

Grounding Equal Freedom: An Interview with Ian Carter

IAN CARTER (Emsworth UK, 1964) is professor of Political Philosophy at Pavia University in Italy. He has spent most of his career in Pavia, interrupted by brief periods visiting Oxford and Cambridge in the UK, his country of origin. He studied at the University of Newcastle (BA), the University of Manchester (MA), and the European University Institute in Florence (PhD), and was then a lecturer at Manchester University before moving to Pavia in 1993.

Carter's philosophical work has focused primarily on the analysis of fundamental concepts in normative political theory. His ground-breaking monograph *A Measure of Freedom* (1999) was the first book-length treatment of the problems that arise if one assumes political and social freedom to be a matter of degree and therefore to be measurable in an overall sense. It also examined the place of the measurement of freedom in a broader theory of justice. Carter has since then continued to contribute to discussions on freedom, including as a prominent liberal critic of the 'republican' conception of freedom, defending the more basic normative role of the liberal 'negative' conception. More recently, he has played an influential part in debates about the foundations of egalitarianism, developing an account of basic equality grounded in the idea of 'opacity respect'. He is currently working on a monograph that further develops the idea of opacity respect and its implications for egalitarian justice.

The *Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics* (*EJPE*) interviewed Carter in spring and summer 2021. The interview covers Carter's intellectual biography (section I); his extensive writings on the measurement and value of freedom (section II); his reflections on the use of formal methods in philosophical work on freedom and in political philosophy more broadly (section III); his more recent work on basic equality and respect for persons (section IV); and, finally, his advice to young scholars (section V).

EJPE'S NOTE: The interview was conducted by Annalisa Costella, editor at the *EJPE*. She thanks Constanze Binder and Akshath Jitendranath for advice while preparing the interview.

Footnotes throughout the interview are editorial annotations directing readers to the relevant literature discussed in the text.

I. INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

EJPE: Professor Ian Carter, reading your CV, one gets the impression that you have always had pretty clear ideas about your intellectual interests. You started out with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Politics at the University of Newcastle and continued with a Master of Arts in Political Theory at the University of Manchester, suggesting a very firm interest in political philosophy. Is this reading appropriate? Did you know from a relatively early age what you wanted to do research on, as it seems from your CV, or has your intellectual path been less smooth than it appears on paper?

IAN CARTER: I originally enrolled to study politics at Newcastle but soon discovered that my real passion was for philosophy and political ideas rather than, say, party politics or political behaviour. So, I switched to philosophy and politics in my second year and took as many courses in political philosophy as I could. With hindsight, and especially compared to the training received by Italian students of 'political sciences' (*scienze politiche*, in the plural), both my BA and my MA do seem pretty narrow, and I had to fill in a lot of gaps in subsequent years.

I dallied with Hegel in my second year (what fun it is to learn a language so few other people understand!) but then rebelled against his obscurities when I discovered analytical political theory under the tutorship of Peter Jones, and I haven't looked back since. So, yes, in that sense I'd say my intellectual path has been quite smooth.

While your Bachelor and Master 'scream' political philosophy, the department from which you received your PhD, the one of Political and Social Sciences at the European University Institute of Florence (EUI), seems to clash slightly with your previous education as well as with the topic of your PhD thesis. Was there a specific reason that led you to EUI and to the department of Political and Social Sciences?

I can see that might look like an unusual choice. After Newcastle I went to Manchester, mostly because I was keen to study with Hillel Steiner, having read some of his work on freedom and justice which I found fascinating. A natural course would have been to continue studying in Manchester with Hillel, and I was indeed undecided about that. But I also had itchy feet and wanted to experience the culture and language of another country, in particular Italy. I had visited France and Italy during a gap year before university and in the meantime had been teaching myself Italian.

The prospect of three years at the EUI was just too enticing! What's more, the EUI did have a long-standing commitment to political philosophy—perhaps more so than now. Steven Lukes, who became my supervisor there, had been preceded by several other important theorists including Brian Barry and Maurice Cranston, so I wasn't exactly out on a limb, although it's true that most of the people in the same department were doing empirical research. I was also lucky enough to have Philippe Van Parijs as co-supervisor—Philippe visited Florence as a Jean Monnet Fellow at that time. My impression is that the Institute has since become more strictly oriented toward research relating to the European Union than 30 years ago when I joined. True, there was no philosophy department at the EUI, but there was one, of course, at Florence University, and I made the effort to follow some lectures there. And that's how I eventually wound up at Pavia, having made contact in Florence with the Italian philosopher Salvatore Veca, who was teaching in Florence but then moved to Pavia.

So, I guess the allure of Italy interrupted what would have been an even smoother path, but I don't regret the move for one moment. The EUI was a wonderful meeting place for different cultures and intellectual traditions. Although I've stayed on the straight and narrow as an analytical philosopher, and have stayed in close contact with Hillel Steiner and several other academics in Britain and elsewhere, living and working in Italy has exposed me to intellectual traditions I might not have come into contact with had I stayed in Britain. That exposure can stimulate the imagination and promote lateral thinking, something analytic philosophers are always in need of. Salvatore Veca once said to me: 'Remember, philosophy is one third rigour, two thirds imagination!'. He later told me he varies the proportions depending on who he's speaking to.

Would you say that specific events, or people, played a key role in shaping your intellectual identity before you entered university?

I think my father, who died young when I was only 17, had quite a strong influence on my political thinking. He was a lecturer in linguistics and worked on language change between East and West Germany. When I was 10, on a family trip to the Harz mountains, he took me to see the east-west border. We stood in front of a large stretch of grass, a sort of no man's land, beyond which there was a huge fence extending into the distance to the left and right, with towers placed at intervals along the fence. My Dad said: 'If you now cross over this line and start walking across the grass, that soldier up in that tower will shout "Halt!". And if you then

ignore him and carry on, he'll shoot you'. That made a big impression on me. Another memory that stands out is his interest and delight in a definition of 'Freiheit' he found in an East German dictionary: 'Freedom (noun): the recognition of necessity'. He was critical of the many Marxists in his university department who, he said, extolled the virtues of the Eastern bloc countries but had never visited them. 'You can't keep a people down forever', he would say, and he was right, though he didn't live to see that fence come down. My interest in negative freedom, in particular its physical dimension, and my distrust of paternalism and what I later learnt to be theories of 'positive' freedom (in Isaiah Berlin's sense of 'positive'),¹ certainly chime with those memories.

At school my favourite subject was history. I had an excellent teacher at high school who sparked an interest in radical politics and politicians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. My hero was Lloyd George, whose 'people's budget' introduced sweeping taxes on the rich.² In my later teens I developed a visceral dislike of the British Royal Family and the undeserved authority and privilege of the upper classes who 'toil not, neither do they spin'.

You've hinted at your interest in negative freedom, which has played a major role in your work. How did you form that interest? Was it the result of an overarching interest in political philosophy or, instead, did you come to political philosophy because you were interested in freedom?

I find it difficult to separate my interest in freedom from my interest in political philosophy, and also difficult to say that one springs from the other or vice versa. I guess the two developed in tandem and are related constitutively rather than causally.

My interest in negative freedom developed over my undergraduate years. I entered university considering myself basically left-wing but became increasingly frustrated by the collectivist and paternalist tendencies of the Left, and with their mistaken knee-jerk association of individualism with egoism and of freedom of choice with the defence of inequalities. This was during the Thatcher years in Britain, when political thinking was quite polarized, though not as much as it is today. Parallel to this, during my studies, it occurred to me that one could think of the history of

¹ See Berlin (1969).

² In 1909, Lloyd George introduced his 'people's budget' in the UK parliament. The budget sought to fund social welfare through income and land tax increases on the wealthy and was passed into law in 1910.

modern political thought as basically a history of rival interpretations of the ideal of human freedom. I became fascinated by this thought, and the more I studied, the more firmly I found myself siding with thinkers in the liberal tradition.

Given your interest in freedom, how strongly would you say that you sympathize with libertarianism, and have you always done so?

I wouldn't call myself a card-carrying libertarian, nor even a card-carrying left-libertarian, because I'm aware of how many empirical premises libertarians combine with their moral ones and I'm too wary about the empirical premises to identify wholeheartedly with a single package of political prescriptions. I'm also wary more generally of 'isms' in political thought, except as very rough categorizations. That said, I do indeed sympathize with some of the basic moral premises of libertarianism. This wasn't always the case. I first really got interested in libertarian thinking when studying Nozick with Hillel Steiner, which was an eye-opening experience for me even though I wasn't at all happy with Nozick's anti-egalitarian conclusions.

The distinction between left- and right-libertarianism is important here, as I see right-libertarians as defending indefensible inequalities, often on the basis of shaky analyses of freedom, even though freedom is supposed to be their basic value. Left-libertarians, more convincingly, take from classical liberalism the beliefs in self-ownership, private property, and markets, but combine those beliefs with the view that if each individual is really respected as a person, then each has no greater right than any other to a decent start in life. They agree with socialists about the injustice of most of today's economic and social inequalities, but they hold that the culprit isn't markets as such but the inequalities on the basis of which people enter markets and the exploitation that results. Some people think left-libertarianism amounts to squaring the circle, but that's too quick—another knee-jerk reaction. There's an intellectual challenge here that has been taken up in interesting and original ways by thinkers like Hillel Steiner, Michael Otsuka, and Peter Vallentyne.³

Charging left-libertarianism with squaring the circle seems, however, to be a strongly entrenched belief among laymen. Many would subscribe to the claim that right-wing positions usually entail a concern for freedom and left-wing ones a concern for equality. And few, among the

³ See Steiner (1994), Vallentyne (2002), Otsuka (2003).

general public, would deny that the two values are in opposition. If this is the case, what do you believe could explain it? Are political philosophers partly responsible for this?

That's an interesting question and one I often ponder. There are ways of interpreting the ideals of freedom and equality that place them in opposition, so people aren't wholly wrong when they assume that the two ideals conflict. For example, if realizing the ideal of equality involves achieving a situation where everyone pursues a similar kind of life with a similar degree of success, and this, in turn, leads to forms of collective control over people's lives, then equality conflicts with individual freedom as most liberals understand the term. That's why left-libertarians, and indeed most liberal egalitarians, are careful to clarify and circumscribe the kinds of equality their theories are prescribing. The error lies in generalizing from the specific interpretations where the ideals conflict, to a blanket claim about the incompatibility of 'liberty and equality', and that seems to be what's going on when people pigeonhole the ideals as 'right-wing' or 'left-wing'.

How responsible are political philosophers for this tendency? I guess they're responsible to the extent that they reinforce these generalizations through simplistic journalistic writings or through their university teaching. And, more specifically, to the extent that they confuse the promotion of freedom with the enforcement of property rights under the current distribution of resources, as many right-libertarian thinkers have.

You have mentioned repeatedly the distinction between left- and right-libertarians. You have also defended the left-libertarian stance as being truer to the most fundamental premise of libertarianism.⁴ A somewhat similar characterization of libertarianism can be found in the manifesto of 'bleeding heart libertarianism',⁵ a movement started in 2011 with the aim of reconciling free-market ideals and social justice ideas. What do you think about the movement, and its impact both on the general public and the scholarly environment? Have you ever considered adhering to it, or would you be sceptical of subscribing to another 'ism'?

I doubt the 'bleeding heart libertarians' have had a great impact on the general public so far, but ideas do take a long time to filter through from academia. They've surely increased awareness among right-libertarian

⁴ See Carter (2012, 2019).

⁵ See Zwolinski (2011).

thinkers, and perhaps also among some social democratic thinkers, about the theoretical possibilities of combining aspects of libertarianism with social justice or a concern for the poor or marginalized. As for me, the time I spend looking at blogs, let alone writing on them, is pretty limited (which isn't to say I'm negative about them: I'm just a slow-working hedgehog and life is short!). Regarding that blog in particular, I have strong misgivings about its name, which gives the impression that a concern for the disadvantaged is or should be motivated by compassion. Most of today's disadvantaged are due compensation as a matter of justice, rather than being the fortunate beneficiaries of duties of charity or of the consequences of adopting certain kinds of free-market policies starting from the current distribution of resources. Relatedly, my impression is that much of what has been presented as 'bleeding heart libertarianism' is less strongly egalitarian than left-libertarianism is, on my interpretation of the latter.

Given what you have said so far and the significant amount of time and intellectual energy you have devoted to 'politically charged' topics, such as those of freedom, human dignity, and respect, one might wonder whether you have ever been active in the political realm, or whether you have tried to keep your political and philosophical selves separate. The last time I was at all active politically was as a member of the Labour Club in Newcastle. As I came to realize then, if you're campaigning as a member of a political party you have to toe the line on points you disagree with or are uncertain about, and for me this created an uncomfortable tension. So, while I admire many of the people who go into politics for the right reasons, I long ago decided that wasn't the route for me. In 2005 I published a book in Italian called *La libertà eguale* which was picked up on by a left-leaning reformist movement going by the same name—'Libertà eguale' (equal freedom). I enjoyed talking with them and exploring affinities, but the contact was somewhat limited given the abstract nature of my arguments. I realize my attitude to political activity can seem over-detached and even self-centred. As a philosopher, I feel only mildly guilty about that as I think there are others, many of them working at the more 'applied' end of the spectrum, who are better than I would be at propagating ideas.

II. FREEDOM, METHODOLOGY, AND RELEVANCE

You started your academic career with the analysis of freedom, its measurement, and its value—as the title of your PhD thesis suggests.⁶ The concern with freedom has permeated your entire body of work. Can you tell us why this theme is so important and explain the key aspects that you focus on?

The importance of the theme is something I've believed in since my student days, as I mentioned earlier. Individual freedom seems to play a central role in normative political theory, but does that role stand up to rigorous conceptual analysis? What initially exercised me was the fact that freedom is assumed to exist in degrees in so much of our political discourse and theorizing. People argue about whether freedom should be 'increased' and about 'how free' different individuals or societies are, relatively or absolutely, and normative political theorists have argued for the 'most extensive liberty', or 'sufficient liberty', 'equal liberty', or even for 'maximin freedom' (I'm using the terms 'liberty' and 'freedom' interchangeably here). And when they do so, they are usually assuming freedom to be valuable in some sense. But I found that what had been said so far about the value of freedom had rarely been connected up to the assumptions made about its measurability, and that those assumptions had themselves rarely been examined. So, I set out to fill these two gaps: to ask what sense could be made of the idea of 'more' or 'less' freedom, and to work out what our interest in that idea presupposes about the value of freedom. I was interested in particular in the role freedom plays in liberal normative theories.

And what is the role that freedom plays in liberal normative theories, in your view?

The key point is that liberals generally assume freedom to be an independent standard of evaluation—not just something that is defined in terms of other valuable things that we can already measure, such as utility (assuming we *can* measure that), or wellbeing, or violations of property

⁶ The title of Ian Carter's PhD dissertation is *The Measurement of Freedom* (Carter 1993). It was defended at the European University Institute of Florence (EUI) under the supervision of Steven Lukes, who was a professor of Political and Social Theory in the Department of Social and Political Sciences at EUI at the time (currently a professor of sociology at NYU) and Philippe Van Parijs, full professor at the faculty of economic, social and political sciences of the University of Louvain (UCL), and Robert Schuman Fellow at the EUI.

rights, or conformity to distributive patterns. That independent standard of evaluation can't be understood or operationalized unless we can provide an independent account not only of what freedom is, in this context, but also of how and why it counts as a fundamental value and what it means for it to exist in different degrees. I adopted a coherentist approach that aimed for a reflective equilibrium between all these elements. The investigation involved asking, among other things, what it means to have available a greater or lesser quantity of action—that took me into the problem of act-individuation in the philosophy of action—and whether different kinds of constraints on action can be commensurated, and how far they need to be.

Mentioning constraints makes one immediately think about a conventional distinction when it comes to freedom: the one between negative and positive freedom. According to many, this distinction has been largely surpassed by MacCallum's definition of freedom as a triadic relation.⁷ Is there still any use for the positive-negative dichotomy?

In *A Measure of Freedom* I avoided the terms 'negative freedom' and 'positive freedom' for the reason you mention. I thought they were largely redundant in light of MacCallum's analysis, at least for the purposes of fundamental theorizing. For MacCallum, as you know, any claim about freedom expresses a relation between an agent (first element), certain constraints or preventing conditions (second element), and certain actions or 'becomings' of the agent (third element), so freedom is always both negative and positive—freedom from something to do or become something. This allows for a spectrum of definitions, not just a dichotomy. But the classic distinction between negative and positive freedom has survived, and I accept that it has some utility as a rough categorization of two families of theories: freedom as the absence of obstacles imposed by other agents on actions of any kind, versus freedom as the absence of conditions that somehow impede self-realization or self-mastery—conditions that might be self-imposed, or imposed by nature, as well as other-imposed.

There is, however, still a debate about whether there is a third rough characterisation of freedom, which is republican freedom, as theorized by Pettit and Skinner.⁸

⁷ See MacCallum (1967).

⁸ See Pettit (1997) and Skinner (2002).

Yes. The republicans' contribution has captured the imagination of a great many political theorists, and so the rest of us have found ourselves adopting their categories when engaging with their work. Over the last two decades, a lot of political philosophizing about freedom has been about 'negative freedom' versus 'republican freedom'—whether they're really different and in what ways. That has been the main reason for my speaking of 'negative freedom' in more recent work.

My own view is that republicans have failed to carve out their promised third way, despite repeated attempts to do so. Either their view reduces to a liberal position focusing on the ways actions are rendered impossible by other agents, as I originally argued in my book and in a couple of subsequent articles,⁹ or else it produces very counterintuitive results that republicans themselves would not accept—for example, the result that virtually everyone everywhere is completely unfree.¹⁰ Or else republicans, in their continued efforts to distinguish their concept from the 'negative' one, have ended up changing the subject and talking about normative freedom or normative status—what sorts of things other people ought not to be allowed to do to you according to the law, or what your legal standing ought to be with respect to other people.¹¹ Republicans oscillate between these different positions, and this suggests that their concept of freedom is inherently wobbly.

But let's imagine that the republican characterization of freedom were a convincing third way. Would this then imply that 'their' freedom cannot be cashed out fully in terms of MacCallum's triadic relation?

Personally, I can't see any reason to deny that any of the specific positions between which republicans have oscillated, whether consistent or confused, appealing or counterintuitive, can be cashed out in terms of MacCallum's triadic relation. For example, the so-called 'robustness requirement' appealed to by republicans is just another way of characterizing constraints on freedom, the second element in MacCallum's triadic relation: Must a constraint have some non-trivial degree of probability in order to count as a limitation on your freedom, or is its sheer possibility sufficient for it to count? Does your freedom to do something depend simply on others not preventing you from doing it, or must those others be prevented from preventing you?

⁹ See Carter (2008, 2013b).

¹⁰ On this point, see Carter and Shnayderman (2019).

¹¹ See, again, Carter and Shnayderman (2019).

Let us look closer at your work on freedom. You have forcefully argued that the possibility of measuring freedom is a necessary condition for freedom to be valuable in the non-specific sense (that is, 'valuable as such'), that a person's overall freedom should be captured in a value-neutral way, and that the specific freedoms open to her should also be captured in a value-neutral way. These are three of your core arguments about freedom. Could you expand on how they relate to each other?

I began by asking why it is that we're interested in measuring freedom in the first place, and I came to realize that the reason has to lie in freedom being valuable as such. If freedom is valuable as such, I came to realize, it has to have a kind of value that I called 'non-specific', or what Matthew Kramer later called 'content-independent'. The basic idea is that freedom doesn't just gain value from its content as the freedom specifically to do x or y or z , which would depend on the other values that x or y or z , in particular, might help us realize or might be partly constitutive of; freedom is also valuable independently of those other values. If a particular set of freedoms has value not just in terms of those other values, but simply as freedom, then the value of that set must be a function not just of the value of the freedom specifically to do one thing rather than another, but also of 'how much freedom' that set contains. I call this idea of 'how much freedom' a person has their 'overall freedom'—where each person's overall freedom is some kind of aggregation over their specific freedoms. So, we're interested in how much freedom we have overall, because we value freedom as such. My conclusion was that overall freedom has to be understood, and measured, independently of any considerations about the values of the specific things we're free to do.

I also believe that for any one specific freedom—the freedom to do x —the question of whether or not you have that freedom is independent of whether or how far it's valuable for you to do x . In other words, the existence conditions for the freedom to do x are independent of the value of doing x . This claim could be defended as following from the account I've just given of overall freedom, given that overall freedom is just an aggregation of specific freedoms. But it's also a sensible stance to take even if you think there's no such thing as overall freedom.

Would the conclusion that freedom is to be measured independently of the values of the specific things we're free to do entail that freedom has to be measured in a value-neutral way?

Basically yes, but I should make a terminological point here: I would prefer to say, ‘in a value-free way’. In my earlier work I did use the term ‘value-neutral’ to describe my proposed metric, but in a later article, published in 2015,¹² I tried to distinguish between value-neutrality and two other notions: ‘value-freeness’ and ‘value-independence’. I think what you mean here by measuring freedom in a value-neutral way is what I would now call measuring freedom in a ‘value-free’ way. I do think a value-free metric for freedom is entailed by freedom being measured independently of the values of the specific things we’re free to do.

That distinction you’ve just made, between ‘value-neutral’ and ‘value-free’, isn’t immediately obvious. Could you expand on it?

A value-free concept is a concept that contains no ethically evaluative terms in its definition. A value-neutral concept, as I now understand it, is one that doesn’t imply the superiority of any one member of a given set of substantive ethical positions. And that’s not quite the same thing as being ‘value-free’ in the sense I’ve just mentioned. Value-neutrality is always relative to a given set of ethical positions, and you can think of it as matter of degree depending on the size of that set, whereas a concept is either value-free in my sense, or it’s not. Value-freeness and value-neutrality are also both different from a third possible feature of political concepts, which I call ‘value-independence’. I think of the value-independence of a concept as implying that you can justify its definition without any reference to ethical considerations, so only by reference to explanatory considerations. Many people think it’s impossible for a concept like freedom to be defined in a way that I’m calling value-independent. I haven’t taken a stance on the possibility or desirability of using political concepts that are value-independent, but I have clarified where I stand on value-freeness and value-neutrality, at least regarding the concept of freedom. If we distinguish in the way I’ve suggested between value-freeness and value-neutrality, then strictly speaking my claim is that our conception of overall freedom ought to be value-free. It might, in addition, be more or less value-neutral, but that’s another issue from the one we’re discussing here.

That’s still quite abstract. Could you give an example of how these distinctions can be helpful?

¹² See Carter (2015).

One example that springs to mind is Robert Sugden's 2003 *Ethics* article,¹³ which contains an internal critique of my position, and where the distinctions we've just been discussing can help me provide an answer. Sugden thinks individual freedom (or opportunity, to use his terminology) has something like non-specific value, a point on which we agree; and he suggests that this implies freedom should be measured in a 'value-neutral' way. But he concludes, somewhat paradoxically, that freedom (or opportunity) can't be measured, because there's no such thing as a value-neutral metric for action. Freedom is valuable as such, so we're interested in how much of it we have, but it can't be measured. And that's a very puzzling conclusion. I think that what Sugden's argument really implies is that there's no such thing as a value-independent metric for action. He thinks any choice of metric will depend on adopting some evaluative perspective. This might well be true. But I also think that the non-specific value of freedom implies a value-free metric. Moreover, the value-neutrality of any metric, in my sense of value-neutrality, is a matter of degree. Once we make these distinctions, Sugden's criticism is much less worrying. What matters, if we're to capture freedom's value as such, is that we work with a value-free notion of overall freedom. That notion doesn't have to be value-independent, and it needn't even have a very high degree of value-neutrality in my sense: there can be ethical reasons for focusing on the physical dimension of action in explicating the notion of overall freedom, and that's unobjectionable inasmuch as we're not aiming for value-independence. And all of this can be true even if the particular metric I proposed is found wanting in other ways—for example, in terms of isomorphism with our common-sense comparisons—and so needs to be revised.

So, your argument that the value of overall freedom should be captured in a 'value-free' way relies on the idea that value-based approaches to freedom are unable to capture freedom's non-specific value—they reduce this latter value to the specific values of the things a person is free to do.

Yes. A value-based metric implies that you're freer the more valuable your specific options are. My argument is that value-based metrics don't really capture degrees of freedom. Rather, they capture the values that the freedom to do *x* or *y* or *z* help to promote causally, or of which those specific freedoms are partly constitutive. I think Dworkin and Kymlicka are right to point out that value-based metrics make the language of overall

¹³ See Sugden (2003).

freedom normatively redundant: everything can be captured by speaking of the instrumental or constitutive values of specific freedoms.¹⁴ But I disagree with the conclusions of Dworkin and Kymlicka: they only consider value-based metrics, and so conclude that the language of overall freedom must be normatively redundant.

Kramer, however, has questioned this point, arguing that, while freedom's non-specific value is not dependent on the values of the things one is free to do, it does depend on the values of the specific freedoms to do x or y or z.¹⁵ You have an earlier paper on this issue.¹⁶ What is your take on this point? Have you changed your mind since?

Kramer proposes what I call a hybrid account (in the earlier paper you've just mentioned, I called it a dualist account): he thinks degrees of freedom are primarily a matter of the physical dimensions of available action, but he introduces evaluative multipliers, so his metric reflects both non-specific value and specific value. He qualifies his value-based metric by saying that the multipliers should be formulated only in terms of the values with which freedom is non-specifically connected—the values to which freedom is also a means, or of which it is partly constitutive, in a non-specific way. I confess I've never grasped why one should think that this last move answers the accusation that value-based metrics confuse the specific and non-specific value of freedom. So, no, Kramer hasn't changed my mind on this issue. Kramer's evaluative multipliers are still based on the value of being free specifically to do x or y or z. That fact isn't changed by restricting the set of ultimate values in terms of which the specific value is measured.

I also have some more specific criticisms of his use of evaluative multipliers, which I'd better not go into here. They're set out in the final part of a long joint paper with Hillel Steiner that's forthcoming in a festschrift for Matt Kramer.¹⁷ Matt recently told me that some of the replies he's written are even longer than the papers they're replying to(!), which is somewhat daunting, though I'm looking forward to reading them.

So, are there no cases in which value-based conceptions of freedom fare better? Take, for instance, situations in which one wants to measure

¹⁴ See, for instance, Dworkin (1979) and Kymlicka (1990).

¹⁵ See Kramer (2003, 242)

¹⁶ See Carter (1995).

¹⁷ See Carter and Steiner (forthcoming).

the ‘value of freedom’, rather than its extent. Would a value-based understanding of freedom then be more appropriate?

Yes, if what you mean by ‘the value of freedom’ is ‘the value of freedom in terms of values other than freedom’! As I see it, the extent of freedom is just the value of freedom measured in terms of freedom itself. Freedom has value in both of these senses—value as such, and value in terms of other things it brings about or is partly constitutive of. Both kinds of value matter. So, value-based metrics of freedom can certainly be useful, but they aren’t what their authors claim them to be: by calling them metrics of freedom, they hide from view, and so fail to capture, the extent of freedom, which also matters for evaluative purposes. Or, more commonly, they capture both, but fail to make the distinction clearly.

*In your book *A Measure of Freedom* you argue that there is a difference between freedom-based justice and justice-based freedom.¹⁸ With this, you mean that there are some definitions of freedom that are moralized and some that are not. You maintain that only the latter can play an appropriate role in a theory of justice. Can you expand on this more, and your reasons for it?*

The answer to this question takes us back to a point I made earlier about the liberal normative assumption that the notion of freedom provides an independent standard of evaluation, referring as it does to a fundamental value. This means that, for any proposed set of rights, we want to be able to say what that set implies in terms of freedom. If we are liberal normative theorists, we ought to be able to defend a particular set of rights on the ground that it is good for freedom. For example, if liberals favour private property over communal property, one reason one would expect them to be able to give is that private property is, at least on the whole, better for freedom. You can’t say this and then go on to define freedom as the absence of constraints that violate private property rights. That sort of justice-based definition, or ‘moralized’ definition, would rob freedom of its role as an independent standard of evaluation. Freedom is then no longer a grounding value. This was all set out very nicely by G.A. Cohen in a series of articles in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁹ I would say, in addition, that freedom ought to be seen as a grounding value by any liberal attaching non-specific value to freedom.

¹⁸ See Carter (1999).

¹⁹ See, for instance, Cohen (1988, 1995).

I find it interesting that moralized definitions straddle the left-right divide, something that Cohen didn't notice or at least didn't bother to point out. For example, both Dworkin and Nozick seem to presuppose moralized definitions of freedom.²⁰ In fact, Dworkin is more explicit than Nozick about doing so. This fact is itself useful in illustrating how moralizing the concept of freedom makes freedom itself redundant as an independent standard of evaluation. If they both moralize the concept of freedom, neither Dworkin nor Nozick can appeal to the value of freedom in order to show what's wrong with the other's conception of justice.

This point about the left-right divide, and the difference between moralised and non-moralised conceptions of freedom brings me to your argument that it is wrong to cash out the divide between laissez-faire liberals and egalitarians with regard to freedom as a divide between formal freedom and substantive freedom.²¹ Does this spell the end of the possibility of finding a 'rough and ready' way to characterize the contrasting views of laissez-faire liberals and egalitarians when it comes to definitions of freedom? Or are there other ways to draw a line between the two camps that you would favour?

I don't think there's a way to draw the line that's quite as 'rough and ready' as the simple distinction between merely formal freedom and substantive freedom—a distinction which can be theoretically useful but which I don't think captures the divide between laissez-faire liberals (more specifically, anti-redistributive liberals), and economic egalitarians. I do think the divide can still be captured, at least in part, in terms of differences between conceptions of freedom. One such way is by reference to G.A. Cohen's work, which I've just mentioned. He saw the difference as one between a moralized definition of freedom as the non-violation of private property rights, and a non-moralized definition, where the latter might be either freedom as not being prevented by others from performing actions (that is, negative freedom in Isaiah Berlin's sense), or freedom as the ability to perform actions, more along the lines favoured by Sen and Van Parijs.²²

Cohen's account of the divide of course also amounts to a critique of anti-egalitarian libertarianism: if you believe in equal freedom, then it's hard to deny that a non-moralized conception will have economically

²⁰ See, for instance, Nozick (1974) and Dworkin (2001).

²¹ See Carter (2011a).

²² See, for instance, Sen (1988, 1996) and Van Parijs (1997).

egalitarian implications. So, either the anti-egalitarians should explicitly defend the appeal to a moralized definition, rather than merely presupposing it implicitly, or they should admit to favouring unequal freedom. The first alternative doesn't seem to be very popular, inasmuch as there are very few explicit defences of moralized definitions (although Ralf Bader's recent work is an example,²³ as is the work by Ronald Dworkin that I mentioned earlier²⁴). The second route seems even less popular, as anti-egalitarian libertarians want to divorce questions about the distribution of freedom from questions about the distribution of resources. There might be other ways of showing how anti-egalitarian libertarians embrace a distinct concept of freedom. Hayekians think of freedom as the absence of arbitrary power, which looks rather different from negative liberty in Isaiah Berlin's sense. But then, Philip Pettit thinks of freedom in much the same way as Hayek at this abstract level, and I would classify Pettit as more of an egalitarian. So here, too, the tendency to moralize the definition of freedom might be the only way to explain this ideological divide by reference to rival definitions of freedom. This makes the critique of moralized definitions quite a potent tool in normative theorizing.

Speaking of justice and freedom, another topic you tackle in A Measure of Freedom is the appropriate role of freedom in a theory of justice. In chapter 9 of the book, you reject Steiner's argument for equalizing individual freedom in a society.²⁵ The reason behind your argument has to do with your rejection of the view that 'a universal quest for greater freedom' is a zero-sum game.²⁶ Could you expand on this (and your reasons for it) more? Do you believe that there is an (or a more) appropriate way of distributing freedom in a society?

I agree with Steiner that individual persons have a right to equal freedom. I base this claim on the premise that persons are basically equal in a morally relevant sense and are due respect as such. So, equality is certainly one basic distributive principle when it comes to allocating freedom. But, as your question implies, if equality were the only distributive principle for freedom, this would have to be because the allocation of freedom is a zero-sum game. Otherwise, we'd be indifferent between levelling-up and levelling-down people's degrees of freedom: 'very little freedom for everyone' would be a perfectly just distribution! Steiner is well known for

²³ See Bader (2018).

²⁴ Carter refers to Dworkin (2001).

²⁵ See Carter (1999, 258-267).

²⁶ On this, see Steiner (1983, 1994).

having defended the zero-sum thesis. He thinks one can never increase or decrease the total amount of freedom enjoyed by a given group of individuals. I've criticized the zero-sum thesis, arguing that the total amount of freedom of a group, understood in the 'value-free' sense we've already talked about, can indeed increase or decrease, depending on how property rights are understood, and also depending on degrees of scarcity and propensities of individuals to cooperate and to consume resources. So, we need to combine equality of freedom with some principle prescribing a certain level of freedom for all. The strongest combined principle would be maximal equal freedom, though there might be other normative considerations that count against that.

In an article for another festschrift—this time for Hillel Steiner—I argued on this basis that Steiner's zero-sum thesis actually plays a key role in his theory of justice, for methodological reasons.²⁷ Steiner wants to characterize justice in a way that's wholly independent of the good. It can be helpful to compare him with Rawls in this respect. Rawls thinks a conception of justice requires at least a 'thin' theory of the good (for Rawls, having more 'primary goods' is better than having less). For Steiner, that's a cop-out. He thinks it doesn't take seriously enough the priority of the right over the good. He wants his theory of justice to be wholly independent of any claim about what's good for individuals. So, in my terms, his idea is that we ought to analyse the concept of justice, no less than that of freedom, in a 'value-independent' way. But if the zero-sum thesis is false, then he needs to appeal to the claim that freedom is good—that having more of it is better than having less, at least *ceteris paribus*, in order to say what justice consists in, exactly. That would make the analysis of justice dependent on a particular ethical evaluative stance. And I think this partly explains why he's remained so strongly attached to the zero-sum thesis.

III. FORMAL APPROACHES TO THE MEASUREMENT OF FREEDOM

In your work, you engage to some extent with the philosophical literature that uses formal tools to analyse social phenomena, while not being a 'formal' philosopher yourself. How important has this approach been in influencing your ideas?

²⁷ See Carter (2009).

Around the time of the publication of my book *A Measure of Freedom*, and over the subsequent decade or so, I did engage quite a bit with formal theorists with backgrounds in social choice theory or philosophy or both. I was aware of the formal literature in welfare economics when working on the book, but, beyond developing a critique of Sen's work on freedom, I didn't engage with it actively until afterwards, when the 'freedom of choice literature', as it came to be known, had really started to take off. During that period Martin van Hees, especially, was instrumental in bringing together a number of political philosophers and rational choice theorists interested in freedom, and several of us organized research projects and workshops in this interdisciplinary spirit. Those workshops were fun meetings and always very stimulating.

In terms of what shows up in my published work, the impact of the formal approach probably looks fairly limited. No doubt this has partly been due to my own limits in following the more technical passages, but also to the fact that sometimes I found that the formal literature started from axioms that the authors took to be self-evident but which I had philosophical reasons for doubting. As a result, whichever literature I was looking at I mostly found myself digging down to the foundations. So, for example, I argued that Pattanaik and Xu's original axioms (in their seminal 1990 paper²⁸) were running together the three distinct concepts of freedom, choice, and freedom of choice, and that separating out these concepts could help dissolve some of the perplexities their analysis had generated.²⁹ This work wasn't just critical, as I had reflected very little on those distinctions and I found it very helpful to do so. The concept of choice is interesting in itself: in one sense it's broader than the concept of freedom, as the choices we have include powers as well as freedoms. I've recently discovered some interesting practical applications of that broader concept working with Stefano Moroni, a specialist in planning theory.³⁰

What, if anything, do you believe is gained (or lost) by the use of formal tools in the analysis of social phenomena, in general, and of freedom, in particular?

In general terms, the use of formal tools certainly brings clarity, rigour, and objectivity. You can't argue with a mathematical proof. That said, the

²⁸ See Pattanaik and Xu (1990).

²⁹ See Carter (2004) on this.

³⁰ See Carter and Moroni (2021).

costs and benefits of using a very technical language seem to me to vary depending on the theoretical context, what one's trying to demonstrate, and, more pragmatically, the nature of the audience. Analytical philosophers, who are of course strong believers in clarity and rigour, mostly get by without using more than the most rudimentary formalizations. But sometimes more technical tools can help in making a demonstration crystal clear and avoiding fallacies or sophisms, of which mainstream political philosophy certainly has its fair share.

Sometimes formal approaches are criticized for their unrealistic, idealizing assumptions—for example, those made about degrees of rationality or self-interest. I have limited sympathy with that kind of criticism. Theorizing involves abstracting, and abstracting involves removing parts of reality. If we don't remove parts of reality, we simply redescribe reality in all its perceived complexity and fail to formulate an explanatory or normative theory about it. In any case, this kind of criticism doesn't seem to apply to the 'freedom of choice literature' in the same way as it might apply to standard rational choice theory.

Thinking more specifically about how things have worked out in the case of freedom, one kind of loss is the one I pointed to a moment ago: many formal theorists seem to take their lead from only a small number of well-known philosophical texts on freedom, such as those by Mill, Berlin, or Sen, devoting nearly all their energy to their formal analysis; as a result, they run the risk of producing work that proceeds with great rigour but from dubious premises or that simply demonstrates the obvious. That said, there's nothing about the use of formal tools *per se* that makes this kind of risk inevitable.

More specifically still, and as some formal theorists themselves have pointed out, the 'freedom of choice literature' has tended to neglect the problem of identifying and assessing different types and sources of constraints on freedom. In other words, in MacCallum's terms, it mostly treats freedom as a dyadic relation rather than a triadic one, because it conceives of freedom simply as the presence of a menu of options, without asking what it is to open or close off an option. The main focus has been on how to aggregate the options, whether and in what ways preferences over options count, how to gauge degrees of similarity among options on the basis of individual preferences, and so on. Of course, this is just another way of abstracting, and isn't bad in itself. Still, it's important to be conscious of the fact that you're treating only one dimension of a multidimensional phenomenon—especially if you think, as I do, that the

plausibility and usefulness of a conception of freedom depend on its overall coherence in wide reflective equilibrium, taking into account all its dimensions, the ways in which it's supposed to ground other normative concepts such as rights and justice, and various philosophical background theories.

Finally, there's the more pragmatic issue of accessibility. Obviously limited accessibility means less impact among the audience you'd like to reach, and this is a danger when the language is very technical and the potential audience is broad. If you're trying to communicate in an interdisciplinary context—as you ought to be if you're working on freedom—it's crucial to include intuitive explanations in plain English for the benefit of those who lack the training to follow your formalizations with sufficient confidence.

To the best of my knowledge, there are two strands of the philosophical literature concerned with the measurement of freedom: one interested in the cardinal measurement of freedom that you and Hillel Steiner, for instance, contributed to, and another that purports to measure freedom (of choice) through the ranking of opportunity sets. They seem to be talking past each other, despite the appearance of being closely related. Is there a reason?

I find the term 'cardinality measure' somewhat ambiguous in this context, as it often seems to be used to cover different things—most importantly, the view that the measurement of freedom is a matter of adopting a simple counting procedure, and the view that the measure should be 'value-free' in the sense mentioned earlier. Here, two qualifications are in order. First, it's important to bear in mind that these two stances are logically independent of one another, even though the denial of the first seems mostly to have been accompanied by a denial of the second, leading to the development of various preference-based rankings of opportunity sets. Second, I don't exactly favour a simple counting procedure but favour aggregation over expected sets of conjunctively unprevented options. Still, roughly speaking, cardinality and value-freeness do characterize the position adopted by Steiner and me.

There has been some important work at the interface, so I wouldn't say that the two approaches you mention have been completely talking past each other. For example, there have been points of contact where formal theorists have attempted to produce non-preference-based

rankings of opportunity sets—as in the work of Martin van Hees.³¹ But there’s certainly some truth in what you say. Most of the reasons seem to be implicit in my answer to your last question. Some are more superficial, some deeper, and I find it difficult to assess their relative importance. At the superficial end of the spectrum, theorists have talked past each other simply because they are unaware of, or lack an interest in, the fundamental concepts and language being developed on the other side of a disciplinary divide. For my part, I have paid less attention than I might have to alternative metrics developed in the ‘freedom of choice literature’.

At a deeper level, there may be some differences in the reasons for our interest in the concept of freedom that generate different views about which problems are important and which solutions would be adequate. For example, welfare economists are generally happier to work with weaker comparisons. And this is natural if you’re coming from an area where the main currency of evaluation has been utility, understood as preference satisfaction, and where one’s main concern may be explanatory as much as normative. Starting from preferences over available options as a means of explaining individuals’ economic behaviour, some welfare economists arrived at the interesting proposition that often people have a preference for having more options. So, the reasoning goes, let’s try and make sense of preferences for freedom by discussing possible rankings of opportunity sets in terms of the freedom of choice they imply. If, on the other hand, you’re coming from mainstream normative political theory—say, in the tradition of Rawls, or of right- or left-libertarianism—where the main concern has been equality, rights, and justice, and you’re asking what sorts of institutional arrangements could realize these values, either in ideal or in non-ideal circumstances, then one of your immediate concerns ought to be whether we can make sense of cardinal interpersonal comparisons of freedom, as these comparisons are necessary in order to make sense of some of the most frequently cited principles of justice, or at least in order to compare different approximations to the ideals those principles represent—for example, approximations to equal freedom or to maximal equal freedom.

If you’re coming from the direction of a deontological theory of justice, there seem to be implications also for the question of preference-dependence—which, as I’ve said, is a separate issue from that of cardinality versus ordinality. If you adopt a deontological perspective on distributive questions, you’re likely to be sceptical about attempts to measure

³¹ See, for instance, van Hees (2004).

freedom in terms of agents' preferences. You'll be more likely to think, along Kantian lines, that freedom, in this context, is an external relation between persons and that agents' preferences are neither here nor there. This is certainly Steiner's perspective, and in my own work I aimed for an account of overall freedom that would at least be compatible with it.

You have done empirical work with regard to the measurement of capabilities,³² but not with regard to freedom itself. This might come across as surprising, given that there are specific indices devoted to the measurement of freedom across countries. An example would be the Human Freedom Index. Has any of the institutions that develop these measures ever reached out to you? Would you accept a task of counseling on the conceptual basis needed for those measurements?

I haven't really done empirical work on the measurement of capabilities. I take it the publication you're referring to is the one that came out of a research project directed by Paul Anand that resulted in a joint article. My contribution to that collective effort was mostly theoretical.

Regarding empirical measures of what you call 'freedom itself', or what I'd call social freedom or negative freedom: back in 2010 I was indeed invited to one of the workshops jointly organized by the Fraser Institute, the Cato Institute, and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation that led to their Human Freedom Index. I criticized some of their assumptions about the relation between freedom and property rights, by which they meant those property rights recognized in positive law (in other words, I was posing a variant of the critique of moralized definitions of freedom). They seemed to be divided over the usefulness of engaging in discussion of such an issue, many of them urging that they should 'just get on with developing the index', so I guess my impact there was pretty limited. Around the same time, I attended a couple of interesting workshops organized by the political scientist Leonardo Morlino, who was interested in measuring freedom as one dimension of the quality of democracy. I'd certainly consider further work in this area, though sadly time is always scarce. One project I've had in mind for many years would be to work with a political scientist on comparing the existing indices and the conceptions of freedom they assume, and the different implications of specific conceptions that are often considered to be 'rivals' yet might in fact imply quite similar indices once operationalized adequately. For example, I think social or negative freedom and republican freedom are unlikely to

³² See Anand et al. (2009).

imply different indices, and that the differences between the implications of these two conceptions and those of Sen's 'freedom as capability' might be fewer than is often supposed.

IV. EQUALITY AND RESPECT

Let me now turn to a more recent theme in your work: equality and respect. In a 2011 paper,³³ you write that we should ask what the basis of equality is. More specifically, you point out that the question of what we should equalize in a society (resources, well-being, or other things) necessarily depends on the basis of equality. Can you expand a bit more on this?

I first came to think about the basis of equality—the question of what makes us equal in a morally relevant descriptive sense—through a sense of dissatisfaction with certain prescriptive claims about equality. In particular, I was focusing on claims to the effect that certain human capabilities ought to be equalized. Sen and his followers have pointed out that humans are naturally unequal in their capacities to convert resources into functionings, as a result of which their capabilities are unequal. Yet Sen is an egalitarian. And it struck me that his affirmation of descriptive inequality, though illuminating, was depriving him of a sound reason to equalize those capabilities. Unless, that is, he could point to some other sense in which people are, in fact, equal, such that those capabilities ought to be equalized. Yet he, and others, have steered clear of that further question. If we're not actually equal in any sense, then why should anything be equalized? Treat equal cases equally, unequal cases unequally. Aristotle, who is often cited by capability theorists, recognized natural inequalities in the capability to function, but he didn't prescribe equalizing any such capabilities. Was he therefore more coherent than contemporary advocates of equality of basic capabilities?

And what was your answer to these questions? Is there a sense in which we are equal?

I developed an argument that starts from Rawls's claim that we're equal inasmuch as we all have the 'range property' of moral personality, where a range property is the property of having certain scalar properties above a certain minimum threshold. I argued that we need an independent

³³ See Carter (2011b).

reason for focusing on such a range property, one that isn't itself based on equality, otherwise our justification of equal entitlements will be circular. That independent reason, I suggested, lies in a kind of respect, which I called 'opacity respect'. To show opacity respect for a person is to adopt an external perspective, refusing to 'look inside' them, and consequently refusing to take account of the level at which they possess certain agential capacities above the threshold. In other words, respecting agents means taking their capacities as given, in our practical deliberations about how to treat them, and simply ascribing the range property to them, without further investigation, because there is something disrespectful about assessing the very capacities on which an agent's moral personality supervenes. Opacity respect might not be appropriate in all contexts, but it does seem to be appropriate in those contexts where we think people should be treated as equals—such as the context of relations between the state and citizens—and in this sense it can explain our commitment to that kind of treatment.

This basis of equality seems to be contradicted by some answers to the question of what we should equalize in society—the so-called currency of egalitarian justice. For example, some versions of the capability approach, and some versions of luck egalitarianism, prescribe equalizing certain 'internal resources' of people or, more commonly, compensating for internal resource deficits by supplying those who have such deficits with more external resources. But, if those 'internal resources' are among the capacities on which moral personality supervenes, then this policy can't be carried out without violating opacity respect. If we reject opacity respect, we no longer have a reason for focusing on the range property. And if we don't have a reason for focusing on the range property, we're back to treating people as unequal. So, my conclusion was that any egalitarian prescription, any answer to the question 'Equality of what?', has to be consistent with opacity respect in order to have a logically consistent justification.

What has been the response of luck egalitarians or capability theorists to your argument (if any)?

Some luck egalitarians have responded either by attempting to deny the entailment that the equalization of internal resources is ruled out, or by rejecting my starting premises—a sort of modus tollens argument, to which I still prefer my modus ponens argument as I haven't yet seen a convincing alternative account of the basis of equality. Gabriel Wollner,

for example, rejects my account of the basis of equality because of its undesirable implications for luck egalitarianism, and as an alternative basis of equality he goes for ‘being human’,³⁴ but I think that alternative account runs into the usual problems of speciesism or of over-inclusion. Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, who is broadly sympathetic with luck egalitarianism, has taken the line that ‘basic equality’, as it’s come to be called, doesn’t do all the grounding work that it’s often thought to do, and has defended this view in his more recent work.³⁵ If he’s right, this might deprive my argument of some of its teeth. I’m still trying to work out why, exactly, I disagree with him, although I’m pretty sure I do! This is still work in progress.

I’m not aware of any capability theorists having addressed my argument excluding the equalization of certain basic capabilities, but perhaps many of them don’t need to. Although Sen originally advocated ‘equality of basic capabilities’ in answer to the ‘equality of what’ question, and although Nussbaum’s list of capabilities includes some very basic ones that I would think of as grounding moral personality, most capability theorists today seem to be closer to sufficientarianism than to egalitarianism in the strict sense, and so might escape my critique. That said, whether they do escape it might depend, further, on how they justify their sufficientarianism. For example, if they endorse a contractualist justification, which itself assumes basic equality, they might still be subject to my criticism.

As you have just pointed out, consistency between opacity respect and egalitarian prescriptions seems to rule out many of the egalitarian theories developed so far. Which one(s) does it not rule out?

Any theory that focuses on external resources or external relations will pass through the filter, as its application won’t involve assessing, or taking into account, levels of internal resources—in the sense of capacities in virtue of which we count as moral persons. Equality of social or negative freedom will therefore pass the test. So, a theory like Steiner’s, in which the most basic principle is equality of pure negative freedom, passes the test. So too, Rawlsian egalitarianism passes the test, as it focuses only on primary social goods and not on primary natural goods.

Seeing what did and did not pass the test was quite a revelation for me. It confirmed some of my long-standing intuitions—in particular

³⁴ See Wollner (2010, 2014).

³⁵ Carter refers to the working paper that Lippert-Rasmussen presented at the 2021 Mancept workshop, entitled “What Is It for Us to Be Moral Equals? And Does It Matter (Much), If We’re Not?”. See <https://mancept.wordpress.com/basic-equality/>.

about the importance of external freedom in a theory of justice—but also led to some surprises, as I had generally thought of myself as closer to luck egalitarianism than to Rawlsianism. Some aspects of luck egalitarianism—for example, a certain version of responsibility-sensitivity—survived this journey. Nevertheless, I have come to appreciate Rawls more than I did.

I also think that more can be said about the currency of egalitarian justice, in light of my account of basic equality, than simply pointing out which currencies can be equalized without violating opacity respect. For example, if your starting point is opacity respect, then a freedom-based theory of egalitarian justice seems to be more congruent with your fundamental egalitarian beliefs than a welfarist one. But this, too, is still work in progress.

Let me pick up on the second reply from egalitarians you mentioned, that of rejecting your starting premises. If we rejected opacity respect in favour of an alternative account of basic equality, could it be that this alternative basis of equality has no implications for what has to be equalized in a theory of justice? In other words, could the question of ‘equality of what’ then be answered independently of the question ‘what are the bases of equality’?

No, even at a more general level, I don’t accept that the two questions can be largely independent. To supply a basis for equality—to provide an account of basic equality—is to say what it is about certain individuals that makes them equal, such that they ought to be treated equally in some respect. Put this way, it should be clear that there’s an entailment-relation between the two kinds of equality: people ought to be treated equally—they ought to receive equality of some particular kind of thing *x*—because they are equal in some sense that is normatively relevant in determining entitlements to *x*. The nature of our equal entitlements is grounded in the content of our basic equality. That said, there might be some leeway. The nature of basic equality might constrain rather than completely determining the currency of egalitarian justice.

For the most part, the question ‘Equality of what?’ has indeed been addressed independently of the question ‘What are the bases of equality?’, but I think this is simply because people have generally pushed the second of these questions firmly to the back of their minds, persuading themselves that they can remain agnostic on such a ‘deep’ question when engaging in normative theorizing about equality. As a result, much of the

literature on ‘equality of what’ seems to have proceeded more through a sort of ‘intuition pumping’—that is, by comparing abstract cases of equality of certain kinds of good and asking whether such distributions really capture our intuitions about what egalitarianism truly amounts to. For example: ‘If egalitarianism meant equality of welfare, then the expensive tastes of the rich might lead us to give them more resources in the name of equality. But redistribution from the poor to the rich can’t be something true egalitarians believe in. So, “welfare” can’t be the right answer to the question “Equality of what?”’. This style of reasoning can be complex and interesting, but it only takes us so far. Once we see the relevance of basic equality to the ‘equality of what’ question, we realize that we also have to dig down to the normative grounds of equality of entitlements and not merely seek isomorphism with surface intuitions about what we ought to equalize.

Since you have mentioned intuitions, I would like to make a brief detour from the topic of equality to that of the role of intuitions in political philosophy. While they are often invoked in support of someone’s argument or against the implications of an argument, it is often unclear what exactly their normative role is in philosophizing, and where they derive their normative force from. Since you have sometimes used intuitions normatively in your own work, I wonder what your thoughts are on this issue.

The term ‘intuitions’ can refer to different kinds of beliefs which can be more or less superficial and, in that sense, more or less authoritative in our theorizing. There are linguistic intuitions, which tell us ‘what we would say’ in certain circumstances. These might seem superficial, and in one sense they are. But, when we analyse them carefully, they can also tell us something about the nature of the concepts we use, and so reveal deeper normative beliefs. I tend to follow Rawls in thinking of these normative beliefs, or ‘considered judgements’ as he calls them, as the appropriate starting point in the development of any normative theory. After all, where else can we start? But the making of a good theory doesn’t just lie in mirroring our raw intuitions. A theory needs to be internally consistent—something our raw intuitions often aren’t—and to have a plausible structure linking more basic, grounding claims with the less basic ones that are grounded in them, and it needs to cohere with other theories in wide reflective equilibrium. If a theory we’ve developed turns out to be highly inconsistent with our initial intuitions, then we have grounds for

rethinking it. Hence, for example, my own interest, when working out a theory of overall freedom, in the consistency of that theory with certain ‘common-sense comparisons’ of freedom that we ordinarily make. On the other hand, I do find myself getting a bit frustrated when I read arguments that seem to move too quickly in rejecting some theoretical claim on the ground that it conflicts with some unanalysed raw intuition. I mean arguments of the form: ‘Claim x can be shown to entail y ; but y is “highly implausible”; therefore, we must reject claim x ’. Raw intuitions are the first word, but they’re not the last word. We often have to revise them in our theoretical efforts to achieve overall coherence, and sometimes these revisions can be surprising and interesting.

Let me now focus more closely on respect. You also have also one article on respect and toleration.³⁶ You argue that it is true both that respect and toleration are compatible and, in another sense, that they are not. Can you expand on this?

Having developed the notion of opacity respect, I came to see that it had implications for principles other than those of equality. Toleration is one example. It’s generally assumed that tolerating something—say, a certain kind of person or practice—involves evaluating it negatively. Toleration is more complex than mere indifference or approval of something. It involves holding back from acting on beliefs or tastes that would otherwise lead us to curtail other people’s freedom. This is sometimes called the ‘objection component’ of toleration—the disapproval or dislike of some person or belief or practice—which is overridden by an ‘acceptance component’—the reason for not interfering after all. Although toleration has traditionally been seen as an important part of the theory and practice of liberalism, some have objected that it is ‘disrespectful’, exactly because it involves a negative judgement. I came to see that there’s something right and something wrong in this claim about the incompatibility of toleration and respect. First, the claim can be based on a simple confusion of ‘recognition respect’ with ‘appraisal respect’. It remains the case that toleration is compatible with recognition respect—that is, with recognizing people’s status as agents with rights to freedom. It’s only incompatible with appraisal respect—that is, respecting in the sense of holding someone or something in high esteem. But there’s also a more surprising sense in which toleration can be incompatible even with recognition respect. This is where recognition respect is interpreted as opacity respect, and where

³⁶ See Carter (2013a).

toleration involves taking into account some of the assessments that opacity respect rules out. Opacity respect involves refusing to make, or at least to take into account, certain evaluations of people's basic agential capacities. So, where the objection component of toleration consists in this specific kind of basic negative evaluation, then toleration is disrespectful in the sense of violating opacity respect. Moreover, given the line of reasoning I rehearsed earlier, failing to show opacity respect involves denying the very basic equality that grounds toleration understood as a liberal democratic virtue. So, where toleration is understood as a liberal democratic virtue, it can't be toleration of the kind that involves opacity disrespect—for example, the kind shown by the so-called 'tolerant racist'.

I would like to close this part of the interview with a question which maybe brings us full circle. This regards the interaction between freedom and equality. Would you say that your interest in equality is ultimately justified by an interest in freedom, or the other way round—that your interest in freedom was ultimately justified by an interest in equality?

I think the justification goes both ways. If you're interested in negative freedom because you observe that certain relations of oppression or confinement are unjust, then in part you're rebelling against the hierarchies that typically establish or legitimize those relations. Vice versa, it would be strange to say you're interested in equality without having at least some vague notion of the content of that ideal—of what ought to be equalized, or made less unequal, between certain people. In this sense, I find the two ideals inseparable, even though my first interest as a political philosopher, chronologically speaking, was in the concept of freedom, and for the most part, when theorizing about freedom, I abstracted from its relation to equality.

The inseparability of the two ideals, at least as I've interpreted them, has been brought home to me even more clearly by focusing on the notion of respect. Respect for persons is what grounds equal freedom: individual persons are equal, in a morally relevant way, insofar as they are due opacity respect; the object of opacity respect is people's agency; as agents, persons are due freedom; as equal persons, they are due equal freedom. And at each stage in this reasoning, the appropriate perspective on persons is an external one that doesn't involve 'looking inside' them. That perspective amounts to a kind of respect, and it grounds both equality and negative freedom, where the latter is understood as an external

relation between actions. None of this need imply that justice consists only in such relations, but it does say something about the connection between equality and freedom that I, personally, find intuitively appealing.

V. ADVICE TO YOUNG SCHOLARS

Let me close off the interview with some questions that look to the future, and, more specifically, to future generations of philosophers. What advice would you give to graduate students aiming to pursue an academic career in political philosophy?

The first thing that comes to mind is: make the most of being a full-time researcher while it lasts! Once you have an academic job, you won't have nearly as much research time. Looking back, my years as a graduate student and as a post-doc seem to have been incredibly free, although at the time of course it doesn't seem that way because of the feeling of insecurity and needing to find your way.

Regarding political philosophy in particular, it can be helpful to be aware of how vast the discipline is and how it borders, at one end, on moral philosophy, philosophy of language, metaphysics and so on, and at the other, on political science, economics, and law. When applying for jobs, if you have the luxury of being able to choose, think about where you'd feel more comfortable—in a philosophy department, if your work is more foundational or conceptual, or in a social science department, if your work is more applied or informed by empirical research. That includes thinking not only about the kinds of researchers you'd most like to interact with but also about the kinds of students you'd most like to teach.

You have hinted at the philosophy job market and the extent to which young scholars can have 'bargaining power' over their choice of where to teach and do research. What PhD students are usually told is that this largely depends on their publications. Would you have any suggestions about this more specifically?

Well, I can give a few pieces of strategic advice based on my experience as an author and as a referee. First, try to be thick skinned. Philosophy journals pride themselves on the number of papers they reject, and often they 'desk reject' pieces for fairly arbitrary reasons. Having a paper rejected after working on it for a long time feels a bit like a punch in the

stomach. But don't let it get you down: nearly all of us clock up a fair number of rejections even though many people don't like to admit it. You get over it after a day or two; and if no reason is given, or if you think the referees haven't provided strong reasons, don't hesitate in sending the piece off to another journal. Don't let it sit on your hard drive doing nothing. Of course, if you think the referees have provided convincing objections, that's another matter. Second, if you get a 'revise and resubmit' verdict, make it clear that you take the referees' points very seriously, both in the revised paper and in your cover letter. That means: if a referee makes a point that they clearly think important, don't respond to it by adding a footnote or making some similarly cosmetic adjustment. Third, don't be too surprised if you find that the part of your PhD thesis that you thought the most original actually turns out to be the most difficult part to publish. Original work provokes objections, and referees who find an idea strange seem to be more likely to reject it; whereas a diligent piece of work applying some well-established theory to some new issue in a fairly mechanical way can get nodded through unproblematically. And that's a shame, but I don't seem to be alone in having this impression, and it might be useful to bear it in mind when prioritizing the publication of one or another piece: the more original piece might take longer to find a home.

Finally, having interacted a great deal with Italian graduate students and colleagues, I have some advice for the many young researchers around the world who aren't native English speakers and are less than perfectly fluent in English: before submitting work to journals or publishers run by native English speakers, make sure that the English is not just comprehensible, but *perfect*. American and British academics do a lot of hand-wringing about their implicit biases in terms of race and gender, but much less about their implicit biases against foreigners whose first language isn't English. Avoid triggering that bias!

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