Power and freedom: Reflecting on the relationship

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the debate on the relationship between power and freedom. Freedom is currently a burning issue in political discourses. It is therefore important to evaluate the relationship between these two important concepts and present a basis for further critique and cognition about this relationship. The article briefly evaluates certain philosophical perspectives in this regard; particularly the theoretical contributions of Oppenheim, Pettit, Kristjánsson and Morriss. By reflecting on these perspectives it is concluded that human beings' rational capacities present them with the opportunity to imagine freedom. However the option of freedom to choose one's own preferences is constrained by a social contract that guarantees and limits freedom. In contrast, power could interfere with freedom by eliminating specific actions or frustrating others from choosing actions or by not suppressing obstacles in this regard. The protection of freedom lies therefore in continuous negotiation, open dialogue and struggle for it.
Key concepts: Power; freedom; definition; concept; liberalism; unfreedom

Opsomming

Mag en invloed: Besinning oor die verhouding

Hierdie artikel dra by tot die debat oor die verhouding tussen mag en vryheid. Vryheid is tans 'n brandende saak in politieke diskoerse. Dit is dus belangrik om die verhouding tussen hierdie twee belangrike konsepte te evalueer en 'n basis te bied vir verdere kritiek en nadenke oor hierdie verhouding. Die artikel evalueer kortliks enkele filosofiese perspektiewe in hierdie verband, en spesifiek die teoretiese bydraes van Oppenheim, Pettit, Kristjánsson en Morriss. In 'n besinning oor hierdie perspektiewe word die gevolgtrekking gemaak dat mense se rasionele vermoëns hulle kans gee om vryheid te verbeeld. Hierdie opsie van vryheid om eie voorkeure te kies, word egter beperk deur 'n sosiale kontrak wat vryheid waarborg maar ook beperk. In teenstelling hiermee sou mag wel vryheid kon belemmer deur spesifieke aksies uit te skakel of mense se keuses vir spesifieke aksies te frustreer, of deur nie hindernisse in hierdie verband te onderdruk nie. Die beskerming van vryheid setel dus in voortdurende onderhandeling, oop dialoog en die stryd daarom.
Kernbegrippe: Mag; vryheid; definisie; konsep; liberalisme; onvryheid.

1.   Introduction

The conceptual relationship between power and freedom is of interest especially from a liberal political perspective. Such an outlook emphasises the freedom of the individual. In contrast, power seems to raise a moral problem in this context. Power is viewed as the antithesis of freedom and therefore undesirable – a threat or a negative influence that should be treated with suspicion. According to the mentioned perspective, the connection between power and freedom is simplified into an inverse relationship – the more power A has the less freedom B will have; and the less power A has the more freedom B will have

(Mokken & Stokman, 1975:37). Power affects freedom negatively. The struggle for freedom and the one for power are thus inseparable as two sides of the same coin. Therefore, there is a view that world politics is a continuing battle due to the predatory politics of ruling elites, which undermine the freedom of citizens and the public good.

The question about the relationship between freedom and power is, however, also deeply imbedded in philosophy and discourses in political theory about the position and value of the public and the individual within society. In this regard, the debate has more contours than the liberal simplified version allured to above. To keep this intricate debate active will help role-players understand, interpret and evaluate political and societal developments more clearly. The debate can also ensure a continuous reflection about upholding the public good in a situation of constant social, political and economic threats to its existence. For academic purposes, it also seems important to keep the debate alive since current publications on power often do not reflect the state of the debate. For example, Han's description of freedom in his recent publication (Han, 2019) does not engage with the broader debate.

This article attempts to contribute to the reflection on the relationship between power and freedom by again revisiting contributions about this discourse and distil helpful guiding arguments for the ongoing debate. This is done by firstly identifying basic philosophical arguments and investigate specific theorists' arguments about this relationship. Thereafter, their contribution to the discourse on power is interpreted.

2.   Freedom – basic philosophical arguments

This section examines philosophical arguments focusing on freedom and its relationship with power. The concept of human freedom has been debated over centuries. Plato (2014; 2016) raised an early argument on human freedom with his description of Socrates' conviction and death penalty. Socrates was accused of refusing to conform to the rules of the city. Socrates argued for philosophical freedom in which he emphasised the importance that tradition, loyalty and patriotism should be replaced with reasonable knowledge which questions custom and authority (Plato, 2014:3; 2016:25). However, in view of this position he was found guilty for undermining the city's legitimacy. However when presented the opportunity to escape his death sentence, he declined. He argued that the citizen is produced by laws and therefore not free to set these aside (Plato, 2014:16-17). If the laws are disobeyed by citizens, the result will be the destruction of society and by implication, of the citizens themselves. Thus, for Socrates freedom lies in the sovereign reason of the individual that frees the philosopher from dangerous authority, injustices and evils of the state. However, in turn the citizen's freedom is limited by the moral code represented by the laws. This means that although rationality produces the concept of freedom the societal setting of the individual constrains this freedom.

Similarly, for Aristotle (1947:189) freedom originates through the exercise of political responsibility. This implies that people cannot live as they want. They are responsible for fellow citizens and thereby for the common good. This restraint over individuals' desires must be upheld through self-rule. According to Aristotle, this capacity for self-restraint is divided unequally among human beings and only develops fully through education.

In contrast, Thomas Hobbes (2000:96) placed stronger emphasis on freedom by viewing liberty as the absence of constraints or impediments to action. This means that people have freedom to act in the space where law is silent. Therefore, it is the sovereign power's responsibility to provide the framework for peace and security. The latter are the lowly interests. For other interests the sovereign must refrain from interfering in individuals' lives. Citizens should determine for themselves how best to lead their lives. On the other hand, Hobbes does renounce efforts by citizens to resist government.

The Age of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) changed the above-mentioned nuanced views on human freedom. The age emphasised knowledge based on science in contrast to tradition, religion and superstition. It also declared individual freedom as the most important political good. However, the Enlightenment did not develop a unified answer to the actual nature of the freedom which the exponents championed.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2017) associated freedom with an openness to unlimited change. As a species, humans are pre-determined as to what they will be; however, they are able to change and transform themselves to altering circumstances and unforeseen situations. Such an ability presents individuals with freedom, which must, however, be tempered by the social contract. This contract and the public's general will limit social freedom. Nevertheless, these frameworks present the space of moral freedom by laws which are the result of direct participation. If individual citizens disobey, they must be forced to obey the laws – thus, being forced to be free. Freedom is service to the state that represents the general will. This stands in contrast with the liberal perspective, which emphasises freedom from the state.

Immanuel Kant (Störig, 1977:33-37) views phenomena as subject to the law of natural causality and therefore unfree – as the result of causes. In contrast, moral law stems from the pure reason, which is not causal and therefore free. Freedom entails choosing this moral law or categorical imperative. The moral law is created by the self and upholds the dignity of each individual. Transgression is possible but the moral law dictates that individuals do not have to transgress. In this regard the human's self-consciousness is active and reminds the self of the moral law's imperative to be free. This freedom reaches its general application in the unanimous consent to a social contract with a minimal need for governmental interference. Freedom is therefore for Kant the primary concept and state power should be used to protect equal freedom.

Herbert Spencer (Barnes, 1948:126, 134) chooses a more specific view of individual freedom. For him, state absolutism and the precedence of the military must be replaced by the freedom that democracy offers the individual. The state must exist for the individual, not vice versa. Thus, the highest good is posited as the personal happiness of the individual. Ethics therefore, entails creating a peace-loving society that places a high premium on freedom.

Karl Marx's (1998) point of departure is the distribution of power through the production process. A class monopoly owning the means of production makes it possible to organise the production process in such a way that a working class is forced to sell their labour to the dominating class. In neo-Marxist literature the labour theory of value is tempered with the emphasis rather on exploitation and the contributing factors. However, the essence of Marx's argument remains intact – freedom must be ensured for the whole of humanity. This is a socio-economic position free from alienation and exploitation. Such a situation of absolute freedom will cause power relations to disappear. For Marxists this will happen through an objective process where the owners of the means of production will be destroyed. As a result, humans will reclaim authentic humanity and freedom will be freed (Luijpen, 1976:243)

In contrast, Theodor Adorno (1998) does not hold a positive view on human rationality. According to him, reason is rather that what humans use to control and exercise power. In the process, humans become objects of their own produced power. Interaction between people is reduced to coldness, not love, seeing that people cannot love themselves. In contrast to his own emphasis on the negative role of reason Adorno leaves room for reason to question the praxis that, according to him, is only appearance.

Michel Foucault (1983) limits freedom to the governed discourse. Such a discourse is confined to an order of possibilities and limitations. Only within those borders people are able to think, speak and act. On the surface such a setup may seem liberal and

democratic. However, those who define reason alternatively, as the insane do; or define independence differently like the paupers; define morality otherwise as criminals do – all are excluded from this order. Freedom is therefore limited to specifically taught desires, inclinations, considerations and manners and therefore implies self-restraint. This means the body (individual and social) has to be recorded, monitored and measured to ensure it is disciplined and regulated. Those who fail to fit into such a structural mould must be subjected to treatment and training.

Along the same line Jürgen Habermas (2012) explains that power relationships in contemporary society aims to maintain the current order. This is done through dogmatic ideas that limit freedom. Habermas therefore defends the necessity of free and liberated dialogue. This interaction and communication must confront domination. The power of such free dialogue contributes to rapprochement or restored interaction between individuals (Luijpen, 1976:242).

Existential philosophy moved the discussion on freedom onto a different trajectory. The above-mentioned perspectives centred on the role of freedom regarding laws, the state and relationships. From their side existential philosophers explain freedom in terms of humans' position of individual freedom to live and choose. From this perspective, freedom implies an absence of determination (Luijpen, 1976:197). Humans are indeed limited by their bodies and the world, yet have the ability through reasoning to discern possibilities beyond this essential limitation (Luijpen, 1976:201, 205). Freedom means that humans can determine their own way in which seemingly insurmountable obstacles are accepted or rejected (Peperzak, 1977:54-56).

Human subjectivity presents the design according to which all situations are evaluated; in this assessment, humans are always free (Luijpen, 1976:217). Humans have freedom to originate meanings and create new meanings. Such freedom should be shared openly with each other – providing mutual room for individuals to confirm their subjectivity. When experiencing full autonomy humans must choose morality – thus, making freedom the general norm (Luijpen, 1976:278). This freedom means that humans allow each other the opportunity to exist (Luijpen, 1976:344). In existential philosophy freedom constitutes humanity, namely the space to experience life and give meaning to it. Such a state is the basis of being human and being a society.

To recap this section: The sample of philosophical arguments about freedom provide certain core insights:

a. Freedom stems from rational thought – within thinking lies the possibility of a yearning for freedom. Teaching can develop and direct such a desire.

b. Freedom is constituted within physical and social space and time. Due to constraints as part of such space and time, freedom cannot be conceptualised as absolute in individualistic terms. Self-restraint is therefore imbedded in understanding freedom.

c. Furthermore, from rational thought stems social, economic or political products that can threaten freedom. Thus, there are powers that can constrain and limit freedom.

d. Philosophers differ on drawing the border between b. and c. above. For instance, certain theorists may include laws in b. (Aristotle, Rousseau, Kant) and others may exclude it (Hobbes, Marx).

e. The protection of freedom lies in negotiation and open dialogue. A dynamic social contract must flow from such interaction.

To advance the mentioned debate, the article subsequently evaluates specific theorists' description of the relationship between power and freedom.

3.   Power and freedom –specific theorists

This section investigates the contributions of Felix Oppenheim, Philip Pettit, Kristján Kristjánsson and Peter Morriss. These scholars focus particularly on the relationship between power and freedom. Therefore, it is important for this article to assess their contributions.

3.1   Felix Oppenheim – a descriptive perspective

Oppenheim defines social freedom in terms of social *un*freedom. To make this point he refers to taxes: Declaring that people are free to pay taxes does not explain much about their freedom in this regard. However, when it is mentioned that people are *un*free to withhold taxes, this provides a better understanding of freedom in terms of paying taxes. The contours of freedom are drawn clearer when *un*freedom is investigated (Oppenheim, 2004:176). Oppenheim also uses the example of freedom to practice any religion. To grasp this freedom it is best to understand that it only exists if people are not prevented from adopting any faith (Oppenheim, 2004:179). To determine whether social freedom exists in a given situation the unfreedom in such a context must be evaluated. Unfreedom is therefore not the opposing term to freedom but a focus on unfreedom illuminates what is free and what is not.

Furthermore, Oppenheim argues that social freedom must only be understood as a relationship between people. He is therefore against understanding freedom as an opportunity to choose, in which a choice includes impersonal factors (Oppenheim, 2004:176). When Oppenheim links this approach of freedom with power, he explains this relation through a formula. Power is exercised where a respondent (R) is unfree to do X due to the actions of a holder of power (P) (Oppenheim, 2004:176). In this relationship Oppenheim identifies two categories of unfreedom. The first is that if R attempts to do X, certain actions of P would cause R's attempt to fail. This means that P makes it literally impossible for R to do X. Thereby R cannot perform action X and only has not-X as an option (Oppenheim, 2004:177-178). The second category entails that if R do X, P will punish R for doing X. In this case R is unfree to do X due to of fear of punishment. Thereby P makes it too burdensome or costly for R to perform the action and therefore renders it practically impossible (Oppenheim, 2004:178-179). This means that social freedom exists if R is not unfree to do X and also not unfree to do not-X (Oppenheim, 2004:176).

From the exposition above, it is clear that freedom exists where unfreedom is tempered – where impossibility or fear is reined in. In this sense, freedom is defined in a negative way. However, it must be noted that Oppenheim is not consistent in keeping the discussion on social freedom as a relationship only between people. In his discussion of choices in unfreedom he outlines impersonal factors; in his discussion of punishment he refers to institutions but does not develop this viewpoint further (Oppenheim, 2004:180-181).

Oppenheim distinguishes P making specific actions for R *literally* impossible from: P making specific actions for R *practically* impossible through punishment. Regarding the latter he focuses on exercised punishment and not the threat of punishment (Oppenheim, 2004:178). From her side, Ruth Zimmerling (2005:162) finds the distinction between punishability and the threat of punishment problematic. If R do X, whether R will be punished or is threatened with punishment for doing X, R remains free (or not unfree) to do X (Zimmerling, 2005:164). Zimmerling (2005:166) explains this situation as follows: If there is a case in which R "always does what he wants (he never wants to do x), never suffers a punishment by P (since he never does x), and does not even know that he would be punished if he did x" then R is perfectly free, however, not according to Oppenheim. According to him R's freedom to do X or not-X is constrained based on the punishability of X by P. This also applies to scenarios where R does X, does not even know that he would be punished if he did X and suffers a punishment by P; or where R does X, does know that he will be punished if he did X and consciously suffers a punishment by P. In all these cases R was free to do X, but not

according to Oppenheim's theoretical framework (Zimmerling, 2005:166). In terms of the above-mentioned examples the "unfreedom" of R did not impact the relationship between R and R's actions. This means that P also did not hold power over R, seeing that P could not control R's actions (Zimmerling, 2005:167).

Zimmerling also critiques Oppenheim's conception of punishability, which implies that de facto every time X occurs it will be punished by P. She states that there is no necessary causal relationship between the performance of a human act and punishment of that act (Zimmerling, 2005:168). She adds: "Performance of some act by an agent is not an empirically *sufficient* condition for the *de facto* infliction of a punishment on him by another ..." (Zimmerling, 2005:168; her emphasis). Zimmerling's view is that Oppenheim's problem with punishability can only be overcome if he changes his focus: Every time R does X, R ought to be punished (Zimmerling, 2005:171). This normative solution has a deontic impossibility – it implies R's moral obligation to do not-X. This means that P has a normative authority over R, which P derives from a normative system (Zimmerling, 2005:173). Zimmerling (2005:175-176) goes further and attempts to improve on Oppenheim's model by suggesting the relationships between power and freedom as set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Power and unfreedom – Zimmerling's correction of Oppenheim's theoretical relationship

Power	Social freedom
Power is factual control over certain of the affected agent's empirical circumstances, i.e. control over facts.	Unfreedom is strictly impossible since the action is made factually ineligible.
Power is a factual control over a part of the agent's mental situation, i.e., control over preferences (which may, but must not, be based on power over facts).	Unfreedom is practically impossible though remaining a factual option, it is made motivationally ineligible.
Power is normative.	Unfreedom is deontically impossible, without affecting its factual or motivational eligibility, it is made normatively ineligible, i.e., prohibited.

Based on Table 1 above, a powerful agent can either control facts, preferences or/and a normative framework. The result is that a respondent will experience unfreedom due to impossibilities created by the agent's various control measures. This Table is a correction on Oppenheim's attempt to define punishability in a non-normative way. His theoretical conceptual problems can only be overcome by introducing a normative perspective. But his descriptive perspective on the relationship between power and freedom, albeit not unproblematic, helps theorists understand how the two concepts mutually can relate.

Nevertheless, according to the exposition in Table 1, power has limitations in its implied agency. Power indeed constrains humans in different ways, however, it can move beyond unfreedom. This is the state of "non-freedom" as Savery (2015:370) terms it, which is created by the disabling constraints from non-intentional and non-arbitrary powers. This critique follows Oppenheim's underdeveloped idea regarding the contribution of impersonal factors to unfreedom. Oppenheim's view of a negative relationship between power and freedom gives the impression that power is always negative. However, it can be argued that constraints set by P can be in the interest of R. To further investigate this intriguing relationship between power and freedom the focus shifts to Pettit's normative perspective – which is absent in Oppenheim's design.

3.2   *Philip Pettit – a normative perspective*
In contrast to Oppenheim, Pettit has a normative ideal as point of departure. His theory

on freedom is embedded in his republican state interest. His focus on social freedom is therefore in view of citizenship. As Oppenheim defined freedom by contrasting it with unfreedom, Pettit defines liberty by invoking negative liberty, meaning that citizens enjoy liberty if they are not prevented or frustrated by someone else to perform an action (Pettit, 1996:576). Not to be dominated means that citizens are sufficiently empowered and protected in their choices.

Dominating power entails a form of control an agent exerts over another agent (Pettit, 1996:578). The absence of such power defines freedom as the antonym of domination. For Pettit dominating power is the ability to interfere with impunity and at will in certain choices which the other is in a position to make (Pettit, 1996:578). This means that the act must be intended to impede the other's situation of choice. This impediment can be by limiting the range of options, the expected payoffs that options may yield, or the payoffs that options actually offer. Dominating power also means that the interference takes place with impunity. In other words, no sanction is imposed on the interferer and there is no cost for the interferer in exercising the power. The latter is difficult to believe since every action produces certain costs. This critique led Pettit eventually to discard "impunity" as part of the definition of dominating power after the 1996 article. However, he continued to emphasise the agent's arbitrariness in dominating power (Pettit, 1997:55). In that sense, dominating power still implies the ability to interfere at will.

According to Pettit (1996:578), agents can be personal, corporate or collective. In addition he (Pettit, 1997:113-117) acknowledges the role of structures. In view of this inclusion, he argues strongly for structural egalitarianism. This means recognising the importance of neutralising the impact of social structures. The scholar later made this point clearer by distinguishing primary from secondary restrictions on liberty (Pettit, 2005:108). Primary restrictions refer to a person or group, whereas secondary restrictions point to non-intentional forces. Primary restrictions impact a subject's status. Secondary restrictions do not target a subject's status but affect the range of choices.

To ensure freedom, the dominating power must therefore be checked. In this regard, Petit refers to freedom as anti-power (Pettit, 1996:602). Freedom as anti-power implies the absence of fear of interference. This means that citizens are sufficiently empowered and protected in their choices (Pettit, 1996:589). They can look each other as citizens in the eye without fear and difference – Pettit's eye-ball test for freedom (Pettit, 2012:84-88). The normative position of Pettit becomes clear: interference and the possibility of interference must be curbed. However, differently to Oppenheim, Pettit acknowledges that not every type of interference should be considered a threat to freedom. An interference that takes into account the interests of those with whom it interferes is a non-dominating, and therefore non-arbitrary, power. This means there can be only objections to dominating power that is detrimental to freedom (Pettit, 1996:596).

The conclusion above represents a problematic idea by Pettit. In the past, colonial powers justified their conquests by stating they are acting in the interests of indigenous people, by exposing them to developmental ideas. Interference in the interests of others does not indicate an obvious and objective normative position. Pettit counters this criticism to a certain extent by arguing that freedom is only compromised by interference that reduces payoff. Zimmerling (2005:199) questions such a qualification by pointing out that if A has an illusionary view of available options and B convinces A to adopt a more realistic outlook, A's perceived range of options will be reduced and according to Pettit, this entails a worsening outlook but it can be argued that a *realistic* view is not worse.

According to Pettit's design (2012:50), A dominates B, thereby making B unfree. This unfree condition stems from A's capacity to interfere arbitrarily with B. The dominated individual is therefore unfree as long as one agent has the ability to interfere arbitrarily with the actions of another. Such unfreedom exists even if the powerholder does not exercise the ability

to interfere. The mere fact that the powerholder could exercise the ability is sufficient to constitute unfreedom. It must be noted that this is a radical position, as Kramer (2008) explains. The focus is not merely on powerholders who *probably* can interfere but on those who *possibly* can interfere even if it is not probable that they will do it (Kramer, 2008:47).

There are several points of critique against Pettit's argument about freedom. Regarding the emphasis on constraints, Zimmerling (2005:200) points out that power does not only imply the eliminating of choices. Therefore, she argues that Pettit must add to his definition the possibility that choices can be frustrated by incentives or disincentives. However, Pettit (2012:366) refers to "the vitiation of choice" and it is a question whether the connotation of "vitiation" does not include the frustration of choices. Furthermore, Zimmerling (2005:200) critiques Pettit's notion of arbitrary and non-arbitrary interferences as too limited. She points out that if A dominates B on behalf of C, A acts not arbitrary and also not non-arbitrary. However, Pettit's definition of dominating power is stated in terms of arbitrary interference. Such a definition therefore does not cover all instances of dominating power. However, it must be mentioned that third parties seldom from part of the power debate, precisely due to the theoretical complexity and complications of such a discourse.

Daniel Savery (2015:378) concurs with Pettit's distinction between arbitrary and non-arbitrary interference. Savery associates arbitrary interference or constraint, as Pettit, with unfreedom. However, contrary to Pettit, Savery names non-arbitrary interference "non-freedom". As in the critique example on colonialism above, the interference actually created non-freedom despite arguments posited on the best interests of subjects. Savery argues that non-arbitrary interference is disabling in nature. Therefore, such disabling constrains constitute a situation of non-freedom where subjects do not even have the power to make a choice.

Pettit's normative perspective highlights freedom as anti-power, or a struggle against domination. His view is a useful and interesting position in the debate on the relationship between power and freedom. However, this perspective points to difficulties in describing this relationship and indicates how logical problems can arise in this description.

3.3   Kristján Kristjánsson – freedom and moral questions

Kristjánsson critiqued both Oppenheim and Pettit. He rejected Oppenheim's usage of descriptive and value-neutral concepts as well as those removed from ordinary usage. This scholar is also opposed to Pettit moralising of the concept freedom. In his view a concept is moralised when it is by definition focused on moral questions. Kristjánsson views freedom as such a moral concept. This means that the concept of freedom raises moral questions. According to him infringements on freedom can be morally wrong, except those that can be justified – thus, cannot be considered as wrong (Kristjánsson, 2007:20).

Kristjánsson (2007:74-75) argues that an agent has freedom relative to another agent if the latter is not morally responsible for any obstacle to the action. An individual can therefore be considered unfree if an agent is morally responsible for constraining the actions of that other person. Zimmerling (2005:215) quotes Kristjánsson: "An obstacle counts as a constraint on an agent's freedom if and only if there is another agent who can be held morally responsible for the existence of the obstacle." Obstacles, according to Kristjánsson, occur where possibilities are narrowed or options closed. Offers cannot be obstacles because they open new possibilities or extend the range of options. However, certain offers do contain an element of threat, which makes that offer an obstacle.

Focusing on responsibility, Kristjánsson's view is that agents have an obligation to justify their action if they do not suppress an obstacle (Kristjánsson, 2007:76). Kristjánsson explains: "An agent *A* is morally responsible for the non-suppression of an obstacle *O* to *B*'s choices/action [...] when there is an objective reason, satisfying a minimal criterion of plausibility, why *A*, given that he is a normal, reasonable person, could have been expected (morally or

factually) to suppress *O* – however easily overridable this reason is" (cited by Zimmerling, 2005:217). This means that unfreedom does not depend on the experience of the affected party. In the cited formulation, freedom functions as an objective concept. In such a case, freedom does not depend on the intentions of the agents but includes inattention and mindlessness, making it possible to identify primary powerholders (Zimmerling, 2005:218).

Kristjánsson posits an extremely close relationship between freedom and power. He therefore defines power by referring to freedom. "*A* exercises power over *B* if and only if *A* is morally responsible for the non-suppression of an obstacle *O* that restrict(s) *B*'s options" (cited by Zimmerling, 2005:219). This means that to exercise power is to make another person unfree. However, it should be noted that in this definition, Kristjánsson only refers to the "exercise of power" and not to "having power". Zimmerling (2005:220) rightly queries whether having power also restricts freedom. Kristjánsson does not answer this question satisfactorily since he prefer only the phrase "exercising power" and view this aspect as more fundamental than "having power". If ordinary usage of language is that important to Kristjánsson, then he actually should consider the phrase "having power" as part of his definition, which thus may be a better cover of all power relations (Zimmerling, 2005:227). However, ultimately Kristjánsson links the two aspects by viewing having power as the successful exercising of power.

If "having power" is the result of the effective exercise of power, the question arises: How can having power be determined? This is only possible if intention is taken into consideration (Zimmerling, 2005:227-229), however, Kristjánsson declines to include intention in his definition. This makes his emphasis on the exercise of power quite problematic. Zimmerling also critiques Kristjánsson for joining the exercise of power to omitting the suppression of obstacles. However, the exercise of power is an action. Thus, is difficult to see how such exercising can be associated with an omission which is a non-action (Zimmerling, 2005:223-224). Nevertheless, the design of Kristjánsson provides insight into the obligations related to freedom. His analysis of the relationship between power and freedom helps shed light on the complexities in this regard.

3.4   Peter Morriss

Morriss argues that the central concern of a liberal society entails a comprehensive moral concern with the fair treatment of individuals. Making individuals an end in themselves presupposes an emphasis on freedom but also on power, as a capacity for action (Clegg & Haugaard, 2009:405-406). Morris defines the relationship between power and freedom as follows: "You are free to do something if there are no demeaning restraints on your power to do it; you lack freedom in so far as restraints which are inappropriate to your status are imposed on you" (Morriss, 2002:122). Although the definition may seem similar to that of Pettit, Morriss emphasises different elements. His focus is more on the subject's possibility of action and how others evaluate this potential. Therefore, for him, freedom depends on whether individuals are able to perform an action and how others treat them; in other words, "the constraints they impose on you, and the symbolic meaning of these constraints" (Morriss, 2002:121).

Based on the exposition above, freedom is not only a matter of not being able to do something but also being constrained by how an individual's action is evaluated by others. This evaluation by the other is an important aspect for Morriss. In this regard the other decides whether a constraint offends a "notion of self-respect and treatment appropriate to one's status" (Morriss, 2002:121). He uses the example of a fence at a cliff. If cliff-walkers feel their freedom is constrained by the fence, others will not evaluate their position as unfree but that they are treated appropriately. Unfreedom occurs where individuals lack the power to bring about generally desired outcomes (Morriss, 2009:62).

Unfreedom can be viewed as occurring in situations where individuals are wrongfully prevented from acting. Morriss is, however, careful to avoid the inference from certain

scholars, that if the prevention can be justified, unfreedom is not an issue (Morriss, 2009:62). Instead Morriss points out that a focus on justification is not a correct perspective on unfreedom: for example, an inmate in a prison is not free to leave it. What constitute unfreedom is constraints and specifically those that matter to individuals (Morriss, 2009:63). For Morriss the constraints that matter are those that humiliate people (Morriss, 2009:63). Freedom therefore does not specifically apply to what individuals can or cannot do, rather, as Morriss quote Jerry Cohen, if "it is an insult to the status of persons when certain acts are forbidden to them" (Morriss, 2009:63). Nevertheless, it should be noted that there is no objective truth about whether constraints ought to matter or not. This normative stance depends to a large extent on the general ideology or preferences people adhere to. In this regard, the decision whether constraints impact freedom or not is defined by the general public and not the affected person (Morriss, 2009:64).

Morriss differs from a common qualification for freedom according to which the constraint must be retrievable, thus, making it unrelated to freedom. Morriss critique this distinction by referring to the example of an individual who is restrained to walk from one whose legs are amputated. To be only restrained in walking mean that it is possible to regain one's walking. The restraint is a limitation of one's freedom. Morriss argues that if a person's legs are amputated it also curtails that one's freedom. Therefore the retrievable argument cannot be a necessary qualification to limit freedom (Morriss, 2002:117). It can be useful to distinguish lacking freedom from lacking ability but there is an overlap between the two deficiencies.

Morriss continues by arguing that the different views on freedom are a result of different notions of self-respect (Morriss, 2002:118). People do not merely react to the actual treatment of the constraints but also to its symbolic content. This opens the field to diverse conceptions of freedom. The scholar (Morriss, 2002:119) argues further: "To be unfree is to be unable, where the constraint on the ability is considered to be particularly demeaning to the actor's self-respect: to say that one is unfree as well as unable is to imply that one is insulted as well as injured. But when we come to consider *which* constraints make us unfree and which merely unable, we need a well-worked-out moral theory of self-respect." The lack of such a theory makes it difficult to identify the real constraints on freedom although there is consensus that these must be the result of human acts.

The difficulty in distinguishing unfree from unable is clear in Ricoeur's view of power as a position in which one being has power over another, which thus leads to a dissymmetry in relationships. Ricoeur (1992:320) explains: "With the decrease of the power of acting, experienced as a decrease of the effort of existing, the reign of suffering, properly speaking, commences." According to his argument, "to be unable" leads to suffering. He also states: "Suffering is not defined solely by physical pain, nor even by mental pain, but by the reduction, even the destruction, of the capacity for acting, of being-able-to-act, experienced as a violation of self-integrity" (Ricoeur, 1992:190). Ricoeur therefore advocates for an ideal situation in which humans will not experience being a victim at all. Humans must have the capacity to act, thus expressing their selves in the world.

Morriss (2002:119) also asks whether individuals can be unfree if they are prevented from doing something "or whether threats or obstacles can render [someone] unfree". He prefers the more general outlook, stating the focus should be on people's aggregate freedom and not specifically the freedom to do something in isolation. This standpoint is based on his view that power is limited if it is only focused on a specific issue. Powerfulness stems from the ability to aggregate power (Morriss, 2002:89). Similarly, the aggregate of freedom is more important than the identification of specific freedoms. In his view, people will therefore enjoy more freedom in a society with fewer laws instead of increased legislation (Morriss, 2002:120).

The way Morriss links the evaluation of power to a general social evaluation must be debated. Byung-Ghul Han (2019:2-5) explains how freedom and submission can coincide

fully. If the subjects have internalised the will of the powerholders and act accordingly as if it is their free choice, perfect power execution was accomplished. The danger with Morriss' symbolic content of the general evaluation is that it can be exactly what the powerholders seek. What is viewed as freedom can be the exact opposite – total unfreedom. In this context, Habermas' emphasis on a continuous open debate is important to protect freedom from fixed internalisations.

In general Morris' discussions on power issues are usually very clear. This also applies to his discussion on the relationship between power and freedom in which he highlights the complexities.

4.   Power and freedom – a reflection

This section reflects on the relationship between power and freedom in view of the discussion above. The capacity humans have of rational thinking makes it possible to imagine the possibility of freedom, in other words, envisage a life that transcends prevailing customs and traditions and to question it. In this space liberal thought entered which nurtures a comprehensive moral concern for the treatment of individuals. The emphasis is on the autonomy of subjects. Such an external perspective on the treatment of individuals explicates what demeaning restraints on individuals can do. Freedom is affected adversely if humans are restrained in a way that is inappropriate and insulting to their externally determined status and self-respect.

However, the problem is the lack of objective truth about whether constraints ought to matter or not. It is not evident when constraints do impact the human status. Such an evaluation will depend on people's prevailing general ideology or preferences, especially regarding the cognition of self-respect. There are different notions explaining self-respect. A systematic comprehensive moral theory is not available. Freedom is also not understood in terms of concrete actions but also in view of its symbolic interpretation, which is unstable. This makes it impossible to pinpoint what freedom for humans constitutes and ought to be. Furthermore, the concepts of insult and injury form part of a dynamic and continuing moral debate. Freedom, therefore, does not concern individualistic perceptions; rather people's aggregate experience of this condition. That is the actual issue: Theorists' interpretation is important, but they differ on the extent of restrictions to freedom that must be allowed, what freedoms must be emphasised, how it must be brought about and who must decide on it.

In contrast to freedom stands power as the ability to curtail, close or narrow possibilities or options. In this way power that can be exercised by persons, collective agents, institutions and social products, is considered an obstacle to freedom. Through their actions such powerholders can create a situation of unfreedom. In such a context, action is made impossible. This can happen by controlling the empirical circumstances of agents and making it impossible to act. Action can also be made impossible through mental control over preferences. Other ways to make action impossible is by controlling moral obligations that direct activity, or through structures with disabling constraints. Power is thus impacting freedom when there is interference by eliminating specific actions of agents or frustrating them in their choice of actions. Such a condition can be caused by making actions less desirable, by persuasion, offering incentives or by limiting the options.

On the other hand, in view of the moral context of freedom mentioned above, it can also be asserted that those in power is also exercising power if they passively do not uphold the moral code. This means if those in power do not suppress the agreed obstacles that affect the choices or actions of agents, these authorities fail to endorse the moral code. Thereby the powerholders unwittingly contribute to unfreedom, which implies that inattention and mindlessness makes those in power also responsible for unfreedom. Viewing the

relationship of power and freedom in this way can help pinpoint primary powerholders in the relationship that undermine the moral code.

Furthermore, infringements on freedom can morally be viewed in different ways. Generally freedom entails autonomous action by individuals and not having the experience of being a victim. However, the non-victim view is tempered by the alternative perspective which emphasises that autonomy is not without boundaries but includes responsibility. Those who do not subject to authority and discipline can be punished. Naturally governments do not want to generalise penal sanctions; they would prefer subjects to govern themselves. Therefore, the social contract is important to limit autonomous action only to the rule of inclusion. According to such a view, freedom is not an absolute ideal. Freedom includes tolerance to others and self-constraint based on the social contract. If this poise is absent external restraint is necessary to protect the freedoms of others. For the general good, governments have to guide the body of society and those on its fringes into the task of practicing responsible autonomy. For this purpose, teaching and surveillance are used to lead citizens into complying with the rule of inclusion. However, the public must ensure through open debate that the social contract remains dynamic and open-ended. This contract must provide the space for freedom but does not constitute freedom as such. The deliberation must be viewed as a continuing project.

Nevertheless, power and freedom are not necessarily opposites. Power can guide, secure and position general freedom. It is the rational roots of freedom that temper the possibility of irrational power. Where freedom is imbedded in the social contract it is expected of powerholders to answer in a rational way. This implies that the power's constraints will be rational and its actions responsible to support the contract. A social contract and corresponding moral code is a result of power processes, which secure and limit freedom. Both contract and code is the result of a dominant social discourse within a specific space and time.

The hegemony described above contains the social understanding about the available freedoms and how it must be supported. However, freedom is only possible and sustainable in an environment where a social contract upholds that freedom. Freedom is therefore restricted and bordered by a moral code, which all must observe. In this way freedom can be practised. To uphold the mentioned code, and thereby freedom, citizens must be taught to exercise self-restraint and accept responsibility to internalise self-rule. In this regard, freedom implies that individuals perform actions confidently because they know in advance; and others know it too – all parties are aware that the others know the action will neither be prevented, nor frustrated.

Table 2 below classifies in an oversimplified way the agency associated with the spaces created by personal and impersonal powers in relation to progressive and constrained freedoms.

Table 2 Agency, powers and freedoms

	Personal powers	Impersonal powers
Progressive Freedom	Freedom champions	Freedom space
Constrained Freedom	Freedom restrictors	Freedom stifler

Table 2 above indicates that personal powers (individuals or groups) can champion freedom, or restrict it. Impersonal powers (e.g. structures or a social contract) can ensure space for freedom, or stifle it. This table is included to emphasise the point that power is not the antithesis of freedom but can be its partner. However, the table also demonstrates the limitation of such a typifying. In several cases powers empower and disempower simultaneously. They are not clear-cut opposites, seeing that freedom and power are not opposite poles.

Nevertheless, when humans exercise freedom they tread on contested grounds. In several ways, free thought and action stand against what those in power aim to direct. The concepts of freedom and power share the same field. Freedom aspires for autonomous space, whereas power aims to dictate this space. In this context, as Pettit points out, freedom and power become entangled so that he even terms freedom *anti-power.* This makes freedom a power to curb interference from the power to interfere. Freedom entails the ability to act freely, and power the ability to limit such action. However, as indicated above, not all interferences by power is to the detriment of freedom. Power can be exercised to support, uphold or broaden incidences of freedom. The issue is blatant dominating power, which is detrimental to freedom and must be objected to.

In final analysis, it must be emphasised that the problem remains of the differences among and fluidity of moral codes that direct freedom. Therefore, the comparative measure of freedom is not possible. This means freedom's measurement cannot be quantified and validly verified. Given that the definitional problems also relate to the concept of power, the operationalisation of freedom and power in empirical research is challenging. But hopefully the theoretical discussion above may give relevant pointers in this regard.

Regarding the matter of operationalising power and freedom, a related issue is *contextualisation* of the predominantly Western conceptual frameworks. In this regard, a probing question can bring the debate "closer to home": How do the discussions above apply to the African context? The Nigerian academic Claude Ake stated: "Most African states have become hollowed out. They are no longer instruments capable of serving the public good. Indeed, far from being able to provide aid and protection to their citizens, African governments and the vampire-like politicians who rule them are regarded by the populations they rule as yet another burden they have to bear in the struggle for survival" (Meredith, 2005:688). In the context of Africa and its powerholders a number of relevant questions can be suggested to expand the debate:

    a.   *From what* must Africans be freed? What dangerous authority, injustices, alienation, exploitation, etc.?

    b.   *For what* must Africans be free – or not unfree? How would dignity, happiness and self-respect translate to an African context? What does the republican "eye-ball test" mean in Africa?

    c.   *Through what* means must this freedom be protected? What would a relevant moral code, general will, social contract, social responsibility entail within the African context? What is the role and moral responsibility of an African state and powerholders to provide and protect a general public freedom? How can a free and liberated dialogue on freedoms be upheld in Africa in opposition to powers that seek to constrain and negate it?

    d.   *In what* lies the freedom? What freedoms were secured in Africa and what work remains to be done in this regard?

5.   Conclusion

This article focused on the intriguing debate centred on the relationship between power and freedom. Ostensibly the debate can be reduced to a simple inverse understanding of the relationship between power and freedom. Nevertheless, this article attempted to explore a multidimensionality in this relationship above the mere obvious implied opposition. In this way this article contributed theoretically to the core debate in current politics about the public good and how to promote it.

The focus was a brief overview of philosophical thinking about freedom, linked to the role that power plays in this regard. Thereafter, specific contributions were critically discussed of Oppenheim, Pettit, Kristjánsson and Morriss in this debate. From these discussions the article reflected on pointers that can be distilled from the arguments:

a.   Rationality provides humans the opportunity to imagine the possibility of freedom – being able to choose and act out their own preferences.

b.   Social freedom is determined externally. In a society it is decided which restraints hurt humans and ought to be constraint. Freedom therefore has boundaries and socialisation is necessary to internalise the social contract prescribing freedom's limits and supervising that humans uphold it.

c.   There are no objective moral code that directs people's understanding about freedom. The discourse about such a code is fluid, bounded by space and time and characterised by opposing and competitive standpoints.

d.   Whereas freedom aspires for autonomous space, power aims to dictate this space. Power obstructs freedom when those in power interfere by eliminating specific actions, frustrating others in choosing actions, or not suppressing obstacles in their way.

e.   The protection of freedom lies in negotiation and open dialogue.

This article makes the point strongly that for humans, freedom is not guaranteed. Powers underwriting and supporting freedom stand in contrast to powers that undermine and deny freedom. The arguments in this article on the one hand, emphasise the importance of a continuing debate and on the other hand, contribute to conceptual clearness on freedom. Hopefully the article may elicit critical responses that can advance this debate on power and freedom.

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