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Freedom, security, and the COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Freedom and security are often portrayed as things that have to be traded off against one another, but this view does not capture the full complexity of the freedom-security relationship. Rather, there seem to be four different ways in which freedom and security connect to each other: freedom can come at the cost of security, security can come at the cost of freedom, freedom can work to the benefit of security, and security can work to the benefit of freedom. This paper analyses each of these connections in turn. It shows that particular understandings of freedom can help us to see particular connections between freedom and security. The practical examples used to illustrate these connections are drawn from the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be suggested that, in the face of challenges such as this one, taking into account all four connections between freedom and security can ultimately help decision-makers in upholding both.

KEYWORDS COVID-19 pandemic; freedom; liberalism; republicanism; risk; security

Freedom versus security?

Freedom and security are often believed to be in conflict with one another. As a result, it is frequently thought that there is a need to 'balance' or 'trade off' freedom and security in public decision-making. This can be observed, for example, in the debate about counter-terrorism after the 9/11 attacks.[1] The 'freedom vs. security' frame also emerges in the discussion about the appropriate response to the COVID-19 pandemic.[2] The idea that freedom and security have to be balanced against one another is not only popular in the public and political debate, it is also found in academic literature. Posner and Vermeule (2007) present it in the form of a 'tradeoff thesis' (p. 21). They suggest that, generally speaking, an increase of freedom in society entails a decrease of security, and the other way around. According to them, the challenge for governments is to balance freedom and security in such a way that the total welfare of the population is maximised.

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In political philosophy, however, the view that freedom and security are in conflict with one another has received considerable criticism. Waldron (2003) investigates the image of balance between freedom and security in the context of increased terrorist threat. He expresses a number of concerns about this way of seeing the freedom-security relationship, and cautions against giving up civil liberties in the name of security. Newey (2012) analyses freedom and security at the conceptual level. He also raises strong doubts about the idea of a necessary opposition between the two, and shows how the language of 'liberty' can frequently even be translated into that of 'security'. These and other authors furthermore make clear that there are important connections between freedom and security that are obfuscated by the idea of a simple trade-off. Both Waldron (2003) and Newey (2012) point out that civil liberties actually have a positive function in providing people with security against the state. Shue (1980), Meisels (2008), and Binder and Binder (2019) suggest that security in turn serves as a supportive condition for the enjoyment of liberties. Neocleous (2007), on the other hand, draws attention to the danger of calling anything a 'security issue' at all, alluding that this almost inevitably invites the state to restrict people's freedoms.[3]

Each of the works cited above brings out one or more interesting aspects of the relationship between freedom and security. What is missing in the literature, however, is a clear overview of the different ways in which freedom and security relate. By that I mean a systematic analysis that on the one hand considers the tension between freedom and security – pointing out where the trade-off thesis goes wrong, but also showing why freedom and security may indeed get in each other's way – and on the other hand considers how freedom and security can actually reinforce one another. This paper provides such an analysis. Drawing both on theoretical literature and on practical examples from the context of the coronavirus pandemic, it brings out four different connections between freedom and security: how freedom can come at the cost of security, how security can come at the cost of freedom, how freedom can work to the benefit of security, and how security can work to the benefit of freedom.

This analysis contributes to existing knowledge about freedom and security in two different ways. Firstly, it shows that particular understandings of freedom can help us to observe and comprehend particular connections between freedom and security. Whereas the Hobbesian or pure negative understanding of freedom makes us especially prone to seeing how freedom can compromise security, the republican interpretation of freedom provides us more clarity about the way in which freedom can indeed support security. And whereas viewing freedoms as basic liberties helps us to note how security can come at the cost of freedom, understanding freedoms as capabilities enables us to grasp how security can indeed work to the benefit of freedom. Secondly, the analysis provided by this paper serves a more

practical purpose: the overview it gives of the different connections between freedom and security can be of help in public decision-making in the face of real-world situations in which the two seem to conflict. I suggest that, by taking into account all four connections between freedom and security, decision-makers ultimately become better able to uphold both. In order to illustrate this, I end this paper by drawing from my theoretical account of the freedom-security relationship a number of practical lessons for future pandemic policies.

The concepts of freedom and security

Before moving on to a discussion of the connections between freedom and security, let us first have a closer look at each of these two concepts in turn. Political philosophers have long debated the meaning of the word 'freedom', and thinkers from different traditions still understand the term in different ways. Let me highlight a number of these. Hobbes (1996) famously describes freedom as 'the absence … of externall Impediments of motion' (p. 145). A similarly 'negative' view of freedom is defended by Berlin (1969), who suggests that someone's freedom consists in the absence of one particular kind of impediment: other persons' interference. In order to protect individuals against such meddling, liberal thinkers such as Mill (1859) favour the legal demarcation of particular areas in which people should in principle be free from interference by others, including the state. The basic liberties that are enshrined in the constitutions of many states around the world today – among them, for example, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and freedom of association – can be seen to serve this function. Republican thinkers such as Pettit (1997) and Skinner (1998) share with liberals a concern for freedom, but they do not equate it with plain non-interference. Rather, they consider someone free to the extent that she is not subject to other people's arbitrary power or – to use Pettit's preferred term – domination. Finally, there is a group of philosophers who challenge the idea that other persons' interference or domination are the only things that can render an individual unfree. By associating freedom with capabilities, that is, actual opportunities to achieve well-being, Sen (2009) and other capability theorists draw attention to the fact that people's material circumstances and physical abilities affect their level of freedom as well.

Although political philosophers often commit themselves to one specific understanding of freedom, I believe that in the minds of most people freedom constitutes a complex and multi-layered ideal that cannot be fully captured by any of the abovementioned understandings of freedom on its own. Rather, I take it that each of these understandings brings out one important element of what we tend to value as 'freedom': from not being constrained in our activities, to holding basic liberty rights; from not being at

the mercy of a despot, to having valuable opportunities available. These are all distinct matters, but they are not per se incompatible, and in practice they are indeed often positively connected to one another. As a way of doing justice to the many-sided character of the ideal of freedom, this analysis does not single out one specific understanding of freedom in order to investigate how security relates to freedom on this particular view, but instead it draws on different understandings of freedom in order to elucidate different connections between freedom and security. As we shall see, each of the views mentioned above can help us to comprehend one important aspect of the freedom-security relationship.

When it comes to debating the meaning of the word 'security', political philosophers have been surprisingly silent (Herington, 2015, p. 35; Waldron, 2006, p. 456). Although the term appears in many of the classical texts, for example, those by Hobbes (1996), Locke (1988), and Mill (1871), its meaning is generally not discussed explicitly. In contemporary literature, security is often associated, on the one hand, with the absence of a particular *risk*. This can be a risk of 'personal violation' (Rothschild, 1995, p. 62) or 'deliberate attacks' (Hildebrandt, 2013, p. 359), but the risk of falling victim to an illness or natural disaster is just as well something people can be said to have (or lack, or want) 'security from'. On the other hand, security is frequently treated as a matter of an individual's guaranteed or continued enjoyment of a particular *good*. This good can be fulfilment of 'basic needs' (Herington, 2017, p. 187) or achievement of 'normal human physical functioning' (John, 2011, p. 73), but a job or a place to live is just as well something people can be said to have (or lack, or want) 'security of' (also see, Herington, 2019, p. 182).

From this it seems that one way of understanding security is to view it as a triadic relation involving an *individual* (i) who is secure against a *risk* (ii) in her enjoyment of a *good* (iii). This idea is inspired by MacCallum (1967), who, in an attempt to clarify the stakes in the debate between adherents of 'negative' and 'positive' conceptions of freedom, portrays freedom as a triadic relation involving an *agent* (i) who is free from a *constraint* (ii) to undertake an *action* or to achieve a *condition* (iii) (p. 314). Given the close correspondence between the concepts of security and freedom when characterised in this way, one might suggest that we could try and bring the things that we normally describe using the terminology of 'security' under the heading of 'freedom' (say, by construing risks as a particular type of constraints) or the other way around (say, by construing freedoms as goods that we can have more or less security of). Consequently, we might reconstruct the connections between freedom and security as connections between different freedoms (or the freedoms of different people), or as connections between different securities (or the securities of different people). Indeed, I believe that a translation of 'securities' into 'freedoms' could work (see, Newey, 2012, p. 9), and that an analysis of the freedom-security relationship

in terms of the exercise and protection of liberties could yield valuable insights (see, Binder & Binder, 2019, pp. 743-745). But given that freedom and security do generally form distinct categories in our minds and are generally treated as distinct factors in public decision-making, our thinking and decision-making can also benefit from an analysis that conceptualises the two as separate matters and then investigates how they relate to one another. That is the function of this paper.

Just like MacCallum does not fix what may count as a constraint or as an action or condition in his understanding of freedom, I do not specify what exactly may count as a risk or a good in my understanding of security. Neither do I require that the word 'security' is always accompanied by an explicit reference to a risk that someone is 'secure from' and a good that she is 'secure of'. Although these referents are always there in the background, one or both of them are often left implicit. In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, for instance, talk of 'security' normally regards the risk of coronavirus infection or disease and the good of bodily health, even though these things are often not mentioned explicitly. I do stipulate that the unit that takes the first place in the triadic relation of security is an individual human being – just like freedom, on the various understandings mentioned above, is generally considered as something held by human individuals. This is because I take it that what should ultimately matter in public decision-making is the security (and freedom) of individuals, not that of the state or some other collective entity. In practice, of course, two individuals rarely have exactly the same level of security against a particular risk. The risk of serious illness as a result of coronavirus infection, for example, greatly varies between people of different age groups and with different underlying medical conditions. Yet, in this paper, I generally speak of people's security against a particular risk as if it pertains not just to one single individual, but to a larger number of individuals. My assumption thereby is not that all of them face exactly equal risk levels, but that at least some level of this risk applies to them all – and that both the risk and the number of people to whom it applies are significant enough to warrant considering people's security against it a proper concern for public decision-making.[4]

How freedom can come at the cost of security

At the beginning of the pandemic of the coronavirus disease – which first broke out in China at the end of 2019, and quickly spread over the rest of the world during the first months of 2020 – it was distressing for many people to experience that common activities such as meeting up with friends or moving about in close proximity to others had suddenly turned into risky engagements. Each of such meetings or movements came with a danger of infection, disease, and even death. It was not long before governments around the

world concluded that the freedom to engage in activities of this kind came at the cost of people's security of health, and would have to be restricted until the threat of serious infection outbreaks had waned.[5] This example points us at the first of the connections between freedom and security to be analysed here: freedom can come at the cost of security. In order to understand how exactly, it helps to consider freedom from the perspective of Hobbes and later so-called 'pure negative' theorists.

In the previous section, we already came across Hobbes's canonical description of freedom as 'the absence of ... externall Impediments of motion' (Hobbes, 1996, p. 145). Hobbes thus views freedom in a purely negative way: as the absence of constraints. He thereby takes someone's freedom only to be limited by constraints that are strictly external to her: freedom can be restricted by 'walls' and 'chayns', but not by 'sicknesse' and 'feare' (p. 146). Later proponents of what has come to be known as the 'pure negative' view of freedom, such as Kramer (2008) and Carter (2008), modify the Hobbesian account in two ways. Firstly, they consider someone's overall freedom as a composition of her particular freedoms to do particular things. And somebody's particular freedom to do a particular thing is not only restricted if she *actually* faces constraints when trying to do this thing, but also if she *would* face constraints in case she were to try it. As Kramer (2008) puts it: 'If the only door to a room would be immediately locked in the event that a man inside were to attempt to leave, then he is unfree-to-leave regardless of whether the attempt and the locking ever actually take place' (p. 38). Freedom, on this view, is thus not a matter of unconstrained action, but of *options* for unconstrained action. Secondly, contemporary pure negative theorists generally only take constraints to limit someone's freedom if these are brought about by other persons. Obstacles created purely by nature are not seen as rendering people unfree. This is in line with what Berlin (1969) writes in his famous essay distinguishing between negative and positive freedom, where the former is related to the absence of one specific type of constraint: 'interference by other persons' (p. 122). On the modified version of the pure negative view, then, an individual's freedom is determined by her options for acting without being constrained by others.

How can freedom, understood in this way, come at the cost of security? In order to see this, let us have a closer look at one of the examples that this section started out with: at the beginning of the pandemic, people's freedom to move about in close proximity to one another suddenly turned out to come at the cost of their security of health. What was going on there exactly? At the most basic level, what was happening was that people's *actions* were coming at the cost of people's *goods*. Namely, instances of people moving about in close proximity to each other led to instances of people's health being damaged. Not every single time this action was performed it led to this good being damaged – not every close encounter between people led to

a new virus infection – but it certainly did some of the time. We could say that the action came with a health *risk*. In other words, the action came at the cost of health *security*. But did the *freedom* to perform this action also come at the cost of security? In some sense, it did. This is because people were apparently *inclined to make use* of the option to move about in proximity to one another. Not all people – definitely not those homebound by 'sicknesse' or 'feare' – but some, and this was enough for people's security of health to be compromised to such an extent that governments decided to restrict people's freedom to come close to one another. By instituting and enforcing laws restricting travel, social gatherings, and movement in the public space, states effectively imposed 'externall impediments of motion'.

It has now become clear how freedom, understood as a matter of people's options for acting without being constrained by others, can come at the cost of security. It is important to stress, however, that freedom does not *need* to come at the expense of security. Freedom only compromises security on two conditions: firstly, that it concerns an option of acting in a way that brings damage to a good or risks causing such damage, and secondly, that people are inclined to make use of this option. Whether and to what extent these conditions are met differs per context. Reconsider the example mentioned above. Moving in close proximity to one another was far less risky before the time of the coronavirus pandemic than right in the middle of it. And in cultures where people were already more accustomed to keeping some physical distance from one another, people were less inclined to make use of the option of getting close to others anyway.[6] If and to what extent freedom comes at the cost of security thus depends on the particular freedom at issue and on the circumstances in which it obtains. Portraying the relationship between freedom and security in general as a zero-sum-game, as Posner and Vermeule (2007) do with their trade-off thesis, is therefore misguided.

Given that the pure negative understanding of freedom inspired by Hobbes makes us particularly aware of how freedom can come at the cost of security, it is not so surprising that Hobbes is also the philosopher to suggest that rational people choose to *exchange* at least some freedom for security (Holzleithner, 2017, p. 11). They obtain this security by joining together in a state, where they find their freedom curbed through laws (Hobbes, 1996, p. 147). If it turns out that a particular freedom comes at the expense of security, the typical Hobbesian response is thus to impose legal restrictions on it – as governments did with the freedom of movement in the face of the pandemic. However, before making such a choice, decision-makers would generally be wise to take into account the remaining three connections between freedom and security as well.

How security can come at the cost of freedom

Not long after the start of the coronavirus pandemic, it was already noted, governments around the world introduced a variety of measures aimed at bringing the quick spreading of the virus to a halt. Many of these measures, which ranged from restrictions on group size to curfews to full lockdowns, were unprecedented in the recent history of liberal states. Indeed, part of them interfered with freedoms that are generally considered to be of fundamental importance from a liberal perspective. Restrictions on group gatherings, for example, impinged on the freedom of assembly and association, and – where the rules applied to religious ceremonies and places of worship as well – the freedom of religion.[7] This draws our attention to the second connection between freedom and security to be analysed in this paper: security can come at the cost of freedom. Clearly, this connection mirrors the one examined in the previous section, and it would be very well possible to analyse it on the basis of the Hobbesian or pure negative understanding of freedom adopted there. Yet, new insights can be gained if we move our focus to a different understanding of freedom instead, one that is focused on what we tend to refer to as our 'basic liberties'.

The section above already mentioned Berlin's (1969) idea of freedom as non-interference. Liberal thinkers generally take it that the state has the task to protect people against interference by others. At the same time, they often stress that the state must thereby restrict its own interventions to the absolute minimum necessary for executing this task. Different thinkers provide different reasons for this. Mill (1859) emphasises how the meddling of the collective in the life of the individual can inhibit human flourishing, which indeed requires 'the cultivation of individuality' (p. 114). Berlin (1969) and Shklar (1989) point at the lessons of history and the political reality of their own day: practice shows that governments can and often do subject populations to the greatest oppression and cruelty, be it in the name of some positive conception of freedom (Berlin, 1969, p. 134) or some other kind of *summum bonum* (Shklar, 1989, p. 29). In order to protect people against too much state interference, then, liberal philosophers from Mill (1859) to Rawls (1971) favour the idea of 'basic liberties': that individuals hold a core set of legal rights that governments should in principle respect. Examples of basic liberties commonly found in liberal theories and constitutions are freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom of religion, but also rights to privacy, due process, and equal treatment under the law.

How can security come at the cost of freedom, when understood in this way? The simple explanation is that, in their efforts to promote security, governments can and often do decide to restrict basic liberties. Why would they do this? In the first place, *people's exercising* of basic liberties can come with risks, be it to themselves or to others. In the latter case, government

intervention is not uncommon even in liberal states. Reconsider the example of the freedom of religion mentioned above. Throughout the pandemic, religious gatherings regularly turned out to be sources of large infection outbreaks, and many governments, also liberal ones, instituted temporary bans or restrictions on religious congregations in order to restore health security. In the second place, *the state's respecting* of basic liberties can stand in the way of efforts to track and eliminate risks before they materialise. This can be observed if we consider the example of the right to privacy during the pandemic. In the fight against the coronavirus, public authorities around the world embraced digital contact tracing apps to detect infections and prevent further transmissions of the virus (Ventrella, 2020, p. 383). The impingement on the right to privacy that the use of such tools may entail can again be regarded as a sacrifice in terms of basic liberties made for the sake of security.

We have now seen how security can come at the cost of freedom, understood as a matter of basic liberties. Yet, it must be emphasised that security does not *need* to come at the expense of such liberties. This relates back to what was established in the previous section: whether and to what extent particular freedoms pose risks to people's goods is very much dependent on the context in which these freedoms obtain. If this context changes, security can indeed expand without freedom shrinking. In the case of the coronavirus pandemic as well, people's security of health can increase because of various changes in circumstances that do not entail a sacrifice of basic liberties. This may happen, for instance, when people themselves decide not to exercise the liberties that are found to be risky,[8] or when health dangers temporarily decrease because of the virus's seasonal effect (Burra et al., 2021). Again, this challenges Posner and Vermeule's (2007) thesis that freedom and security generally have to be traded off against one another.

Interestingly, although security does not *need* to come at the cost of freedom, when states *do* interfere with people's basic liberties, their justification for this often *does* rely on an appeal to security. Indeed, it is generally only by reference to 'security', 'public safety', or a 'national emergency' that such far-reaching government intervention can be legitimised.[9] This has led empirical students of security to conduct extensive research into what has come to be known as 'securitisation' (Wæver, 1995): the process whereby a particular issue gets framed as a matter of security, and is consequently raised 'out of normal politics and into the realm of exceptional politics, where it is addressed by extraordinary measures' (Floyd, 2019, p. 2). Although the general public indeed sometimes wants issues to be securitised, the process is not without dangers: it may 'for example, result in the systematic infringement of key rights, the loss of civil liberties, an increase in police powers, "othering"/alienation of suspect individuals and groups, the use of lethal force, and because the issue itself is removed from democratic decision-

making, a reduction of the democratic process' (ibid.). From this it seems that securitisation, and the loss of freedom that can accompany it, may actually produce significant risks to people's well-being – and thus, paradoxically, end up undermining security itself. This insight remains relevant when we turn to the next connection between freedom and security.

How freedom can work to the benefit of security

Although the exact policy response to the coronavirus pandemic differed per country, stringent measures were adopted by authoritarian and democratic states alike.[10] Mandatory quarantining, obligatory face covering, restrictions on social contacts, and extensive policing and surveillance geared towards checking compliance with these rules were part of the policy toolbox not only of authoritarian regimes but of many liberal democracies too. Naturally, all governments claimed to be acting in their citizens' own interests, and it is reasonable to assume that many of the measures helped to prevent great suffering in the form of illness and death. At the same time, it stands to reason that policies such as the ones just mentioned also impact the well-being of citizens in negative ways, and power-holders should carefully weigh their costs and benefits in order to best serve the interests of the people – and never abuse these tools for their own purposes. In this regard, citizens of democratic states have less to fear than citizens of authoritarian states. This brings us to the third connection between freedom and security to be analysed here: freedom can work to the benefit of security. One way to comprehend this connection is to approach it from yet another understanding of freedom: the republican idea of freedom as 'non-domination'.[11]

In the previous section, freedom was identified with the absence of interference. As Skinner (1998) has shown, however, this liberal notion of freedom was historically preceded by a different understanding of the term, dating back to the distinction between free men and slaves in ancient Roman law. On this republican interpretation of freedom, someone is free to the extent that others do not have the power to interfere with her *on an arbitrary basis* – or, in the terminology suggested by Pettit (1997), to the extent that she is not subject to 'domination' (p. 52). On the one hand, this view implies that people's freedom can be compromised even if they are never actually interfered with: the mere fact that another agent has the power to constrain them in their choices can render them less free. As Skinner (2008) puts it: 'Slaves whose choices happen never to fall out of conformity with the will of their masters may be able to act without the least interference', and yet they 'remain wholly bereft of liberty' (pp. 89–90). On the other hand, the republican view implies that people's freedom can be left untouched even if they are indeed subject to another agent's power to constrain them in their choices, whether these choices affect themselves

or also others: if the exercise of this power is not based on the arbitrary will of the power-holder, but – to use Pettit's (1997) words again – it is instead 'forced to track the interests and ideas of [those] suffering the interference' (p. 55), then this does not come at the cost of their freedom. If the power of the state is to be in line with the republican ideal of freedom as non-domination, then, there must be certain conditions in place ensuring that government interference does indeed strictly serve the interests of the people. Among these requirements we find the rule of law, separation of powers, and protection against all too sweeping majoritarian authority (see pp. 172–183), but also – and this is the condition that we will focus on here – democratic rule. Although this final requirement is interpreted in different ways by different republican thinkers (Laborde & Maynor, 2008, p. 11), there is general agreement that democracy in some form or the other constitutes an important condition for the fulfilment of the republican ideal of freedom as non-domination.

How can freedom, when understood in this way, work to the benefit of security? Let us go back to the example of the stringent measures that states adopted in the fight against the coronavirus, such as restrictions on movement and group gatherings. From a republican perspective, these measures do not need to come at the cost of freedom. Yes, they constrain people's choices, thus constituting an interference. But as long as the requisite checks on state power are in place and the policies are the product of democratic decision-making, they do not entail domination. These conditions, after all, ensure that the rules imposed by the government strictly serve the interests of the citizens; that the interference is not *arbitrary*. Importantly, the conditions at issue *must* be in place for the exercise of power by the state to be consistent with the ideal of freedom as non-domination. In this sense, a kind of security is actually baked into the very concept of freedom as republicans understand it, namely, 'security against interference on an arbitrary basis' (Pettit, 1997, p. 45). In fact, Pettit uses this phrase as a synonym for freedom as non-domination. Thus we can see why people living under democratic regimes fulfilling the conditions of the republican ideal have less reason to worry, at least in one respect, than people living under authoritarian regimes falling short of these requirements – even when both groups face the same interfering policies.

It has now become clear how freedom, understood as non-domination, can work to the benefit of security. To the extent that the citizens of liberal democracies possess this kind of freedom, they also have security against state interference that goes against their own interest. Importantly, this is not to say that they can just take this freedom and security for granted. Democracy – and, by extension, republican freedom and security against harmful state interference – requires that citizens constantly stay on their toes to check whether the government indeed

rules in their best interest; that citizens display 'eternal vigilance' in relation to 'those who hold power within the state' (Pettit, 1997, p. 250). This applies in a crisis situation such as a pandemic as well as during normal times. Now, having achieved these insights about how freedom can support security, we only have one more connection between freedom and security left to explore.

How security can work to the benefit of freedom

Around the turn of the year from 2020 to 2021, roughly one year after the start of the pandemic, the first countries managed to start large-scale vaccination campaigns in order to get their populations inoculated against the coronavirus disease. First in line for the vaccine were those groups who had the highest risk of suffering serious health consequences from infection. People belonging to these groups often experienced their vaccination not only as a return to safety, but also as a kind of liberation.[12] Many of them had spent months in self-isolation, and the protection afforded by the vaccine enabled them to finally go out and see people again.[13] This points us to the last connection between freedom and security to be analysed in this paper: security can work to the benefit of freedom. In order to grasp this connection, let us shift our focus to another understanding of freedom once more: an understanding of freedom that is focused on 'capabilities'.[14]

All of the different notions of freedom adopted in the previous three sections are 'negative', in the sense that they render someone free to the extent that particular things are *absent*. For Hobbes, what matters is the absence of external impediments; for liberals, this is the absence of interference; for republicans, the absence of domination. Other philosophers, however, adopt a 'positive' understanding of freedom instead, relating someone's freedom to what is *present*. Some thereby focus on the presence of self-control (see, for example, Taylor, 1979); others look at the presence of actual opportunities to achieve well-being. Sen refers to the latter as 'capabilities' (Sen, 1980, 1985, 2009) or 'well-being freedom' (Sen, 1992, p. 40). Capabilities can be described as an individual's actual opportunities to achieve beings and doings that she has reason to value. Unlike the options that are the focus of contemporary pure negative theorists, capabilities do not just pick up on constraints created by other persons, but also on the inhibiting effects of factors like poverty, disability, and disease. Examples of capabilities, as listed by Nussbaum (2003), are the ability 'to have good health', the ability 'to move freely from place to place', and the ability 'to engage in various forms of social interaction' (p. 41). Importantly, what matters for someone's overall well-being freedom is not just the *single* opportunities available to her – take the ability to have good health and the ability to engage in social interaction – but rather the *combinations* of opportunities open to her – the ability to have

good health *and* social engagement (Robeyns, 2016). Someone who has to choose between both options thus has fewer capabilities – less well-being freedom – than someone who can combine the two.

How can security work to the benefit of freedom, when understood in this way? In order to see this, let us have another look at the example of vaccination against the coronavirus. The vaccine gives people security – at least to some degree – against the risk of severe health consequences from the virus. That way, it makes them better able to achieve one particular valuable being: it enables them to be healthy. At the same time, it makes them better able to combine this valuable being with various valuable doings: moving about freely, for example, and meeting up with family and friends. In other words, after vaccination, people are better able to be healthy *and* see other people. What about before vaccination? Actually, in some instances, people would then also have been able to be healthy *and* see other people: even in the midst of the pandemic, as was noted before, not every single encounter between people led to a coronavirus infection or to serious health damage. However, in other instances, people would in fact not have been able to combine both options: had they met up with their friends, then they would have fallen ill. The point is that, before vaccination, people *did not know* if they had the ability to be healthy *and* see other people; they were *unsure* if this combination of options was available to them. This insecurity was enough for some people, especially those belonging to vulnerable groups, either to rationally decide to forgo the option of going out and meeting others, or to be too scared to try using this option. In the latter case, when people are too afraid to dare exercising an option, it is actually doubtful whether they can be considered to have this option at all: their fear may be so incapacitating that, de facto, they are robbed of their capability to achieve the doing at issue.

Thus we can see how security can work to the benefit of freedom, when understood as a matter of capabilities. If people have security in one particular aspect of their lives, this can broaden the range of valuable doings and beings that they are able to combine, take away the idea that they have to choose between these different options, and remove incapacitating fear. Moreover, especially if they have security of core goods such as bodily integrity, shelter, food, etcetera, this can release people from a constant preoccupation with survival, from nagging feelings of stress and anxiety, and from what Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) call 'paralysis of the will', 'where much of the world begins to appear beyond one's control, even when in fact this is not the case' (p. 69). This may in turn strengthen their capacity for exercising self-control, pursuing self-expression, or participating in collective self-rule – activities often associated with freedom on other positive understandings of the term (see,

Inglehart, 2018, p. 1; Loader & Walker, 2007, p. 153). In this sense, security appears to function as a supportive condition for freedom on some alternative positive conceptions as well. This completes our overview of the connections between freedom and security.

Taking all four connections into account

We have now seen that the relationship between freedom and security is much more complicated than it is often portrayed. Yes, freedom can come at the cost of security, and security can come at the cost of freedom. But the idea of a simple trade-off between the two is misguided. For one thing, freedom need not always come at the cost of security, and security need not always come at the cost of freedom. Freedom can even work to the benefit of security, and security can work to the benefit of freedom. 'The' relationship between freedom and security thus turns out to be an intricate knot comprising multiple different threads.

We have also seen that different understandings of freedom can help us to comprehend different connections between freedom and security. From the viewpoint of Hobbes and other pure negative theorists, it becomes particularly clear how freedom can come at the cost of security. If we look at basic liberties, we can see especially well how security can come at the expense of freedom. From a republican perspective, it becomes particularly apparent how freedom can work to the benefit of security. And if we focus on capabilities, we can best observe how security can support freedom. In order to disentangle the various connections that together make up the freedom-security relationship, it thus helps to draw on a variety of different interpretations of freedom.[15]

What, then, is the practical use of these findings? I claim that taking into account all four connections between freedom and security can ultimately help decision-makers in preserving and promoting both. The key is for them to try to prevent freedom from coming at the cost of security, and security from coming at the cost of freedom, while upholding the ways in which freedom supports security, and security supports freedom. In order to illustrate this, let me end by revisiting the practical examples from the context of the COVID-19 pandemic mentioned earlier, and translating this paper's core theoretical lessons into a number of practical recommendations for future pandemic policies.

Firstly, remember that we found that people's freedom to move about in close proximity to one another can come at the cost of their security of health. Whether it actually does, however, depends on the circumstances: only if a dangerous and infectious virus is going around and people are inclined to use their freedom to move in close proximity to each other, does this freedom come at the expense of security. As long as both these conditions apply,

governments may be justified in restricting freedom of movement for the sake of health security. Yet, in order to save both freedom and security in the long run, *governments should also think of measures to prevent circumstances in which the freedom of movement comes at the expense of health security to begin with*. That is, governments should act now in order to prevent novel infectious diseases from emerging and spreading in the future – so that trade-offs between freedom of movement and security of health are less likely to arise further down the road. Examples of such measures include strengthening animal health and phasing out unsustainable agricultural practices, which may be a source of zoonotic diseases such as the coronavirus (United Nations Environment Programme, 2020).

Secondly, we saw that the search for health security can be accompanied by restrictions of basic liberties: bans on social gatherings come at the cost of the freedom of assembly; restrictions on religious congregations infringe on the freedom of religion; vaccine mandates limit the right to bodily integrity. Again, in certain circumstances, such restrictions may be justified in the name of health security, even if they concern restrictions of basic liberties. Yet, especially given the important status of these liberties, in the face of infectious disease outbreaks, *governments should try to preserve health security first and foremost in ways that do not infringe on basic liberties*. Once more, there is a lot that governments can do now in order to prevent restrictions of basic freedoms from being the only options on the table later. Options that do not come at the cost of basic liberty rights include improving ventilation of indoor spaces in order to reduce transmission of respiratory infections (Morawska et al., 2021), investing in healthcare so as to increase treatment capacity, and enabling people to lead healthier lives so that they become more resilient against novel diseases.

Third, we found that living under a democratic regime upholding the republican ideal of freedom as non-domination provides security against the risk of harmful state interference. Especially if the state intervenes in people's lives in far-going ways – as we have seen during the pandemic, for example – it is important that these guarantees against harmful state interference are robust. This means that *measures that governments adopt in the name of health security should be the product of democratic politics*. Of course, when first confronted with an urgent health emergency that clearly calls for immediate action, governments may be justified in resorting to exceptional decision-making procedures that do not take as long as the usual democratic process. Yet, such derogations from normal politics should only be possible for a limited period of time, and there should always be mechanisms in place through which people can hold decision-makers accountable for their actions retrospectively (cf., Floyd, 2019).

Fourth, remember the finding that, if people gain security of health, this can expand their range of capabilities. After all, it does not just grant them the opportunity to stay healthy, it may also enable them to combine this opportunity with other valuable opportunities: meeting with friends; going to work; participating in the social life of the community; and so on. Arguably, this is what should be the ultimate aim of public policy in a long-lasting pandemic: *governments should try to enable people to stay healthy and at the same time achieve other valuable beings and doings*. This means that the success or failure of pandemic policies should be evaluated not only by monitoring infections, hospitalisations, and deaths, but also by looking at the actual opportunities that people have to lead meaningful lives and participate in society (Putters & Bussemaker, 2022). In the end, policies should be geared towards upholding and creating such opportunities for everyone, including those with vulnerable health.

Of course, these are only general guidelines, and pandemic policies would in practice have to be further specified and tailored to the particular circumstances in which they apply. In the present context, these recommendations primarily serve as an illustration of the way in which the theoretical findings of this paper can be put to practical use. The most important of these findings is that the relationship between freedom and security is not one of straightforward opposition, but one of a complex entanglement of multiple different connections. Faced with a situation in which freedom and security seem to be in conflict, then, decision-makers would do well to take into account all four of the ways in which the two relate to one another. Ultimately, this may help them in upholding both freedom and security.

Notes

1. See, for instance, *Liberal reality check* by Kristof (2002), and *Counter-terrorism powers: Reconciling security and liberty in an open society: A discussion paper* by the British Home Office (2004).
2. See, for example, *Corona: Sicherheit kontra Freiheit* by Pinzler et al. (2020), and *Baudet in coronadebat: Geef ons onze vrijheid terug!* by Forum voor Democratie (2020).
3. Furthermore, there exists a broader field of 'critical security studies', which is mainly concerned with the study of security *practices* and *discourses* (see, Herington, 2015, p. 30). The implications of these practices and discourses for people's liberties form a recurring theme in this branch of literature. Important contributions here include Buzan et al. (1998), Huysmans (1998, 2004), and Bigo (2010); for an overview, see, Aradau et al. (2006) and Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2015).
4. How, then, are decision-makers to determine how secure people are against a particular risk, and at what point their security against this risk should indeed be considered a factor of public concern? Here, we can derive some helpful insights from Herington's account of security in the context of infectious

disease control. Herington (2012) distinguishes between objective and subjective realisation of security. In the context of infectious disease control, what matters for the objective realisation of security is how reliably an individual *actually* is protected from infectious disease. What matters for its subjective realisation is how reliably she herself *believes* to be protected and whether she *feels* reassured in this regard (Herington, 2012, p. 20, 2019, pp. 183–184). Those in charge of public decision-making, Herington (2012) suggests, should rely on scientific research to try as much as possible to approximate knowledge about the degree to which security is *objectively* realised for people (p. 21). I add that this is not to say that the degree to which security is *subjectively* realised is unimportant: as becomes clear from section 6 of this paper, what people believe and how they feel about their security can impact their lives – and indeed their freedom – in significant ways, which it may be important to take into account in public decision-making too.

5. Although the exact policy response to the coronavirus pandemic differed per country, the vast majority of states adopted various restrictive measures in order to prevent people from travelling, meeting in groups, or leaving their homes. For an overview, see Hale et al. (2021).
6. See *Social distance, Swedish style* by Bjurwald (2020).
7. In Germany, for instance, the Federal Constitutional Court concluded that the coronavirus-related restrictions on religious gatherings interfered with the freedom of religion, although they were judged legitimate in light of the risk of further spreading of the virus (Bundesverfassungsgericht, 2020).
8. An example is when believers or religious institutions themselves decide to forgo or call off in-person services. See *One of the country's largest megachurches says it's canceling all in-person services for the rest of 2020 over coronavirus concerns* by Rose and Andrew (2020).
9. See, for example, the European Convention on Human Rights, which at various points mentions 'national security', 'public safety', and the occurrence of a 'public emergency' as potential grounds for limiting human rights (Council of Europe, 1950).
10. This section was inspired by *Liberty in the time of corona* by Laborde (2020).
11. How freedom can work to the benefit of security may also be analysed on the basis of the understanding of freedom adopted in the previous section, centering around basic liberties (cf., Waldron, 2003, p. 205). Yet, as the present analysis will show, this connection can be elucidated especially well from a republican perspective.
12. An illustration of the different ways in which people experience the effect of their vaccination can be found on the website of the City of Portland (2021). Interviewees report feeling 'safe' and 'secure', but also 'free'. As one Portlander puts it: 'I'm free, COVID-19 can't catch me anymore.'
13. One complication here is that in many countries at some point vaccination did not just expand people's freedom in the ways described in this section, it also granted them more legal freedoms. The right to enter bars or restaurants, for example, was made conditional on showing proof of vaccination in various states; Austria even banned unvaccinated people from leaving their home 'for non-essential reasons', as reported by Oltermann (2021). Because such policies interfere with the right to bodily integrity and self-determination (Krasser, 2021, p. 232), they can actually be seen as an instance of security coming at the

expense of basic liberties – the second in our overview of the connections between freedom and security. I will leave this complication to one side in this section.

14. We could also analyse how security can work to the benefit of freedom if we again interpret freedom as a matter of basic liberties (cf., Binder & Binder, 2019, pp. 754-755; Meisels, 2008, pp. 71–75; Shue, 1980, pp. 26–27). However, as we will see in what follows, we can gain new insights if we view freedom as a matter of capabilities instead.
15. This is not to say that each of the four connections between freedom and security only applies if we adopt one of the four understandings of freedom. Presumably, each of the connections would hold and could be analysed on the basis of other understandings of freedom as well. See my remarks at the end of the first paragraph of section 4 and in footnotes 11 and 14.

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