Enhanced Political Agency: Citizen Power Against Economically based Political Inequality

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Abstract

In this research, I investigate to what extent can the institutional enhancement of citizens' political agency fully counteract economically based political inequality. I start by arguing that there are three mechanisms through which affluent citizens are endowed with oversized political power (I call this phenomenon the translation problem). These mechanisms explain why economic inequality is *pro tanto* antidemocratic. I explore how liberal theorists (i. e., Christiano and Green) look at the translation problem and conclude that the liberal framework is incapable of countering it because of its normative commitments with individual freedoms, property rights, and their understanding of democracy within the limits of a division of political labor. Then, I explain how the translation problem can be understood as a problem of domination – following the republican framework – and describe two proposals of institutional reform (i. e., the People's Tribunate and the democratization of regulatory processes) that aim at tackling the translation problem by enhancing citizens' political agency. Finally, I explain why this framework also fails to deal with the translation problem thoroughly.

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Poenitentia virtus non est sive ex ratione non oritur sed is
quem facti poenitet, bis miser seu impotens est.
(Spinoza, E IV, P LIV)

Introduction

After the Great Recession of 2008, growing scholarly interest was paid to the phenomenon of economic inequality. Within political theory, scholars look into the relationship between economic inequality and what democratic regimes need to thrive. The commonly shared conclusion, even among scholars working in different frameworks, was the same. Democracy is at odds with high levels of economic inequality due to the political power that goes hand in hand with wealth (I refer to this phenomenon as the translation problem).

Empirical studies that support this thesis have even called into question the democratic character of the oldest democratic state (Bartels, 2016; Gilens, 2012; Schlozman et al, 2018). Moreover, this situation has revived the interest in the study of political regimes like oligarchies given the similarities that they have with certain phenomena experience in contemporary liberal democracies (Fishkin & Forbath, 2014; Winters, 2011).

Nevertheless, there is no reason to condemn economic inequality *a priori*. After all, if this inequality stems from institutions (such as property rights) that play a central role in the well-functioning of the global economy, we might risk too much by upsetting them in the name of equality and democracy. In other words, there is no reason to push equality if that means equality that makes everyone worse off than in a condition of inequality.

Leaving this point aside, one can wonder how feasible it is for the political systems of liberal democracies to carry out the economic reforms that are necessary to invert the current trend of rising economic inequality. If those in charge of the decision-making process benefit from this trend, what incentives do they have to do something against it?

This research deals with one alternative solution to the challenges that economic inequality raises to democracy: the creation of institutions that enhance the political agency of ordinary citizens. In other words, this research focuses on how empowering citizens through the reform of political institutions can counter economically based political inequality to the point that it stops being a treat for democracy.

With this aim in mind, I divided the research into three chapters. In the first one, I explain the ways in which economic inequality hampers democracy. That is, I show why economic inequality is *pro tanto* antidemocratic. However, I also set forth the trade-offs that must be considered when dealing with economic inequality. As I mentioned before, upsetting basic institutions of the economy can create a scenario in which the cure is worse than the disease.

In the following chapter, I engage with two liberal theorists to show how this framework deals with the translation problem. First, I spell out Thomas Christiano's take on it and show how his theory does not offer effective solutions. Then, I flesh out Jeffrey Green's plebeian theory of liberal democracy and explain how it also capitulates to the translation problem. This chapter aims to show the limitations that the liberal framework has when it is asked to offer solutions to the translation problem without calling for major economic reforms.

In the last chapter, I explore the republican framing of the translation problem and two proposals of institutional reform (i. e., the People's Tribunate and the democratization of regulatory processes) partly inspired in that framework. As will be shown, although these proposals deal with the translation problem to a certain extent, they are unable to tackle one of the mechanisms through which the affluent can hinder democracy. If so, the enhancement of citizens' political agency can alleviate, but not thoroughly neutralize economically based political inequality.

I. The Interplay between Economic and Political Inequality

Economic inequality is a characteristic feature of complex societies. Societies once ruled by egalitarian mechanisms became economically stratified once they achieved a certain level of cultural development. Magical or religious narratives that established inegalitarian criteria for distributing goods were required for economic inequality to endure. It was due to and through these narratives that some members of a community appropriated the economic surplus produced by the overall community in ways that were considered legitimate by the rest (Winters, 2017:167-168).

This dialectic between economic inequality and narratives of legitimation is also present in liberal democracies. In these democracies, human beings have seen their freedom and political rights flourish in unprecedented ways, while, at the same time, they have experienced the highest levels of economic inequality ever seen (Winters, 2017:162). Among others, the Oxfam annual report on wealth inequality reminds us to what extent wealth is highly concentrated in the hands of the most affluent members of the global community (Lawson et al., 2019), and how the current economic trend deepens this unequal distribution (Winters, 2017:160).

In this chapter, I will contend that politics play a key role in the current rise of economic inequality in liberal democratic societies. Furthermore, after explaining how economic inequality engenders political inequality, I will argue that democracy institutes a *pro tanto* reason against economic inequality. In other words, insofar as economic inequality countervails political equality (i. e., democracy's normative core), it hampers democratic politics. I will proceed as follows. First, I will spell out the political nature of economic inequality. Then, I will expound on the interplay between economic and political inequality – an interplay that gives rise to the translation problem. Finally, I will explain why economic inequality represents a threat to democratic politics.

I. Politics as a *sine qua non* condition for economic inequality (in liberal democratic societies)

As mentioned above, the development of economic inequality hinges on narratives that legitimate exclusive claims over wealth. Originally, when prerogatives over resources were challenged conflict emerged, and it was resolved through the use of sheer violence. However, the creation of modern institutions, like private property, transformed the way in which wealth was defended. By setting up rules that regulate the transactions of resources and by endowing state officials with the power to enforce them, institutional coercion took the place of violence as the means for wealth defense (Winters, 2017:171).

Even though these rules were initially established by wealthy individuals that only looked after their own interests, the rise of democracy slowly impinged on this normative framework. The consolidation this modern institutional framework paved the way for its appropriation by other groups, who understood the substantial role that the law plays in configuring the overall distribution of wealth – the history of the labor movement is an example of this phenomenon.

We can take the United States economic history as a representative example of the evolution in wealth distribution undergone by liberal democracies over the past century. In this country, economic inequality was at its historical peak in the decades before the Great Depression (Bartels, 2016:13; Milanovic, 2011:193). After the 1929 economic crash, major policy reforms – like Roosevelt's New Deal and the active enforcement of antitrust laws – and historical events – like the World War II and the beginning of the Cold War – shifted this tendency to one that fosters wealth distribution among all social strata (Bartels, 2016:6-13). Hence, while in previous decades, the increase of wealth mainly ended up in the hands of the more affluent; in the postwar period economic growth benefited all income groups[1]. Nonetheless, this redistributive trend came to an end in the seventies. Since then, the more affluent groups of society have been capable of taking over the lion's share of economic growth[2] (Milanovic, 2011:193-195). Thus, exacerbating the concentration of wealth to a point only known right before the Great Depression (Gilens, 2012:1; Winters, 2017:196).

Three variables are commonly laid out as explanations of the contemporary shift in wealth distribution: technological change, economic efficiency, and policy changes. Regarding the first one, it is the case that technological innovation is responsible for exponential economic growth (Bartels, 2016:24; Gilens, 2012:251; Schlozman et al., 2018:195-196). However, the fact that most of this growth ends up in a few hands is independent of the growth itself. Specific institutional arrangements (such as the tax policy), and not market forces, are to blame for the concentration of wealth created by the technological revolution. If so, this factor does not by itself explain the tendency shift in wealth distribution.

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[1] I acknowledge the distinction between income and wealth inequality. However, for the purpose of this research, I follow Milanovic (2011) understanding of economic inequality as a phenomenon that comprises both types of inequality. Given that my research deals with economic inequality in general, I will make use of data on income and wealth inequality to support my claims.

[2] According to Bartels (2016), the wealthiest 0.1% of the American population controlled 10.9% of the total national income in 2005, while they only owned 3,2% of it in 1950. If we look at the top 1%, their share of total income increased from a 10,2% in 1950 to 21,8% in 2005 – and it has kept growing since then.

Economic efficiency is also presented as an explanation for the current accumulation of wealth. According to this rationale, economic inequality increases as a consequence of the better performance of firms. Hence, the fact that companies nowadays adequately reward their more productive workers inevitably entails growing inequality (Bartels, 2016:16-17; Schlozman et al., 2018:190). In other words, higher inequality stems from the fact that more wealth is being allocated to more productive individuals. If so, inequality should not be considered a problem, but an unpleasant byproduct of economic efficiency.

There are at least two problems with this perspective. Firstly, recent empirical studies find no relation between current high wages of managers and CEOs and their productivity[3] (Schlozman et al., 2018:191). Secondly, this explanation assumes what some critics have called the 80/20 fallacy or myth. According to this myth, both in companies, and in the economy as a whole, 20% of the workforce is responsible for producing 80% of the revenue (Milanovic, 2011:6). Therefore, this 20% – usually the highly educated workers – have a right over a significant slice of the wealth they help to create. However, no empirical evidence supports any of these claims (Bartels, 2016:17; Krugman, 2006). It does not follow from these two problems that a more efficient distribution of wealth - in a case such as returns to education – is not a relevant fact to take into account when we look at economic inequality. However, more research is needed to know how much of the current distribution is due to this phenomenon.

Finally, the evolution of economic policy has also been used to explain trends of wealth distribution. Taking another example from the United States, we can see how the fact that the federal minimum wage – established in the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act – is not indexed to inflation, is partly to blame for the decline of the real minimum wage since 1968 (Bartels, 2016:233-234; Schlozman et al., 2018:199). Also, in the same country, the obstacles that the 1947

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[3] Schlozman et al. (2018) allude to a study that showed that the compensation of CEOs of large companies became only 4% below the median in the case of companies that declare bankruptcy.

Now, in 1965, the mean compensation of these CEOs was 20 times the salary of the median worker of their company on average. In 2013 the mean CEO compensation became 295,9 times the salary of their median employee. In some large corporations, the gap between the CEO and the salary of the median employee is even more significant. For example, in 2015, Disney's CEO earned 2 238 times the salary of the median worker in his company (Schlozman et al., 2018:191).

Taft-Harly Act places to the expansion of unions foster the concentration of income – given that unionized workers, on average, earn more than the non-unionized (Schlozman et al., 2018:202). Therefore, a political decision like the enactment of legislation that promotes or hinders the development of strong unions directly impacts the overall distribution of income – and the overall distribution of wealth in the long run.

Furthermore, since the second half of the twentieth century, the policy-making priorities of American legislators have focused on alleviating the tax burden of the more affluent. From 1958 to 2013 the United States compressed twenty-four tax brackets into seven. Nineteen of those twenty-four imposed a higher tax rate than the higher tax bracket in 2013. As a consequence of these changes in legislation people with an income between $1 million and $1 billion in 2013 paid the same tax rate as a person that earned $150 000 dollars in 1958 (in constant 2013 US dollars) (Winters, 2017:197-198). The effects produced by changes in tax legislation, among other policies, show how economic policy plays a foundational role in the way society distributes its wealth.

Now, while technological changes radically alter the performance of the economy, rendering it more efficient, their impact on wealth distribution is subjected to the institutional structure that regulates market transactions. Therefore, neither technological changes nor significant improvements in the performance of firms have weighty explanatory power when trying to discover the more fundamental cause behind economic inequality. Conversely, policy change refersmic directly to the institutional level that shapes a societies' distribution of wealth. That is to say, in liberal democratic societies the state is a *sine qua non* condition for economic inequality given that it is the institution in charge of enforcing all economic transactions that take place in the market.

Following this rationale, we could go as far as to say that every time that a particular institutional arrangement prevents a more egalitarian distribution of wealth in liberal democratic societies, economic inequality shows itself as a political phenomenon (Bartels, 2016:3; Milanovic, 2011:xii). Yet, this does not mean that all economic inequality is undesirable. On the contrary, given that a set of market institutions, like property rights, are necessary for the functioning of any modern economy (Milanovic, 2011:12-18), a certain level of inequality that accompanies those institutions is considered desirable[4]. If so, the relevant political issue lies in deciding under what institutional framework a society will run its economy.

However, the relationship between the realm of politics and the economy is a two-way street. Not only can politics alter wealth distribution, but those with significant economic power can also shape political decisions. As recent empirical studies have shown, wealthy individuals and groups play a significant role in the design of economic policy (Bartels, 2016; Gillens, 2012; Gilens & Page, 2014; Solt, 2008). In the next section, I will delve into this relationship in order to gain a better grip on the interplay between economic and political inequality.

II. Economic and political inequality: a two-way relationship

In this section, I will explain how affluent citizens, due to their wealth, have more influence in the legislative decision-making process than ordinary non-affluent citizens. Furthermore, I will also describe how this economically based political inequality reinforces economic inequality. Finally, I will claim that we can derive a *pro tanto* reason against economic inequality from democratic considerations. That is to say, economic inequality is *pro tanto* undemocratic insofar as it lessens political equality (i. e., the normative core of democracy). Therefore, I will first refer to how economic inequality shapes the board of democratic politics and after that how political inequality bolsters economic inequality. I will then briefly refer to how democratic normative commitments can counteract economic inequality.

From economic inequality to political inequality

In liberal democratic societies, the fact that politics is a *sine qua non* condition for economic inequality places the legislative decision-making process at the center of the interplay between economic and political inequality. Concretely, whoever controls or effectively influences the law-making process holds a privileged position to advance his economic interests. There are at least three ways in which money can make politics more responsive to the interests of the affluent: working as a gatekeeper to access elected positions, yielding oversized influence in public opinion, and granting leverage in political negotiations.

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[4] The role that inequality plays in the creation of incentives that promote innovation (Milanovic, 2011:65-66) is a perfect example of a case in which economic inequality is considered valuable.

First, in democratic polities, money works as a gatekeeper to elected positions (Christiano, 2012:245-247). Given that money is needed to run electoral campaigns, parties, and candidates appeal to affluent citizens to get the resources they need – even in countries where campaigns are publicly funded. Therefore, money gives the affluent a hefty influence over political candidates. By this, I am not referring to any illegal practice. Quite the opposite, affluent citizens can condition their campaign contributions in fully legal ways: they can ask politicians for appointments in which they will express their policy concerns or ask for a particular issue to be added into the legislative agenda for deliberation once the candidate gets into office. This role of affluent citizens in democratic politics becomes more salient when parties establish fees as a requisite for their members to become candidates for any position.

As an undesirable byproduct of this phenomenon, a political class can become culturally captured by the mindset of special interest groups (Rahman, 2016:127). In other words, the constant contact with members of the donor class or their representatives can hamper, in the long run, the ability of public officials to critically assess which policies they ought to favor. This phenomenon must be distinguished from capture, which is normally understood as the illicit payment that a corporation or individual makes to a politician in order to gain political influence (Hellman et al., 2003:756). Cultural capture only refers to the ideological closeness that politicians might develop as part of their regular work. Such an ideological closeness can make them conflate policy that benefits corporations with policy that advances the welfare of the population they represent.

Money also works as a means for influencing public opinion (Christiano, 2012:247-250) – itself an indirect way of swaying legislators' opinion. Given that affluent citizens own a significant share of media companies (Smith & Owens, 2011:206), they can use them to propagate their policy concerns and political views. In this way, they can indirectly alter the legislative agenda by setting a topic of discussion in the public opinion. Likewise, media companies, from radio stations to newspapers, have absolute power when it comes to deciding which opinion makers are welcome to their locution or their opinion pages and which topics should be discussed (Solt, 2008:49). To sum up, money grants affluent individuals megaphones that help to disseminate their political opinions and to accomplish their objectives.

Finally, the fact that one of the leading governmental priorities is to achieve and maintain a healthy economy places those with economic might in a preeminent negotiating position to pursue their interests. For example, when a business chamber that represent the interest of the affluent[5] informs a government that their affiliates will fire twenty thousand workers if a new tax is approved, it exerts political power over governmental decisions in a way unknown to most citizens (Christiano, 2006:119, 2012:250). In order to let politicians know their position on relevant policy issues, corporations hire lobby services to influence both directly and indirectly the law-making process. The active role in drafting legislation that lobbyists play clearly shows how much influence they can exert (Shobe, 2014:826). This mechanism is the third way in which money amplifies the voice of the affluent – by giving them leverage in political negotiations.

Up to now, the way that I have referred to affluent citizens might give the impression that they form a coherent group. Although they show coherence in their hostility against redistributive policies, this is not the case regarding other policy discussions. Conflict among them emerges with regard to policies that involve opposing economic interests. For example, affluent citizens that have heavily invested in fossil fuels find regulations that advance clean energy detrimental to their interests. In the same way, those that invest in new energy sources find the fossil fuel lobby against clean energies detrimental to theirs. Nevertheless, the aforementioned mechanisms all count in favor of the affluent when it comes to counteracting redistributive legislation.

On how economically based political inequality boosts economic inequality

The above three mechanisms through which money translates into political influence also have a flip side. That is, the fact that economically based political inequality bolsters economic inequality. Power imbalances between the affluent and ordinary citizens affect the political engagement of both groups. The fact that the affluent consistently achieve their political goals – regardless of the popular support for them – takes away the incentives of participating in the political process that ordinary citizens should have (Solt, 2008:49). This situation specifically affects poor citizens, given that they stop relying on politics as a vehicle for the enactment of redistributive policies. Solt's cross-national study in rich democracies portrays this reality by showing that "economic inequality powerfully depresses political interests, discussion of politics, and participation in elections among all but the most affluent and that this negative effect increases with declining relative income" (48).

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[5] Although we should not conflate the interests of affluent citizens, business networks, and corporations, there is a close relationship between the interests pursue by all of them – insofar as affluent citizens take part in the latter two in one way or another.

If we look at this phenomenon from an income distribution perspective, this means that under conditions of high economic inequality, political engagement decreases in all income groups except for the highest income quintile (Solt, 2008:56). Therefore, while affluent citizens have the means to influence the policy-making process effectively, non-affluent citizens lose hope in having a say in this process[6]. This dynamic not only benefits the affluent, but it also reinforces the imbalance of political influence from which their economic advantages stem – i.e., it reinforces economic inequality.

Grappling with the phenomenon mentioned by Solt demands us to touch upon the concept of political equality. If we understand it as the principle according to which "the goals of every adult citizen of a republic are to be accorded equal value in determining government policies" (Dahl, 2006:32), then a scenario of political inequality is that in which the goals, interests, or preferences of one or more citizens are valued more than those of the others – for whatever reason. Hence, those citizens whose interests are overvalued will have an easier time advancing them. As has been shown, in liberal democracies, the affluent have access to mechanisms with which they can influence the legislative decision-making process in ways that ordinary citizens cannot. Therefore, legislation tends to reflect the interests of the affluent (Gilens, 2012:2; Gilens & Page, 2014:565).

This conclusion applies to a broad range of policy issues, and not only economic ones. Nevertheless, regarding policies that endure – if not deepen – economic inequality, it is well documented how historically the affluent have used their disproportionate opportunity of political influence to countervail attempts at redistribution (Bartels, 2016; Machin, 2013:125; Winters, 2017). It is in this way that political inequality bolsters economic inequality.

This interplay between economic and political inequality point at how in liberal democracies money can translate into political power and vice versa (Christiano, 2010:203; Machin, 2013:121-122; Rahman, 2017:44; Thompson, 2017:201). Such a relationship is problematic, given that political equality is the normative principle of democracy. If so, there is a *pro tanto* reason[7] from which the interchangeability of money and political power (hereafter the translation[8] problem) appears undesirable. Thus, baldly put, political inequality is problematic for democracy insofar as it is contrary to its normative core, and economic inequality is problematic for democracy as long as it engenders political equality – as it does.

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[6] This behavior is explained in depth by the power theory of political engagement (Solt, 2008:49).

[7] I stress the *pro tanto* character of this reason given that intrinsically neither economic nor political inequality are problematic. From an oligarchic and even an epistocratic perspective, they can both seem perfectly justifiable.

[8] As suggested to me by a English-native speaker, I want to clarify at this early stage that I am using the word translation as meaning "the activity or process of changing something into a different form" ("Translation," 2019) – and not in any other sense.

To fully grasp the normative concern that the translation problem raises for democratic politics, it is necessary to delve into the concept of political equality. Understanding how political equality informs the democratic decision-making process will showcase the relevance of this ideal for real-existing democracies. Hence, in the following section, I will investigate this topic to gain precision on how this problem represents a threat to democracy and to gain insight into the solutions for it.

III. Political equality: economic inequality as a threat to democracy

The ideal of political equality informs democracy as a system of government by demanding law-making institutions to warrant an equal say to each citizen. In this project, I am not concerned with the intrinsic value of political equality, but with political equality as the normative core of democracy. In other words, political equality is relevant as a normative standard due to its relation to democracy. After all, a democratic government is characterized by the fact of having laws that represent the will of its citizens – instead of those of a group (i. e., an oligarchy) or a person (i. e., an autocracy).

Much has been said about this ideal and on how to interpret the notion of equal say or equal value that follows from it. In this project, I will put aside the more abstract conceptualizations of political equality to focus on an approach that directly relates to the legislative decision-making process. This decision follows from our interest in how the spillovers of economic inequality affect real-existing democracies. Hence, touching upon political equality on a higher level of abstraction – although always philosophically gripping – becomes an unnecessary digression.

In this chapter, I will first set forth the five requirements of political equality. Then, I will establish three constraints that limit the implementation of political equality. Thirdly, drawing on Christiano's division of political labor (1996, 2001, 2010), I will lay out how political equality can be instantiated in a less demanding way in real-existing democracies. Finally, I will show that economic inequality weakens political equality even in its less demanding expression. Thus, I will claim that economic inequality is *pro tanto* undemocratic insofar as it lessens political equality.

The requirements of political equality

Granted that the ideal of political equality informs citizen participation in real-existing democracies, we can dissect political equality in five requirements: "equal right to participate, equal capacity and opportunity to participate, equality in the amount and nature of political activity coming from individuals or segments of society [or equal voice], equality in the reception of one's political voice (…), and equality in response (...)" (Verba, 2003: 664-665). Let us look at each of these requirements.

The equal right to participate is firstly achieved through equal voting. Voting, as the fundamental democratic institution, warrants every citizen an equal say in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, political participation goes beyond the right to vote and includes other activities like protesting and taking an active role in political campaigns. Therefore, living up to the equal right to participate goes hand in hand with ensuring the equal capacity and opportunity to participate. This second requirement recalls the fact that formal institutions warranting equal participation do not guarantee that participation will take place under conditions of equality. In other words, equal political participation demands more than just voting or allowing citizens to take part in campaigns. It also requires citizens to develop skills and to have the resources to participate fully.

In this regard, equal capacity and opportunity to participate includes a broad array of elements: from citizens' availability of resources in making monetary contributions to political parties to literacy as a skill that citizens need to understand electoral material. That is to say, this type of equality is subject to citizens education, income, social network, and even health. Therefore, it is not possible to fully achieve it. However, societies can try to ensure it to the largest possible extent by actively endowing citizens with the necessary skills for political participation and by establishing constraints on participation. One example of this last case would be capping the amount of money that affluent citizens can give to political parties in order to level participation.

As the third requirement of political equality, we mentioned equality in the amount and nature of political activity. This requirement is even more demanding than the previous two, given that it ideally entails that each citizen will participate equally and in the same ways as the others in every political decision-making process or other types of political activity. Even though this type of equality cannot be fully realized, as an ideal, it supplements the previous two by stressing that equality involves both an individual and a collective dimension. Therefore, living up to it would entail, for example, the equal treatment of minority groups when it comes to designing representative bodies.

According to the rationale of the first three requirements of political equality, equal citizenship demands that each citizen is provided with the necessary resources and endowed with the necessary skills to take part in his community's political life as fully as his fellow citizens. I will group these requirements under the name of *requirements of input*, given that they refer to what political equality demands from citizens when they take part in politics.

The last two requirements are equality in the reception of political demands and in receiving the benefits of public policies. Concerning equality in the reception of one's political voice, decision-making bodies should look after all stakeholders that are willing to contribute to the decision-making process. Ignoring citizens' letters and emails would lessen the realization of this requirement. Finally, equality of response refers to citizens' right to benefit equally from governmental policy. Although fulfilling this requirement is possible in general terms, differences in citizens' preferences and needs limits its full realization. For example, some policy might benefit rural areas more than it benefits inner-cities.

I will also group these two requirements under the label *requirements of output*, given that they pertain how political authorities ought to respond to citizens output. From these two types of requirements (i. e., of *input* and *output*) it follows that the satisfaction of the *requirements of output* necessitates the previous fulfillment of the *requirements of input*. However, this relation does not mean that fulfilling the latter entails the automatic realization of the former; both groups of requirements are independent.

Constraints to political equality

This picture of what political equality entails for democratic practices gives rise to two questions. First, to what extent should liberal democratic societies live up to these requirements? Second, how can liberal democratic societies live up to them? Let us start with the first one. Besides the already mentioned limits faced by the requirements of political equality, there are at least three constraints to be put in place when implementing these requirements.

First, the fact that citizens in pluralistic societies have different world views is problematic for political equality so far as some citizens are averse to politics. By this, I am not referring to the citizens that do not want to take part in politics after realizing that their political system is rigged, but on those whose religious beliefs or philosophical convictions command them not to take part in the political life of their society. Therefore, respecting individual freedoms, like freedom of religion, entails conceding that some citizens have the right to forsake the exercise of their political rights. This phenomenon creates inequality in political participation and goes against the *requirements of input* demanded by political equality.

Should we then relinquish such individual freedoms in the name of democratic political equality? Clearly no. On the contrary, this example points at one desirable limit to the pursuit of political equality. We should try to fulfill such a democratic ideal if it does not countervail the individual freedoms that are also necessary for democratic life.

Leaving aside the case of idiosyncratic aversions to politics, time management also becomes a salient constraint in the achievement of equality. On the one hand, citizens face the decision of how to distribute their time. In complex societies, citizens dispose of a limited amount of time that they can and want to dedicate to politics. Furthermore, not only do some individuals like to dedicate more time than average to political activities, but for a political system to function properly, it is necessary that some people dedicate themselves to politics daily. Therefore, this situation counteracts the requirement of equality in the amount and nature of political activity.

On the other hand, achieving an efficient political process require elected officials to take decisions in specific time frames. If so, there can be desirable limitations in the reception of one's political voice. However, elected officials countervail the fourth requirement of political equality when they prioritize the main stakeholders affected by a piece of legislation over other citizens that want to give input on the decision-making process.

The third element to consider is that of the quality and weight of citizens' input. Democracy demand of granting equal value to all citizens positions in the decision-making process becomes problematic when deciding over highly technical issues that most of the citizenry does not understand. This circumstance puts into questions the extent to which the government should give the same weight to the input of all its citizens. For example, we could rightfully wonder if the opinions of a biologist and a taxi driver that did not finish elementary school should be equally weighted when there is a vote on which strategy a government should choose to protect biodiversity. There seems to be something wrong in allowing citizens to make uninformed decisions on matters that they do not understand. Then, prioritizing the opinion of particular citizens when the polity is deciding over specific topics seems to be desirable and an excellent constraint to the equality in the reception of one's political voice

To sum up, a functioning liberal democracy imposes three constraints over the full realization of political equality: one related to citizens' individual freedoms, another regarding time management, and a last one concerning the quality of citizens' participation and the role of expertise. These constraints mainly limit the realization of the third and fourth requirement of political equality. In other words, by accepting these constraints, we admit as desirable that not everyone will provide the same input to the political discussion (both in quantity and in quality) and that not everybody's contribution will be equally weighted.

Political equality and the division of political labor

With this picture in mind, we can address the second question: how can a democratic society live up to these requirements of political equality? The answer lies in the way in which every society divides political labor. Such division can imply a more or less demanding realization of the requirements of political equality. Given that this chapter aims to show how economic inequality lessens political equality, I will now focus on a division of political labor that instantiates political equality in a less demanding way. The underlying reason for this methodological choice is that if economic inequality lessens political equality in its less demanding instantiation, the same will apply for the more demanding version of it. Furthermore, this methodological decision also follows from the conviction that a democratic division of labor that assumes a less demanding view of political equality is closer to the way real-existing democracies work. If so, the dialog between the normative conception of political labor and empirical findings becomes more productive.

Thomas Christano's (1996, 2001, 2010) egalitarian theory of democracy provides an example of a normative division of political labor that carries out the demands of political equality in a less demanding way. According to Christiano, a democratic division of labor distinguishes between *equality in the legislative process* (analogous to the *requirements of input*), and *equal say over the process of legislative decision-making* (analogous to the *requirements of output*). The former type of equality is achieved when citizens take part in a fair electoral process to choose representatives. The latter will only take place as long as the elected representatives are faithful to their campaign promises.

On this picture of equal political participation, citizens have a precise role to play, they have to establish the aims of society. This task involves two levels. In the first one, citizens vote for representatives as a way of communicating the aims of society and rank the trade-offs between them. Normatively speaking, voting involves the duty and right of deliberating over these aims – i. e., votes should be cast according to reasons that citizens give to each other (Gutmann & Thompon, 2004:3). In other words, democracy demands the existence of an environment of public discussion regarding the aims that society should pursue – a discussion that takes into consideration all the available views.

Following this scheme, equality in the legislative process can be achieved if citizens have access to all the necessary means to take part in the voting process. This involves endowing citizens with the information, skills, and time needed to engage in the political debate fruitfully. Likewise, it also requires that all citizens can find their ideas represented in one of the electoral options available or that they can form their political party to represent themselves and others that think alike – here questions of how political parties ought to be funded become relevant.

In the second level, elected officials deliberate what means should be used to carry out the aims that society demands. The authority of government officials should be understood as merely instrumental, therefore downplaying the fact that this subset of citizens possesses more political power than an average citizen. Vesting officials with excessive of power would only go against political equality if it is used to pursue different aims than those established by the electorate. However, there might be cases in which elected officials cannot satisfy citizens' demands. When this happens because of an independent condition or event (e. g., natural disasters) preventing the accomplishment of a particular aim, the breach of an electoral promise does not go against nor lessens political equality.

Pairing the five requirements of political equality with Christiano's scheme, we can see that the *requirements of input* (i. e., equal right to participate, equal capacity and opportunity to participate, and equality in the amount and nature of political activity) are instantiated through fair electoral processes that guarantee what he calls *equality in the legislative process*. Likewise, the *requirements of output* (i. e., equality in the reception of one's political voice and equality in response) are the byproduct of representatives living up to their promises, and of governmental efficiency in the enforcement of new policy – what Christiano calls *equal say over the process of legislative decision-making*. By centering the role of citizens on selecting the aims of society, the realization of political equality would demand that fair elections are guaranteed, in which citizens choose the overall aims of society, and that elected officials would live up to their promises of working for those aims.

This democratic division of labor deals with the three constraints that bear on political equality. By endorsing the need for a political class that will allocate more time to political activities, it deals with the time concern. Likewise, the existence of a body responsible for the decision-making process (i. e., a Congress or Parliament) creates conditions to avoid uninformed decisions. Representatives at this body will have access to advisors from which to get the technical insight they need to evaluate policy proposals and to discriminate on which opinions should be considered when assessing a particular piece of legislation. Additionally, this scheme can deal with the first constraint by rendering political participation and voting non-mandatory. If so, citizens' individual liberties and political rights (to select the aims of society) remain unscathed even if they decide not to exercise the latter - therefore, political equality is not lessened.

When is political equality lessened – and, thus, democracy threatened – in this scheme? According to Christiano, this would happen when a citizen or a group of citizens prevents the realization of the democratically selected aims. However, I would add to this view that political equality is already lessened if there is a citizen, or a group of citizens in a position that allows them to hinder the realization of these aims – even if they do not prevent them in the end. I will engage with Christiano's argument against this view in the next chapter. For now, I will only stress the normatively problematic character of the mere capacity to prevent the realization of the democratically determine aims. In short, electoral politics become an epiphenomenon once a citizen or a group of citizens have veto power over the aims a society can pursue. If so, the mere possibility of preventing these democratically determined aims entails that the electorate does not have the final word in selecting the aims of its society. Thus, such potential contravenes political equality, and, by extension, it is democratically undesirable.

Now, if we go back to what was referred to in the previous section as the translation problem, we can see why the translation of money into political power is problematic for this less demanding instance of political equality. The access that the affluent citizens have, due to their wealth, to elected officials; the way in which they can alter public opinion in favor of their interests, to the point of setting the legislative agenda, and the leverage that their economic might give them in negotiating public policies with the government, puts them in a position from which they can prevent (as they often do) the realization of the democratically selected aims. Thus, the translation problem represents a threat to democracy given that in liberal democracies, economically powerful citizens have access to mechanism with which to forestall the implementation of democratically determined aims.

IV. Trying to overcome the translation problem

After spelling out the translation problem, we can now look into possible solutions for it. We can group the multiple proposals as following in one of two main strategies. On the one hand, the solutions that consider wealth distribution (e. g., universal basic income) as the solution to the problem. In other words, through economic reform, wealth could be allocated among citizens in such a way that wealth inequality would become politically irrelevant. On the other hand, a different set of proposals argues for the enhancement of citizens' democratic agency. Such enhancement requires the development of institutions that would neutralize economically based political inequality by boosting citizens political power.

These two strategies do not exclude one another; on the contrary, they can even be complementary. Yet, concerns – if not utter skepticism – about the political feasibility of substantive economic reform calls for the study of alternatives mechanisms to neutralize economically based political inequality. Moreover, given the improbability of getting those in power to pass laws against the system from which they benefit the most (McCormick, 2019:143-144), looking for other ways to tackle the translation problem might be the more promising strategy forward.

Following this rationale, in this research, I will focus on the enhancement of citizens' political agency as a strategy to neutralize economically based political inequality. By concentrating on this strategy, I do not pretend to cast aside the other one. On the contrary, I take the enhancement of citizen' agency to be a necessary prelude to currently unfeasible but desirable economic reforms. The feasibility of these reform hinges on the previous transformation of the political landscape: from one that fosters economic policy that deepens economically based political inequality to one that champions policy that counters it.

It does not follow from the contrast between the two strategies that empowering citizens is an easy task. Nonetheless, by looking at the recent success of social struggles (mainly those lead by the feminist and LGBT movements) in which politically active citizens gained the recognition of their rights, the enhancement of citizens' political agency appears a promising strategy in dealing with the translation problem. Thus, in the following chapter, I will explain the liberal take on the translation problem and how to tackle it through this strategy.

II. Liberalism and the Translation Problem

In the previous chapter, I defined the translation problem as the challenge that liberal democratic polities face due to the potential translation of economic power into political power. Moreover, the current levels of economic inequality buttress an imbalance in the distribution of political power that goes against the democratic ideal of political equality. According to this ideal, citizens should have an equal say in establishing the overall aims of society. Therefore, the translation problem points at the fact that affluent citizens have access to mechanisms that, although legal, allow them to prevent the realization of those democratically selected aims. In other words, insofar as economic inequality nourishes political inequality it ought to be considered *pro tanto* antidemocratic – hence, something that democratic polities must deal with.

There are at least three ways in which wealth can be translated into political power. First, money works as a gatekeeper to run for public office. Hence, through money affluent donors can exert influence over politicians. Second, the control that the affluent have over a significant part of the media, think-tanks, and other protruding elements of the public sphere, allows them to exert an outsized influence over public opinion. Finally, economic might can work as leverage from which to negotiate with a government and with which to oppose policies that are democratically backed up.

In this chapter, I will delve into how liberal theorists deal with the translation problem. To that end, I will first present Thomas Christiano's take on it (2006, 2010, 2012). Granting that Christiano's work represents the standard liberal response to the translation problem, I will claim that his framework leads him to capitulate to it. For Christiano, the tension between democracy and liberal rights that give rise to the translation problem is insurmountable. Nonetheless, the power imbalance that comes out of this tension should not be considered as problematic for political equality as long as those in a position of power abide by informal moral duties to defer to all democratic decisions. I will criticize this moralization of the translation problem – on the grounds that it yields an unsatisfactory response.

Thereafter, I will engage with Jeffrey Green's (2013, 2016a, 2016b) plebeian approach to the translation problem. Green's plebeian theory of democracy flirts with the democratic republican tradition[9] while trying to remain loyal to fundamental liberal commitments. By pairing these two theories, Green advances a democratic theory at the heart of which he places the translation problem, but that also theorizes it as an insurmountable problem for the realization of political equality. In this regard, I will contend that Green's capitulation to the translation problem follows from his decision to constrain the potential of the plebeian ethos to a moral stance, instead of advancing institutions capable of enhancing citizens' democratic agency in accordance to this ethos.

After covering these two liberal theories, I will argue that liberal theories (i) downplay the relevance of the architecture of social institutions in the realization of political equality (ii) by emphasizing individual rights and equality of opportunity in their understanding of political equality. It is because of the limitations discussed in this section that in the following chapter, I will explore a different theoretical framework that advances institutional mechanisms that aim at neutralizing the translation problem.

This chapter will proceed as follows. First, I will lay out Christiano's take on the translation problem and explain why it leads to a capitulation. Second, I will present Green's critique of the liberal understanding of the translation problem and how his plebeian theory deals with it; although it also entails capitulation. Finally, I will explain why the capitulation to the translation problem is the natural outcome of specific liberal theoretical commitments.

I. Christiano's liberal moralization of the translation problem

As depicted in the first chapter, Thomas Christiano's (1996, 2001) conception of democratic citizenship claims that citizens main political task is to determine the overall aims that their society should pursue. Citizens establish such aims by voting for representatives who in turn choose the means required to achieve the democratically selected goals. However, carrying out these goals involves more than just governmental action; it requires of citizens that they respect and support these goals. That means that citizens can either align their life plans to the democratic aims of society or pursue fully legal courses of action that undermine these aims.

By saying this, Christiano (2006) points at the tension that arises from the commitment to liberal rights (i. e., individual freedoms and liberal property rights) and democratic values

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[9] I follow McCormick's (2011, 2019) distinction between aristocratic and democratic republicanism. The latter is mainly – if not only – subscribed to the Machiavelli while the former to all the other great republican theorist (e. g., Madison and Montesquieu).

(chiefly, political equality). For Christiano, this tension is troubling, given that there are ways in which the recognition of these rights undermine democracy. The main problem emerges from the fact that societies with high levels of economic inequality endow the affluent with mechanisms (the three already mentioned above) to influence politics that are not available to ordinary citizens.

However, after looking into these mechanisms, Christiano (2012) argues that they should not be understood as pernicious for democracy without further consideration. In some cases, we just face a trade-off scenario. For example, by prioritizing freedom of speech over political equality, the U.S. Supreme Court defended the excess of political power that affluent citizens get due to the importance of money in electoral processes and the formation of public opinion. Therefore, Christiano argues, such inequalities in influence and power are not intentional[10] but a byproduct of protecting freedom of expression over political equality.

Now, Christiano (2012) also acknowledges that such inequality of political power should worry us "if we accept the thesis that there are likely to be significant conflicts of interests between those who have less wealth and those who have more wealth" (251). However, he does not think that wealth plays a more relevant role in determining someone's interests than do does gender, race, religions, and other traits. Furthermore, he contends that more empirical research would be needed to support the idea of a significant divide in people's interests related to their economic strata.

Regardless of his dismissal of this thesis, Christiano admits that two problems would follow if we take it to be true. First, by being able to influence politicians more and letting their opinions be more loudly heard in the public sphere, the outside influence of the affluent would lessen the chance of other opinions to be heard; in particular, the opinions of the poorest members of society. Second, this phenomenon would also distort the topics that are under public deliberation – if were to the affluent set the agenda, the issues that matter for other parts of the citizenry could potentially be ignored. These two phenomena prevent the fairness of electoral processes – that demands proper deliberation – and thus, they undermine democracy.

Moreover, if we were to accept that there is a conflict of interests between affluent and ordinary citizens, legislating over this issue (e. g., by enacting campaign finance reform) would require society to pick sides between liberal and democratic values. Or, more precisely put, society would have to rank its liberal and democratic values while knowing that the final ranking entails that in specific cases either democratic or liberal values are going to be undermined.

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[10] Contrary to requiring literacy for voting. This would indeed be an intentional limitation on political equality.

Christiano (2006, 2010) is also interested in the third mechanism through which wealth turns into political power. In particular, he worries about the fact that the exercise of liberal property rights can buttress legal forms of non-cooperative behavior from citizens towards democratically determined aims. That is to say, that sometimes citizens' legal exercise of their property rights is at odds with the requirements of political equality – he calls this issue the *partial incompatibility thesis*.

Through one example, Christiano works out this thesis. He asks the reader to imagine a small town in which a private industrial complex employs a significant part of its members. In the citizens' assembly, the community members decide to regulate the industrial complex, given that it pollutes too much, and its safety standards are too low. Likewise, they choose to raise the corporate tax to promote a better distribution of wealth in the community. With these aims in mind, they elect representatives that will carry these policies through by creating the necessary legislation. So far, so good.

Now, we must look into the possible ways in which the private industrial complex will react to these policy changes. Christiano (2006) lays out three possible scenarios. (i) The company accepts the new regulation and corporate tax and continues working as usual – although with less profit in the short term. (ii) The company realizes that once the new legislation passes, this town is not the best place to maximize its profits. Therefore, after the enactment of the legislation, the company moves to a different location. (iii) The company informs the citizens' assembly that if these regulations were to pass, they would move their operations. This information changes the mind of the legislators who decide not to pass the reforms.

For Christiano (2006), under certain circumstances, both the second and third scenarios entail an abridgment of political equality. To understand the exact issue, we have to go back to the division of political labor that Christiano stands for. According to him, citizens establish the aims of society and their representatives carry them through. If so, by relocating, the private industrial complex is preventing this community from its democratically established goals. However, although this action alters the conditions of feasibility of these democratic goals (Christiano, 2010:201), it does not involve any illegal activity.

In sum, the company's decision to move out of town renders the democratic aims of this community unachievable. This type of actions by companies undermines democracy regardless of their intentionality. Even if the company's rationale is only to move to a place where they will maximize their profits, it is still pursuing its "own self-interest at the expense of what had democratically been judged to be in the public good" (Bennett, 2019:5). Therefore, when a company uses its power to prevent the realization of society's democratically determined aims, it cripples the democratic decision-making process.

Nevertheless, Christiano (2006) recognizes that neither company nor citizen should be asked to bear burdens beyond what is reasonable in the name of democracy. Two caveats come at play in this regard. On the one hand, citizens and companies have the right to differ from democratic decisions if following such decisions entails hampering their particular undertaking. For example, if the private industrial complex changes its location because the new taxes enacted by the citizens' assembly would lead them to bankruptcy, then its action should not be regarded as one that undermines democracy. On the other hand, the second caveat holds that, if previous to acting, it is not clear that one's actions will prevent the realization of a democratically determined aim, then the outcome of one's action should not be thought as one that undermines democracy.

After laying out the uneasy relationship between citizens' exercise of their property rights and democracy, Christiano states that governments should not intervene nor change the property regime from which the tension stems. Because if they do so, societies run the risk of losing more than they might gain, given that the liberal regime of private property has proved itself useful and desirable as a key institution in market transactions. Hence, possible solutions to the problem are to be found outside governmental intervention.

If we go back to the example, the first scenario gives us the case in which the behavior of the private industrial complex does not undermine democracy. In this scenario, the private industrial complex complies with its democratic duties. Christiano (2006, 2010) argues that this democratic attitude from the company is adequate to the problem we face. Businesses in democratic societies must understand that they have democratic duties to abide by and cooperate with the decisions taken by the democratic assembly; otherwise, they would be undermining the democratic character of the society from which they benefit. Therefore, following the same reasoning, Christiano (2010) writes that affluent citizens, capitalist, businessmen, and all strong private economic actors "have a special responsibility, by virtue of the power they hold, not to use it to pursue antidemocratic aims" (207).

Now, Christiano's framing of the problematic character of the possible translation of wealth into political power is misguiding. Christiano (2006) does not consider that the fact that some citizens can prevent, due to their wealth, the realization of democratically determined aims to be a problem in itself. On the contrary, it is only the prevention of those aims that constitutes a problem. As long as wealthy citizens abide by their democratic duties, there is nothing to worry about. To support his idea, he gives an "intuitive example" that goes as follows:

> Suppose a group of persons is in possession of an easily detonated bomb and they decide democratically to defuse the bomb and destroy it. Suppose, further, that only one of the members knows how to defuse or detonate the bomb. It would be quite easy for that person, if desiring to do so, to detonate the bomb. In other words, that person has the power to undermine the decision and the others do not have that power. It is intuitively clear here that this inequality of power by itself does not undermine the democratic character of the group. Only if the person capable of detonating the bomb actually does so, is the democratic character of the group undermined. If the person defers to the decision and defuses the bomb and destroys it, then she is acting consistently in a democratic fashion and the group is acting democratically as well. (Christiano, 2006:127)

After giving this example, he draws a distinction between the artificially defined[11] distribution of power that goes on in democratic politics and the distribution of overall power. He then claims that democracy does not require an equal distribution of power overall, but an equal distribution of power in the artificial decision-making contexts. Insofar as these artificial contexts exist, the equality among their participants is warranted, and insofar as the decisions taken through them are respected, political equality is preserved. That is to say, the existence of power imbalance outside these artificial contexts is irrelevant for the realization of democratic ideals. Christiano (2006) adds that the only case in which we would aim at equality in overall power would be in the case that some individual could never or rarely restrain themselves – in such a case it would seem pointless for him to organize society as a democracy in the first place.

I find Christiano's example deeply troubling. First, he postulates a false analogy between being wealthy and having a skill (i. e., defusing a bomb). Being wealthy requires a political structure that allows for significant concentrations of wealth. Hence, the power imbalance that stems from wealth is different from the one that emerges from having a skill that one may or may not learn throughout one's life. Furthermore, Christiano acknowledges (2012) that wealth inequalities endow the affluent with more influence over politicians and give them a louder microphone in the public sphere. If so, these citizens have an advantage in the artificial context of power in which democratic politics take place, even if it does not affect the fact that every citizen is entitled to vote.

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[11] In this context, the concept of artificial does not oppose that of natural. Christiano's point is that in every society, democratic or not, there is an uneven distribution of power If so, democratic societies are those that create specific contexts in which the power to influence a particular political decision is evenly distributed.

More specifically, it is troubling that Christiano does not recognize the antidemocratic character of a situation in which one person or a group of people has veto power over the decisions of the rest. At this point, I would raise a counterexample. Let us think for a moment of a country that has suffered a communist dictatorship for decades. In this country, the supreme leader is ill and knows that he will die in a few months. So, he grants all his power to his oldest son. Once the old leader dies, the new leader tells his fellow citizens that the country will be democratized, but that he, as the supreme leader of the country, will have the power to veto any law enacted by the future Congress. Would such a new regime be democratic under Christiano's standards?

I am afraid that the answer is yes, as long as the communist leader does not veto any law. The very moment that he uses his veto power, democracy seems to vanish. This same logic, although less extreme, takes place in a democratic society when the affluent can prevent democratically determined aims from occurring. Therefore, for this rationale to make sense, Christiano requires granting the affluent – or the new communist dictator – a significant capacity of self-restraint. However, just as the communist dictator has the incentives to veto any law that targets his power, the affluent have incentives – and mechanisms – to avoid redistributive laws that diminish their economic might in a significant way.

The counterexample of the benevolent despot tries to point out that even if abiding by democratic duties is desirable, there are reasons to question the democratic character of a society in which democratically determined aims can be prevented if they do not count with the goodwill of some individuals. Given the minimal agency that citizens have in Christiano's political division of labor, it seems that the democrats of that society should hope for the best in order for democracy to thrive. That is to say, they should hope that the affluent do not get up on the wrong side of the bed one day and decide that advancing antidemocratic aims might be useful for them that day.

It is at this point that Christiano's moralization of the problem emerges. Once he acknowledges the insurmountable tension between the exercise of liberal property rights and democracy, he argues that those with the economic power to undermine society's democratic aims ought not to do so because of the democratic moral duties they owe to society. Such duties should not be legally codified because "the law cannot be formulated clearly to handle all the situations that might interfere with the pursuit of democratic aims" (2010:208). Leaving aside the ways in which legislation can be effectively used to enforce these democratic duties, there are other institutional ways to deal with this problem besides codifying these duties – I will refer to them in the third chapter.

To sum up, taking Christiano's work as representative of the mainstream liberal viewpoint, we can see how this framework recognizes the problems that wealth accumulation poses for democracy while arguing that these are lingering problems that cannot be solved institutionally. At best, democracy can hope that those who can prevent the realization of democratically determined aims will abide by a democratic ethos and support democratic societies in their pursuit of political equality. I find this conclusion to entail a capitulation to the translation problem, given that it does not offer solutions to alleviate – let alone neutralize – the translation problem. It only describes under which conditions political equality might be attained – depending on the individual will of those with power.

II. Green's reluctance to politicize the plebeian ethos

Christiano's view on the translation problem is a common one within liberal circles. Nonetheless, his claim that economically based political inequality would become a non-issue if those that can prevent democratically determined aims simply comply with their democratic duties is not. On the contrary, it has raised concerns by some scholars who consider that such an idea downplays the fundamental problem that economically based political inequality entails for democracy. That is, it creates a power imbalance that impugns on political equality.

Jeffrey Green (2016a, 2016b) is among the scholars that denounce the liberal reluctance to acknowledge this fundamental problem. Working on the outskirts of liberalism, he claims that mainstream liberal theory has developed strategies to deny, ignore, and avoid this problem, instead of informing itself by it. Therefore, there is a need to take the translation problem as a starting point of any theorization about democratic politics. Doing otherwise prevents liberals from finding a solution to it.

Green (2016b) undertakes this endeavor in his plebeian theory of democracy. There he argues that liberal democratic theory includes among its fundamental assumptions the fact that no liberal democratic society will ever be able to fully live up to its promise of freedom and equality between its citizens – regardless of how progressive and enlightened it becomes. He refers to this fact as *the shadow of unfairness*. To better understand this shadow, he suggests looking into the phenomenological structure of everyday democratic life. That is, he wants to inform democratic theory with ordinary citizens' experience of democracy.

This phenomenological structure consists of three elements: remove, manyness, and plutocracy. By remove, Green (2016b) refers to the exclusion from the fullest forms of political life suffered by ordinary citizens. The division of political labor that comes out of an electoral system necessarily excludes the majority of its citizens from assuming positions of power. Therefore, once ordinary citizens reach maturity, they come to realize not only that they do not hold any relevant political position but that it is unlikely that they ever will.

If, as Green proposes, we add remove to the phenomenological assumptions of democratic theory, we can call into question those views of democracy that consider deliberation as a key aspect of democratic politics – as for instance Christiano's theory. Green (2016b) argues that the condition of remove questions the value of deliberation as an ideal of democratic communication. As an ideal of political communication, deliberation is desirable in contexts of proximity to power. It is indeed desirable, and it should be expected from politicians to deliberate on their decisions. However, the condition of remove points at the fact that the ordinary citizens' political life unfolds far from those contexts. In this case, non-deliberative types of communication (like protests) appear to be more effective ways of being taken seriously in the decision-making process

This idea allows us to step into the second element of the phenomenological structure of everyday democratic life: manyness. That is, the fact that ordinary citizens' can only mobilize their interests by coming together as a group. Another criticism to deliberation as an ideal of political communication follows from the condition of manyness. Given that the effective empowerment of ordinary citizens requires their aggregation in non-deliberative contexts, confining their agency to contexts of deliberation hampers the possibility to maximize their political influence.

Finally, plutocracy completes the full picture of the phenomenological structure of democratic life. Although liberal democratic societies promise to their citizens that "similarly talented and motivated citizens, independent of their socioeconomic backgrounds, can expect to have roughly equal prospects of engaging in government" (Green, 2016b:44), affluent citizens, due to their wealth, have an advantage in engaging and influencing political decisions. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a positive relationship between wealth and political participation; a relation that favors the affluent while it also depresses ordinary citizens' political participation. Ordinary citizens' democratic experience bears witness to how money can translate into political power and how this harms civic life (Green, 2016a:89-91). It is this phenomenon, the absence and the lack of fulfillment of liberal equality, that informs ordinary citizens experience of plutocracy.

Plebeianism departs from mainstream liberal theory by adding the phenomenological structure of everyday democratic life to the other inescapable structures that condition democratic political experience. Green (2016b) considers that the three elements of this structure (remove, manyness, and plutocracy) should be added to the other fixed aspects of political reality from which the theorization about liberal democracy starts (e. g., scarcity, pluralism). These new phenomenological constraints inform the plebeian attempt to reform liberal democracy in a way that it can more fully realize its ideals of free and equal citizenship.

By adding the phenomenological structured of everyday democratic life as part of the fixed assumptions of liberal democracy, Green introduces the translation problem in the liberal framework. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the phenomenological structure of democratic life covers a broader array of phenomena than the translation problem. In this respect, plutocracy is the element through which Green's introduces the translation problem to his theory. At the same time, both remove and manyness show the flip side of plutocracy. That is to say, that lack of power suffered by ordinary citizens' in general is problematic insofar as some citizens do have the power to influence the political decision-making process – bypassing the hustle of democratic politics.

This new liberal take on democratic theory does not assume free and equal citizenship as its starting point, but as a necessarily unfulfilled ideal that liberal democracies will nonetheless strive to fulfill. At this point, Green (2016b:109) identifies two plebeian models on how to proceed. On the one hand, there is the plebeianism *á la* McCormick that calls for the enhancement of ordinary citizens' democratic agency through the creation of institutions from which to hold the economic and political elites accountable (more on this in the next chapter). On the other hand, there is Green's model, that calls for the regulation of wealth and the transformation of the ordinary citizens' ethos.

To support his model, Green does not argue against McCormick's plebeian strand. He only points out that while McCormick's model is more specific, since it champions particular institutional reforms, his model is more general. General in the sense that it fleshes out the idea of a plebeian morality from which different policy proposals can follow. Green's model strategy to alleviate the translation problem – never to thoroughly neutralized it – hinges on a polity's capacity to regulate the affluent by capping the amount of wealth that they are entitled to accumulate. Like other similar proposals (Machin, 2013; Robeyns, 2017), Green claims that capping wealth is necessary to realize political equality. However, the originality of his proposal lies in arguing this thesis from a Rawlsian framework – so that liberals can relate to it.

Nevertheless, as mentioned, this investigation will set aside the proposals that tackle the translation problem through economic reform. Therefore, what interests me in Green's plebeianism is the plebeian ethos that underlies his proposal of economic reform. This ethos posits that ordinary citizens should learn how not to be good. Such a learning process consists of a transvaluation of the traditional civic morality that tell citizens that they should all treat each other as equals in the public sphere. This transvaluation demands that ordinary citizens distinguish between their fellow ordinary citizens and those that are members of the economic or political elite. On the contrary, not achieving this transvaluation entails subjecting ordinary citizens to the elite's morality.

When Green (2016b) refers to the traditional civic morality, he is talking about the morality put forth by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, Kant, and even deliberative democrats. To the notion that citizens should give reasons to each other in the public sphere when debating about political issues, Green advances a particular morality that applies to ordinary citizens. However, for this distinction to make sense, he first acknowledges that his theory takes morality and political ethics as two different normative realms. If so, ordinary citizens ought to develop a principled vulgarity – the kernel of the plebeian ethos.

Reshaping civic behavior through principled vulgarity involves at least four elements. First, class-based differentiated citizenship becomes the new paradigm to understand the ideal of free and equal citizenship. Instead of thinking of themselves as being equal among other fellow citizens, ordinary citizens should understand themselves as part of a powerless majority (the Many) when compared to those that hold political power in liberal democratic societies (the Few). By posing a distinction between the Few (that includes the affluent) and the Many, ordinary citizens can point out the fact that liberal democratic societies have an advantaged class that needs to be regulated in a particular way[12].

Denying such a class-based differentiated citizenship works as a mechanism that blurs the differences between the Few and the Many, making it difficult to justify overburdening the Few with particular obligations. Conversely, accepting the distinction is the first step towards the necessary legislation that will help to close the gap between the two groups. Given this egalitarian rationale that underlies this dichotomic way of framing civic relations, the claim that plebeianism rejects the ideal of free and equal citizenship does not hold. The plebeian insistence on the unrealizable character of this ideal is compatible with the recognition of the value that the ideal has. Moreover, from a plebeian perspective, it is only by vulgarly stressing the unrealizable character of the ideal that actions toward it can be taken.

As a second element, principled vulgarity calls for the endorsement of arbitrariness as a methodological principle. By working within a framework of methodological vulgarity, those that assume the distinction between the Few and the Many reject the demand of giving a precise definition of who belongs to each group. This rejection follows from the fact that plebeianism values its aim (to hold the elite accountable) more than theoretical precision. Therefore, plebeian theorists "must operate with notions – "elite," "select few," "the specially empowered and favored" – that are infelicitous if only because their borders of inclusion are inescapably linked to the discretionary judgment of specific political bodies and cultures" (Green, 2016b:113).

The plebeian criteria are vulgar for those used to tidy distinctions whose objective character is not easily put into question. However, this vulgarity is not undesirable given that it follows from a methodological decision of prioritizing the formulation of redressive policy that will regulate the elite over never-ending debates about how much wealth is needed to be among the more advantaged citizens of a particular society.

This preference of vulgar criteria of judgment over objective ones – or at least reasonable ones – leads us to the third element of principled vulgarity: the cultivation of non-deliberative forms of discourse. I touch upon this element when talking about remove and manyness by saying that plebeianism rejects the ideal of deliberative discourse as one that applies to ordinary citizens. We should expect deliberation to take part in the discussion of the elite and those close to power. Nonetheless, given their conditions of remove and manyness, the Many would lessen their political power if they were to subject themselves to this ideal of political interaction. On the contrary, it is by engaging in non-deliberative discourse, such as protesting or interrupting the discourse of a politician, that citizens maximize their political power. Thus, adopting a plebeian ethos requires ordinary citizens to see these non-deliberative activities as the quintessence of political participation – and not as a last recourse.

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[12] Green (2013, 2016b) argues that liberals should not find this strange to their theoretical framework given that already in mainstream liberal theory it is common to find references about the less advantaged members of society.

Last but not least, principled vulgarity comprises ordinary citizens giving free rein to their rancorous sentiments against the most advantaged members of their society. Indignation, ingratitude, and a quasi-vindictive desire to publicly burden the powerful serve as the inspiration of redressive economic policy. Therefore, plebeianism argues that once ordinary citizens recognize the ways in which economic and political elite might oppress them, they are to let their indignation towards the affluent loose to counter their position of vulnerability. In stable liberal democratic societies, ordinary citizens will be charged with being ungrateful and not appreciative of all the benefits that their society gives them. Plebeianism supports this lack of gratitude because it is only by being ungrateful and dissatisfied that ordinary citizens will push for legislation more aligned with the ideal of political equality.

Finally, plebeianism promotes a quasi-vindictive desire to see the powerful burdened on the public stage. The function of this desire is twofold. First, it reminds ordinary citizens that they should remain watchful of the potential oppression that they might suffer from the elite. However, it also works as a way of redressing social injustices from which the more advantaged citizens benefit. Together, these three rancorous sentiments form the emotional base of principled vulgarity. These emotions are vulgar, given that they oppose the traditional civic emotions that go hand in hand with the ideal of civic friendship.

Besides these four elements that configure the idea of principled vulgarity (i. e., the idea of class-based differentiated citizenship, arbitrariness, non-deliberative discourse, and rancorous sentiments), the plebeian ethos involves an extra element that does not stem from principled vulgarity: the idea of extrapoliticism. This element follows from the unease that comes with recognizing oneself as an ordinary citizen – a member of the Many – that has the duty nonetheless to take part in political life. In light of the constant dissatisfaction that follows from being part of the powerless in a liberal democratic society, Green (2016b) writes that ordinary citizens should find solace outside politics. This does not entail the promotion of antipolitical behavior, like political quietism, but an extrapolitical mindset that "associates the egalitarian mindset with the tendency periodically not to care about politics" (Green, 2016b:131). In other words, ordinary citizens must understand democracy in an "extrapolitical sense as the critical indifference toward active and engaged political life" (Green, 2016b:131).

This idea of finding solace outside politics is an attempt to recover the concept of equality from a purely political interpretation. By understanding that equality goes beyond what political life has to offer (e. g., equality in the face of death), ordinary citizens can find solace from the fact that they will never be politically equal to some of their fellow citizens. Finding this type of solace is not only psychologically desirable in itself, but it also works as a respite from the unease of engaging in politics if one is an ordinary citizen.

With the full picture of the plebeian ethos in mind, we can go back to our primary concern, namely, the role that it plays in dealing with the translation problem. As mentioned earlier, Green's (2013, 2016a, 2016b) institutional proposal is to enact legislation to cap the wealth of the affluent. Now, the plebeian ethos comes in as the underlying rationale that justifies such a proposal. Green's plebeianism is part of the liberal tradition given that it endorses the liberal normative framework, albeit subjected to a plebeian turn. The plebeian turn put into question the liberal conceptualization of citizenship and calls for a revision of it. Nevertheless, Green's (2016b) does not carry out his revision to its logical conclusion, given that he does not question the division of political labor that makes part of the liberal conceptualization of citizenship.

According to Green (2016b), ordinary citizens are to endorse plebeianism as a political morality with which to cope with liberal democratic politics, but not as one with which to transform it. By capping the wealth of the affluent, liberal democracies can alleviate the effects of the translation problem, but no more than this is possible. Because of this, finding solace in extrapolitical contexts is relevant to Green's project. In the end, in a similar way to Christiano, Green's plebeian theory of democracy capitulates to the translation problem. It frames it as an insurmountable problem that accompanies liberal societies, regardless of how many redistributive policies are put in place.

In light of this, I think of Green's plebeianism as an unaccomplished project whose full potential is yet to be actualized. Two main reasons lead me to think this way. First, Green's project starts by placing the translation problem in the fixed aspects of political reality. By doing so, he capitulates to the problem without even looking for possible solutions to it. However, and this is my second reason, as mentioned above, Green’s explanation of the phenomenological structure of everyday democratic life shows that he is not in the business of criticizing the division of political labor championed by liberals like Christiano.

It makes sense that under a democratic division of labor in which ordinary citizens (the Many) vote while elites (the Few) are in charge of carrying out the will of the electorate, the structures of remove, manyness, and plutocracy will stay in place. However, there is no reason to believe that institutional reforms that alter the division of political labor and counter those three conditions are not feasible, or that they are illiberal. Therefore, I found troubling Green's reluctance to promote the institutionalization of the plebeian ethos beyond specific economic policy as it amounts to renouncing the possible neutralization of the translation problem.

Furthermore, Green’s decision to limit the plebeian ethos to morality limits its import to the plebeian project. By this, I am not arguing for the creation of legal duties that will force citizens to engage in non-deliberative discourse, but instead for the institutionalization of contexts of contestation in which the plebeian ethos can be exercised in the benefit of the Many. After all, Green’s plebeianism indeed empowers citizens by setting them free from the constraints of traditional civic morality. However, it immediately encloses their scope of action to the division of political labor established by mainstream liberalism. This leaves us wondering why the critical force of the phenomenological structures of everyday life, which leads to a revision of key liberal normative commitments was not extended to the liberal division of political labor. I will discuss this in the next section.

III. The translation problem and the limits of the liberal framework

Drawing on Thompson's (2011, 2017, 2018) critique of the liberal understanding of political inequality, I want to point out two theoretical limitations that make Christiano's and Green's theories capitulate to the translation problem. Namely, that liberal theories (i) downplay the relevance of the architecture of social institutions in the realization of political equality by (ii) placing “an emphasis on individual rights and an equality of opportunity as empowering features of liberty and their protection as a crucial element of justice” (Thompson, 2011:2-3). I take both Christiano's and Green's theories to be in line with these criticisms. Hence, in this section, I will contend that the sum of these two criticisms, along with the liberal distribution of political labor that underlies liberal theories, inevitably lead the liberal framework to capitulate to the translation problem.

Thomas Christiano and the limits of mainstream liberalism

In the two previous sections, we examine how liberal theories deal with the translation problem. We first looked at Christiano's understanding of the problem that economic inequality raises for political equality. In this regard, Christiano acknowledges that economic inequality can prevent political equality. He then argues that this can be avoided, if those citizens with economic power abide by their democratic duties. Nonetheless, this argument becomes problematic when we realize that it entails the equation of democracy with a scenario of benevolent despotism.

We can trace this problem back to Christiano's division of political labor. In it, Christiano contents that political equality is at stake when fair elections cannot be guaranteed (first level) and when representatives do not live up to their promises (second level). At the same time, the impact that affluent citizens have on the realization of democratically determined aims is conceptualized outside of this division of democratic labor as one feasibility constraint among others that can thwart the fulfillment of these aims. By taking this theoretical decision, Christiano disjoints the way in which a society determine its democratic aims from the way in which it carries through such aims. In other words, he downplays the role that the architecture of social institutions – from which economic inequality stems – have in the realization of the ideal of political equality.

Endorsing such division of democratic labor is common in the liberal tradition (Beerbohm, 2012:166-192; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004:7; Cohen, 2003:94). Furthermore, downplaying the political duties of powerful citizens that do not hold public office is also common practice even among liberal egalitarians like Rawls, who tries to bridge the gap between democracy and liberalism. For example, when Rawls (1997) talks about the political duties that apply to the public political culture, he constrains the duties of public reason to government officials and candidates for public office (767). Therefore, liberal democracy imposes stringent duties to citizens that hold public power given a particular institutional framework, but it does not hold private power accountable, although this also depends on a shared institutional framework that does not benefit all evenly.

Whether this tension between democracy and liberalism follows from a strong distinction between the public and the private sphere or from the liberal fear of the destructive potential power of majority rule (Skorupski, 2017), it is the case that liberals tend to downplay how the structure of institutions play a more important role in the realization of political equality. In this sense, even if equality of opportunity can be warranted in the electoral context, designing political institutions in a way that renders private wealth relevant to the political process can forestall this equality.

For example, given that political equality demands that legislators comply with the democratically determined aims, and not with those of the affluent, one could imagine an institutional framework in which citizens could hold representatives accountable for their decisions without having to wait for new elections, or to resort to a recall. Without such framework, a society would have to rely on electoral mechanisms that are inefficient in dealing with the cases at hand, because of how costly, time-consuming, and socially divisive they can be. Moreover, by relying on these inefficient mechanisms, one ignores that this political structure engenders both the possibilities and the incentives for representatives to distance themselves from their democratic duties.

Likewise, according to the liberal division of political labor, legislators can act in accordance with their judgment, and there is nothing beyond electoral mechanisms – i. e., the incentive of reelection or at least of avoiding a recall – that compels them to act democratically if they decide to do otherwise. Thus, given the exposure that politicians have to the affluent class, there are incentives in place not to act in accordance to what has been democratically determined if it goes against the interests of the affluent class.

To complete this broad view of the issue, we can add the fact that even if legislators abide by their democratic duties, affluent private citizens can still jettison political equality. This is a constant reality in democratic societies given the structural position that grants affluent citizens the possibility of advancing their interests against democratically determined aims. By not paying attention to this fact, Christiano and other liberals forsake all institutional solutions to the translation problem and hands the realization of political equality to the goodwill of affluent citizens.

As mentioned above, Christiano says that it is hard if not impossible, to legislate over these cases. That is to say, it is hard to determine when the affluent are acting in an antidemocratic way, and when they are just pursuing their conception of the good as any other citizen does. After all, the value of liberal rights lies in the way they "guarantee that each citizen has a kind of independent authority to act as he or she pleases within constraints" (Christiano, 2006:119). Nonetheless, what Christiano sees as an insurmountable tension between liberalism and democracy, is in fact a tension between liberal rights (i. e., individual freedoms and property rights) and a conception of democracy whereby the aims of society are democratically determined by its citizens.

Given that liberal theories center their attention in how individual rights help citizens to advance their conception of the good, instead of looking at the architecture of social institutions that citizens also need to fulfill them, we end up with a "morally unsatisfying conception of social justice since it is unable to correct for certain fundamental inequalities between individuals" (Thompson, 2011:4). In this regard, Thompson (2017) argues that liberal theories – like Christiano's – "can be seen to reinforce and even justify economic inequality based on market principles" (202) given that they fail to look past this level of social life. Therefore, they indirectly reinforce political inequality.

Christiano's reluctance to discuss how democratic reforms that are not at odds with liberal rights can tackle the translation problem becomes troubling. By staying faithful to his conception of democracy and his commitment to liberal rights, he ends up paving the way for economically based political inequality to develop. Nevertheless, these two commitments make him capitulate to the translation problem - an aftermath that the liberal framework might be able to avoid by revising these commitments.

Jeffrey Green and the limits of plebeian liberalism

That the idea of the democratic division of labor that pervades liberal theory constraints its capacity to deal with the translation problem becomes more evident when we look at Green's plebeian theory of democracy. As presented above, Green's theory starts by placing the translation problem as its point of departure – and as a way to revise the liberal framework. Nonetheless, this theoretical proposal does not aim at ambitiously tackling the translation problem, but instead only to modestly alleviating the way it impacts ordinary citizens.

This last claim follows from the fact that Green conceptualizes the translation problem as part of the fixed aspects of political reality that are part of liberal democracies. Therefore, the best that ordinary citizens can aim at is for the enactment of laws that cap the accumulation of wealth by the affluent. This proposal is already a step forward in liberal theory given that Green (2013, 2016b) upholds this legislation even if it has overall negative consequences for the economy – a boundary that liberal theorists seldom cross (Thompson, 2011:6). Nonetheless, we will not be focusing on the proposals of economic reform but on how the plebeian ethos can give rise to institutions that enhance citizens democratic agency. In this regard, the ethos that pleads for an antagonistic sentiment towards affluent citizens does not offer any institutional response that could boost ordinary citizens' agency. Conversely, by assuming from the start that inequality will always be the case, Green capitulates to the translation problem without much fight.

This attitude towards the translation problem is extremely disappointing when we realize that Green's theory had mapped out the shortcomings that liberal theories show when dealing with it. One cannot help but wonder why Green did not argue for the institutionalization of the plebeian ethos beyond his support for economic regulation. More specifically, why did he refuse to champion for institutions that empower ordinary citizens in order to neutralize the translation problem? I am afraid that the answer to these questions lies in the same theoretical constraint that affects Christiano's theory: the liberal division of political labor.

Just as Christiano, Green assumes the liberal division of political labor. Yet, contrary to the liberal picture, he also supports the idea that ordinary citizens should engage in extra-institutional non-deliberative political practices (like protests) as a way to influence the political class in their favor. If so, Green offers ordinary citizens some tools to deal with the translation problem. Even if the political elite and the affluent have still significant leeway to prevent democratically determined aims, given the limitations that actions like protests movements have (e. g., regarding time or resources).

In the same way as Christiano's, Green's theory champions for the moral emancipation of ordinary citizens from traditional and damaging conceptions of civility, but not for the creation of institutions that would alter the division of labor, or institutions that would endow ordinary citizens with more political power. Here, I take Green to be downplaying the relevance of the architecture of social institutions in the realization of political equality. Nonetheless, I surmise that Green's reluctance to support this type of institutions lies in an understanding of political equality according to which no institution would be able to attack the root of the translation problem.

Furthermore, Green works with a very demanding – although not unrealistic – conception of political equality that requires the even distribution of opportunities to engage in government among citizens endow with a similar set of skills and motivation. Such equality of opportunity is not achievable in a society with high levels of economic inequality. Contrarily, high levels of economic inequality generate – as Green points out – a class-based differentiated citizenship in which ordinary citizens (the Many) stand vulnerable in opposition against the economic and political elites (the Few). At this point, one could ask Green what holds him back from making a move from understanding political equality in its individual dimension, to looking at it from the perspective of the class-based differentiated citizenship.

It is, in fact, the case that the enhancement of ordinary citizens' democratic agency would not entail the realization of political equality at the level of citizens' opportunities to engage in government. However, it would help in the realization of political equality understood from a class perspective. In other words, it would allow for both the Many and the Few, viewed as groups, to have equal access or representation in government. Clearly, endorsing this latter position would require Green to distance himself – if not to fully stepping out – from the liberal framework he is working with; a framework that insists on an atomistic social ontology (Thompson, 2018) that is incompatible with a class-based differentiated citizenship.

Hence, Green's liberal commitments do involve an effort in moving liberal theory forward in its conceptualization of the translation problem. Nonetheless, his commitment with the liberal division of political labor and with an idea of political equality heavily focused on individual equality of opportunity limits the capacity of his theory to find ways to neutralize economically based political inequality instead of merely accepting it as a given that makes up part of liberal democracy.

Hence, in this section, I have explained how a set of theoretical commitments in liberalism limits its capacity to offer a solution to the problem that economically based political inequality entails for democracy. Beyond their variations, liberal theories seem to share the feature of downplaying the relevance of the architecture of social institutions in the realization of political equality. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will look into a new framework from which institutional solutions to the translation problem have been put forth - institutional solutions that do not focus on the partial reform of the economic system but the enhancement of citizens democratic agency.

III. Republicanism and the Institutional Enhancement of Citizens' Political Agency

The liberal capitulation to the translation problem forces us to look for a different theoretical horizon if we want to find solutions to it. One strand of republican theory and the social thought of the progressive era in the United States are two traditions from which scholars have recently found inspiration to rethink about how the translation of wealth into political power is problematic for democracy.

In this chapter, I will engage with the republican tradition (Dagger, 2006; Rahmann, 2016, 2017) in order to explain why and how the translation problem can be understood as a problem of domination. Nonetheless, working from the Republican perspective moves us away from the initial framing of the translation problem. Hence, I will explain the relation between the translation problem understood as a problem for democracy and understood as a problem of domination.

After reframing the translation problem as one of domination, I will lay out McCormick's (2001, 2006, 2011, 2019) Machiavellian theory of elite control and Rahman's (2016, 2017) theory of the democratization of governmental institutions. Each of these theories propounds one institutional mechanism that aims at neutralizing the translation problem: the People's Tribune and the democratization of regulatory processes. However, I do not purport to put forward a full-fledged defense of such institutions. Their function in this research is merely illustrative. In other words, they are to be understood just as examples of how institutions can enhance citizens' democratic agency in a way that neutralizes economically based political inequality.

In the third section, I will make an overall evaluation of the way in which the republican framework deals with the translation problem as a problem of domination. Here, I will claim that the republican-inspired framework fails to deliver an institutional solution to fully neutralize the translation problem via the enhancement of citizens' democratic agency. This will be followed by a set of comparative remarks on how the liberal and the republican frameworks can deal with the translation problem.

I. The republican take of the translation problem

In the previous chapters, I explained why economically based political inequality is at odds with democracy. In democratic societies with a high concentration of wealth, economic inequality endows affluent citizens with the necessary resources to legally prevent some democratically determined aims of society. According to the liberal viewpoint, this scenario – in which the affluent have oversized political power – violates the democratic principle of political equality. Therefore, this dynamic between economic resources and political power is *pro tanto* antidemocratic.

Liberal authors, like Christiano, mainly conclude that this is a lingering problem that follows from the uneasy relation between democracy and liberalism. That is to say, sometimes individual freedoms and liberal property rights conflict with democratic aims to the extent that the enforcement of the former can undermine the latter. In this context, the best that democracy can hope is for those with power to abide by their democratic duties and support democratically determined aims, while the powerless adopt an attitude of mild contestation towards the affluent (and other members of the Few). Outside of these palliative hopes and measures, ordinary citizens of liberal democracies would have to get used to the translation problem casting a shadow over their political life.

Republicans do not agree with this analysis. This disagreement follows form the fact that republican framework departs from liberal normative commitments[13]. Instead of starting from democracy and political equality, the republican normative framework places publicity and self-government as its core ideals. While publicity can be easily defined as the ideal of conducting public business openly – i. e., subjected to scrutiny –, defining self-government requires more work, given the multiple ways in which republicans understand it. Nevertheless, Dagger (2006) argues that they would all agree that self-government involves at least the following two ideas: (i) "that self-government is in some sense freedom through government, not complete freedom from it," and (ii) "that anyone who is subject to arbitrary rule cannot be a self-governing citizen" (153). In other words, republicans reject any attempt of subjugation among citizens. Yet, they all accept to subject themselves to the rule of law given that law when legitimate, is not an instance of arbitrary power.

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[13] Although republicanism can be understood as a critique of liberalism (Dagger, 2005; Thompson, 2011, 2017, 2018), I do not use this framework in such a way. On the contrary, I take republicanism as a different theory that helps to contrast with the liberal approach to the translation problem.

In order to make use of the republican framework as a critique of liberalism would require to distinguish between classic liberals and egalitarian liberals, or between perfectionist liberalism and political liberalism, or yet, between liberal theories that endorse a positive account of freedom and those that limit to a negative account of freedom. I agree with Dagger (2005) that when these distinctions are drawn, it is not hard to imagine a position that can be defined as liberal republicanism. Therefore, the contrast between the liberal and republican framework that I carry out in this chapter should be understood in the context of how these two frameworks deal with the translation problem through institutions that enhance citizens' democratic agency.

Furthermore, Dagger (2006) argues that contemporary republicans set out these two core normative commitments in four second-order normative commitments: political equality, freedom, deliberative politics, and civic virtue. Here, I will only focus on the first two, given that they are the ones at stake in the republican take on the translation problem. For republicans, political equality is the condition that every citizen has to mold political affairs. That is, political equality grants all citizens equal standing under the law and in the political sphere. Therefore, this ideal demands citizens' control of inequalities in wealth, given that societies with a wide gap between the rich and the poor tend to erode this type of equality.

This last claim allows us to introduce the ideal of freedom. Achieving political equality requires citizens to be free in the sense of being self-governing people. As mentioned above, the condition of being subjected to arbitrary rule prevents citizens from self-governing themselves. Republicans refer to this condition as domination. It follows from this, that domination directly countervails freedom – and indirectly political equality[14]. Under a condition of domination, it is not only the case that citizens cannot be considered politically equal to their fellow citizens that enjoy freedom, but the conditions of domination also strengthen over time.

Now, we can bring democracy into the picture. This political regime enters the republican framework as the political order that gives citizens the incentives and means to avoid domination (Lovett, 2019). That is to say, democracy is a prerequisite for freedom (understood as non-domination). This relation is only conditional (instead of biconditional) insofar as there can be a democratic regime that does not fost1er that type of freedom – as is the case in oligarchic democracies (McCormick, 2001:167-168, 2006:157, 2011:177-178). In other words, while freedom requires democracy, democracy does not require freedom – at least not when it is understood as non-domination.

It is in the arena of democratic politics where citizens have the possibility of advancing policies that tackle domination, even if this domination is not strictly political. The central idea here is that any relationship that prevents citizens from being self-governing persons regarding their lives should be targeted as a relation to be mended.

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[14] The republican view on self-government contrasts with the liberal view insofar as the liberal version avoids extending self-governance to the private realm. For example, Gutmann equates self-government with the "the right of adult members of a society to share as free and equal individuals in making mutually binding decisions about their collective life" (173). If so, a society in which citizens can make mutually binding decisions about their collective life but that at the same time subject to economic domination is one in which liberals would recognize self-governance while republicans would not.

In this picture, the fact that in contemporary democratic societies wealth can translate into political power becomes a problem since it begets a dynamic of domination. This dynamic stems from the "arbitrary, unchecked influence on another's opportunities and actions" (Rahman, 2017:80) that the affluent concentrate due to the oversized political power that comes with their economic might. It is important to stress that domination does not require those that hold arbitrary power to exert it. Dynamics of domination are in place – and therefore, should be fought against – even when the powerful decide that they will not take advantage of their position. Furthermore, the dynamics of domination can take place without having an individual or group exercising arbitrary power. Social structures can be in themselves sources of domination. In other words, social structures can limit citizens' capacity of self-governance by hampering their opportunities to flourish.

This view of domination contains two possible instances: dyadic domination and structural domination (Rahman, 2016:47-49, 2017:81-85). Dyadic domination refers to the capacity of an agent to arbitrarily interfere in the life of another. In this scenario, the dominated has no capacity (or close to no capacity) of response to the act of domination, and no agent nor institution can come to his aid. A society in which affluent citizens have the means to prevent the realization of democratically determined aims in favor of their own, is a society in which that group of citizens can exert arbitrary power over the rest.

We can attest this claim by looking at the mechanisms that allow the affluent to advance their antidemocratic aims. For instance, when a wealthy donor makes his campaign donation conditional on a particular favor (i. e., money working as a gatekeeper), or when the affluent shareholder of mass media orders his companies to attack a popular piece of legislation because of the negative impact that it will have on his finances (i. e., money helping the affluent to control public opinion), or yet, when a business man threatens politicians to relocate the operations of his company to another country if a raise in corporate tax rates is approved (i. e., money as political power), those are cases where the ones with economic might exert arbitrary influence over their fellow citizens.[15]

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[15] There is a significant overlap between these three mechanisms and the typology put forth by Doris Fuchs to explain the ways in which multinational enterprises exert political power. Fuchs mentions three types of power used by these entities: (i) instrumental power that "involves the employment of specific resources to achieve one's aims; (ii) structural power that "refers to the ability of 'business' or a specific business entity to affect outcomes in its

The other instance of domination is structural. It refers to the property of a system that undermines citizens' individual autonomy while also creating dependency and unfreedom. Structural domination is the feature of a system; that means that its effects are not produced by an intentional agent. On the contrary, this type of domination stems from the aggregation of thousands of individual actions of citizens that by following societal rules create a decentralized system of domination. Drawing on the social thought of the progressive era, Rahman (2016, 2017) observes that the market economy is the exemplar of this type of domination.

By taking part in an economic system that subjects a large segment of its citizens to conditions of economic dependence (like that experienced by unskilled workers), which limits their possibility of integral development, and benefit the few, all participants of such a system become diffuse agents of it. In the particular case of capitalist market economies, this system subjects some citizens to unemployment, low-wage employment, and other conditions that follow from the way that the system works or from its failures. Given these characteristics, structural domination does not eliminate citizens freedom completely, although it does limit it significantly.

Although economic domination through the market is the exemplar of structural domination (Rahman, 2016, 2017), in this research, we are interested with another instance of this type of domination: the liberal division of political labor. Recall that liberals assume a division of political labor in which most citizens only take part in one of its two levels. On this first level, citizens take part in elections from which representatives are elected to carry out the societal aims chosen by the voters. On the second level, the elected officials create the legislation needed to realize these aims. Nonetheless, as has been mentioned, even when a society can guarantee fair elections, economic inequality gives rise to a structure of domination in which the affluent (as a group) hold arbitrary power over ordinary citizens.

In other words, even when everybody plays fairly, electoral politics lack oversight mechanisms from which citizens can effectively hold their representatives accountable. If we

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favor without having to exercise instrumental power to achieve it"; and, (iii) discursive power that "is the ability to influence outcomes through promoting ideas, setting social norms and expectations, and even shaping identities" (Ruggie, 2017:5-9).

When used to exert arbitrary influence over people's lives, I take these three types of power to be instances of dyadic domination. The fact that one can identify the agents involves in the relationship of domination render all these instances of power cases of dyadic domination (including the use of structural power). This does not mean that the individual actions of multinational enterprises cannot be part of a system of structural domination. Nonetheless, taken by themselves, they are instances of dyadic domination.

add to this circumstance, the instances of dyadic domination mentioned above, we end up with a system in which democracy endures dynamics of domination that go against the republican ideal of freedom. Among other studies mentioned in the first chapter, the one by Solt (2008) exemplifies the structural domination I am referring to clearly. Given the success that affluent citizens have in advancing their interests against those that are democratically determined, citizens that are members of lower income strata lose the incentives to take part in the electoral process, and therefore reinforce the domination of the affluent over them.

To sum up, just like liberal theory, the republican framework is also at odds with the translation problem. However, from a republican perspective, the problem is not that this type of inequality is *pro tanto* antidemocratic because it countervails political equality, but that it is problematic because it gives rise to the dynamics of domination. This means that economically based political inequality prevents ordinary citizens from self-governing themselves.

II. Institutionalizing enhanced citizens' agency

As mentioned at the end of the first chapter, societies can resort to two strategies to tackle these relations of dominations. On the one hand, societies can advance economic reform that narrows the gap between the highest and the lowest income strata. On the other hand, they can champion institutions that enhance citizens' democratic agency in such a way that it gives back to citizens the power of self-governing themselves – that is, to the extent that dynamics of domination are dismantled. In this section, I will set forth two institutions that aim at neutralizing the translation problem through the second strategy: the People's Tribune and the democratization of regulatory processes.

The People's Tribunate

Inspired by sources from the Renaissance, John McCormick (2001, 2006, 2011, 2019) has been developing his theory of Machiavellian democracy. In it, he argues that Machiavelli's democratic thought gives us a lens from which to understand the undergoing crisis of contemporary democracies. On the one hand, popular government (or democracy) promises its citizens equal accessibility and responsiveness to governmental authorities. Yet, on the other hand, the evidence seems to show that those with money and resource are in a privileged position to determine policy outcomes (McCormick, 2006:147, 2019:133).

As McCormick (2011) points out, this economic inequality that jeopardizes political equality is an inevitable outcome of democratic government. Citizens in a democracy enjoy a level of freedom that allows some citizens to acquire economic and social advantages over others. Given that these advantages grant political influence, we see the rise of what I have referred to as the translation problem. Nonetheless, from a democratic republican tradition, as the one McCormick endorses, this problem of contemporary societies follows not only from its socioeconomic disposition but also from the institutional framework from which it stems. If so, different institutions than the current ones might help to alleviate or even neutralize the problem at hand.

If so, the pre-eighteenth-century republics become a relevant source of research given that the translation of wealth into political power was one of the more salient political problems of these polities. Citizens in these republics were constantly looking for ways to prevent affluent citizens from co-opting the political process. In other words, ordinary citizens wanted to avoid the political domination of the wealthy – a structure of dyadic domination given that we can identify the agents that are in a position from which to exert arbitrary influence over the lives of their fellow citizens. It is in this context that McCormick turns to Machiavelli's democratic theory to gain insight about this lingering problem of democratic government.

According to Machiavelli's studies on ancient republics, they tend to work as a political unity constituted by two distinct polities: the *grandi* (that comprises the affluent, the political elite, and the nobles) and the *popolo* (that comprises everyone that is not part of the *grandi*). Furthermore, the interests of these groups are incompatible. While the *grandi* have a well-known appetite for dominating and oppressing others (*grandi* or *popolo*), the members of the *popolo* only aim at avoiding domination by the *grandi* (McCormick, 2006:151; 2011:4-6). In light of this behaviors, Machiavelli recommends to the Prince to base his government on the *popolo* that will always support him if he is good with them, and not on the *grandi*, who will betray him any time that doing so benefits them.

Nonetheless, Machiavelli also recognizes that both the *grandi* and the *popolo* play a role in the republic. For example, members of the *grandi* tend to be better trained to hold government offices, but if left to their own devices, they will use their power to oppress their fellow citizens, hence endangering the stability of the republic (McCormick, 2001:303). Therefore, the *popolo's* duty lies in holding the *grandi* back by holding them accountable. Only in this way, will the *popolo* prevent domination and the decline of the republic.

When studying the case of the Roman republic, Machiavelli found in the tribune of the plebs the institution that grants the Roman *popolo* (plebs) the necessary power to carry out these tasks. This tribune that exclude the patricians (the Roman *grandi*) and was formed by members of the plebeian class was able to propose new laws and veto those approved in the Senate (that was under the control of patricians). In this way, this class-specific and wealth-excluding institution represented the interest of the plebs against the power of the patricians. For Machiavelli, this institution works as a means to reestablish the power imbalance generated by wealth inequality.

Now, when taken from a contemporary perspective, McCormick (2011) argues this institution reveals two democratic deficits of liberal democratic societies (Smith & Owen, 2011:203): (i) the absence of extra-electoral mechanisms from which ordinary citizens can hold the elites accountable, and (ii) the rejection of a quasi-formal distinction between ordinary citizens and elites – either economic or political. Without institutions that channel the healthy anti-elite antagonism democratic societies are doomed to suffer from the translation problem and eventually to perish because of it.

In light of this, McCormick (2006, 2011) propounds a hermeneutic exercise of considering how a tribune like this would work in contemporary democracy. Framed in the US context, he calls the institution in his thought experiment the "People's Tribunate". Regarding its composition, it would be formed by fifty-one citizens (with a minimum age having been established[16]) selected by lottery for a one-year nonrenewable and nonrepeatable term. As an incentive to participate, these fifty-one citizens will be paid their regular salary for a year, and the return to their jobs will be guaranteed. Among other possible perquisites, they might be compensated with free college tuition for their offspring or a full year free from paying taxes.

Two groups of citizens would be excluded from it: citizens that have held a major governmental office – from the municipal to the federal level – for two consecutive terms (i. e., the political elite) and citizens whose net household value qualifies as that of the top 10% wealthiest families of this putative society (i. e., the economic elite). Likewise, indirect exclusions might be justified in order to give a higher chance of representation to minority groups that have been historically underrepresented (e. g., Native and African Americans in the US context).

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[16] In his first formulation of the Tribunate, McCormick sets at 25 years old the minimum age required to be part of it. However, he lowers it to 21 in his later work. He does not give any reason regarding this change in the minimum age.

Now, the tribunes will meet five days a week (for six hours per day) to study and discuss issues related to the federal government. They will be allowed to invite fellow citizens, in general, and experts, in particular, to inform them about any situation – although, sitting officeholders cannot be invited. All this preparation will allow the Tribunate to make use of their three constitutional powers: to veto legislation, executive orders, and Supreme Court decisions (at least one of each per term); to propose legislation that would be enacted if approved by a national referendum; and to initiate impeachment proceedings against at least one federal official of each branch of government (McCormick, 2011:184; Smith & Owen, 2011:208).

Besides these provisions, McCormick also stipulates that the powers of the Tribunate could change and that the qualifications to be eligible can be altered. Likewise, members of the Tribunate could hold each other accountable given that they can indict any member for misbehavior if two-thirds of the tribunes agrees on the charges. If this were to happen, the indicted tribune would be judged by a jury of five hundred randomly selected citizens, and if he is found guilty, he will be penalized according to federal statutes.

With this picture in mind, we can go back to our concern about how this institution relates to the translation problem. If we go back to the three mechanisms through which the affluent gain oversized political power, we can see how the People's Tribunate can potentially neutralize two of them, however, one in a direct way and the other in an indirect way. Concerning the role that money plays as a gatekeeper in politics, the Tribunate would overcome the money filter given that it is an extra-electoral mechanism. Here, the extra-electoral character of the Tribunate becomes relevant given that elections have an aristocratic effect (McCormick, 2011:179) that would render this institution amiss with its intended function. Furthermore, the power to start impeachment procedures would work as an incentive in the political class to avoid cultural capture, given oversight function that this class-specific organ fulfills.

Although the Tribunate would not grant ordinary citizens more access to the ears of politicians, it would give them an institution with which to advance policy and with which to veto antidemocratic legislation enacted by Congress. It is in this way that the contemporary *popolo* can level their political power to that of the contemporary *grandi*. One might argue that there is no way in which the institutionalization of class-conflict would be beneficial to a state. However, Machiavelli points out that although this is true in an intra-institutional level, it is not so in a cross-institutional level (McCormick, 2001:302). The institutionalization of cross-institutional conflict – be it class-specific or any other – would be just one among other systems of checks and balances that liberal democracies could have.

When we consider how the Tribunate could target the second mechanism through which the affluent gain outsize political power, we come to realize that this institution could only have an indirect impact on it. The fact that public media companies are a minority puts a filter to the capacity of ordinary citizens to convey their talking points to a broader audience. Legislation to change this situation can be set forth by the Tribunate. Nonetheless, the most relevant impact of the Tribunate in this regard would be that as the appearance of a class-specific political institution would necessarily alter what is being debated in the public sphere.

By bringing into public debate topics that are relevant for ordinary citizens and minority groups, media companies will tend to cover such topics – with or without a political bias –. The discussion of popular policies – e. g., whether the Tribunate should veto this piece of legislation or the other one, or whether it should put this project up for referendum – will become part of daily political life in a way that empowers citizens democratic agency, even if this would only entail letting them vote yearly on legislation that they find relevant.

Finally, I do not think that the Tribunate could be of any help when it comes to dealing with the direct translation of economic power into political power. If a company decided to leave a country after corporate tax was raised, the Tribunate could not do much. However, once a law gained popular support, the Tribunate would be able to use its power to prevent Congress from setting it back or from creating loopholes that would render the legislation ineffective.

It is this regard, is hard to imagine the Tribunate actively enacting economic reform given that it is mainly a reactive institution. Following Machiavelli, the role of the *popolo* is mainly to contain the *grandi* not to govern instead of them. For this reason, McCormick does not champion the Tribunate as an institution that will replace the traditional legislative branch, but as an institution that will hold the political elite accountable for their actions. If so, we have another reason that supports the claim that this institution will be of help when dealing with the third mechanism of the translation problem.

To sum up, the creation of a People's Tribunate would entail the institutionalization of class conflict in contemporary democracies. This class-specific institution would enhance ordinary citizens' political power by endowing them with a mechanism from which they could counter the political domination that the affluent exert on electoral politics and their significant control over the public sphere. Nonetheless, this institution would not have a significant impact on the capacity of the affluent to use their economic might as political leverage. Thus, the People's Tribunate would hold back the appetite of domination of the affluent to a certain extent, but not entirely.

Democratizing regulatory processes

Drawing on the social thought of the progressive movement and neo-republican thought, Rahman (2016, 2017) argues for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of economic domination. He points out that this phenomenon has both a dyadic, as well as a structural dimension, and that it should be analyzed in its particularities. In this subsection, I will make use of Rahman's idea of structural domination to explain how the liberal division of political labor instantiates such a phenomenon. Then, I will explain how the enhancement of democratic agency can neutralize this type of domination. Finally, I will set forth how the enhancement of democratic agency could be brought about.

The market is the exemplar of structural domination. Such type of domination does not follow from the action of a discrete agent, but instead from a diffuse and decentralized social system in which the aggregation of actions by different agents "undermine individual autonomy, creating dependency and unfreedom" (Rahman, 2017:83). There is no intentionality involved in structural domination – on the contrary, all participants in the social system can purse their individual goals under an adequate scheme of incentives which, nevertheless, when examined from as an overall system impinges on people's lives negatively.

Unlike dyadic domination that can snatch someone's freedom, structural domination cannot eliminate individual freedom – given that there will always be room for individual action. However, it does make those that suffer this type of domination profoundly unfree. The case of an unemployed, unskilled worker during a global economic crisis exemplifies a situation in which a set of conditions limit a person's capacity to self-govern his life. The unemployment of this worker impinges on the lives of his offspring, who might not be able to access a better education given the lack of resources in their household. In this way, the structural conditions of a system can take opportunities away from people in a way that perpetuates the condition of domination.

I claim that the same is true about the way in which liberal democracies tend to organize political labor. Most citizens' political role is that of being a voter during the electoral period. Some might even go so far as to support the campaign of a candidate donating money or time. Then, once the electoral period is over, citizens hand over the power to take political decisions to elected officials and non-elected public servants. Nonetheless, as explained in the first chapter of this research, the high level of economic inequality allowed in liberal democracies endows affluent citizens with legal means to undermine democratic decisions taken in free and fair elections.

For example, a pro-life businessman can condition his donation to a politician to his commitment to vote against the expansion of abortion rights. Alternatively, a businesswoman can use her influence in a media outlet to oppose environmental legislation that would force her company to fire a hundred employees. Likewise, the CEO of a corporation can relocate a factory that employs more than half of the population of a community because the enactment of a new corporate tax render it unprofitable. In all of these cases, none of the individuals is doing anything legally nor morally reprehensible. However, the sum of all these actions in which affluent citizens use their private power to pursue their individual interests can undermine decisions that were democratically backed up.

When looked at closely, the main issue in these dynamics of structural domination lies in the fact that ordinary citizens do not have the means of making sure that those elected to office will do what has been commanded of them, while affluent citizens can try to advance their own interests using their private power. In other words, there is a gap between the power that ordinary citizens have to vote in support of certain policy and the power that they have to ensure that this policy is enacted. Furthermore, this malfunction of the democratic system feeds off an architecture of social institutions that from an overall perspective render the individual incentives of affluent citizens perverse due to the impact that they have in the political system.

To target this type of structural domination, Rahman (2016, 2017) calls for the enhancement of citizens' democratic agency through the democratization of regulatory agencies. This enhancement entails the transformation of the state's institutional framework in such a way that it fosters active democratic participation. This requires a significant change in both democratic theory and practice. Chiefly, when thinking about democratic institutional design, we should shift the current focus "on the knowledge, rationality, and virtue of individual democratic participants, to a focus instead on the systems of collective democratic action, judgment, and decision-making" (Rahman, 2017:98).

Several reasons support the desirability of this a shift. Leaving aside the goal of neutralizing economically based political inequality, when institutions develop, propose, and enforce policies, they face tasks that go beyond mere technical matters. If so, involving citizens in the daily work of governmental agencies should not be understood as a denial of the value that experts bring to government, but as an acknowledgment of the fact that expert judgment involves a political and moral dimension. By demanding the democratization of political institutions, citizens reaffirm their right to take decisions by themselves. Experts have a role to play in this picture, as they should bring insight to policy discussion, but not resolution – to do so would neglect citizens' right to self-government and would pave the way for new dynamics of domination to develop.

Furthermore, when ordinary citizens can take part in the processes of deliberation and decision-making that happen within governmental agencies, these agencies can more effectively define the social problems that beset local communities and can also gain insight regarding the extent to which implemented policies are successful. Such democratic participation allows citizens to hold authorities and technocrats accountable and to ensure that these institutions do not go astray in the realization of the democratically determined aims of society.

One could point at the fact that citizens lack the capacity to engage in policy production effectively. Therefore, the democratization of technical agencies would yield the undesirable outcome of crippling the decision-making and policy implementation capacity of these institutions. Without denying that this might be the case under current circumstances, those that champion the democratization of state institutions could argue that citizens are incapable of fruitfully engaging in such a type of democratic agency because institutions prevent them from of doing so. If so, polities should make their institutional frameworks adequate for democratic agency, and not the other way around. This applies to different types of institutions, from schools to agencies in charge of the economic governance of a country.

Now, effective democratic agency involves three necessary conditions. These three conditions work as the basic principles from which to design democratic institutions. First, democratic institutional design should place democratic forums at the core of the deliberation spaces of governmental institutions. These forums will fulfill different tasks, such as informing public officials about their particular needs, therefore, adding new voices to debates that are controlled by technocratic elites. The forums will also allow citizens to hold public officials accountable on the spot. Taking part in deliberation processes would give citizens access to information that they would otherwise lack – therefore, constraining their ability to contest antidemocratic actions.

Nonetheless, the creation of democratic forums will not enhance democratic agency if a reallocation of political power does not accompany it. This is the second condition needed for effective democratic agency: democratic forums should have decision-making power instead of playing a passive role as input generators. If regulators take citizens' opinions only as an input, which they can either include or reject in the policy-making process, citizens will lack the incentives to get fully involved in the process. On the contrary, regulatory agencies should aim at structuring the policy-making process by granting power to factions with diverse interests that can check each other.

Through figures like ombudsmen, people's tribunes or public advocates, among others, institutions can create the channels by which a wide range of groups can voice their points of view and concerns on issues. The creation of spaces in which citizens can effectively both express their opinion on a topic and exert power to defend their interests will serve as a catalyst for other citizens to mobilize and make use of their democratic agency.

This final claim leads to the third element for effective democratic agency: the need for reiteration and experimentation. Setting up institutions that effectively foster democratic agency calls for a trial and error approach in which citizens are willing to try different forms of political participation. Trying new organizational schemes and repeating them even when they do not seem to work at first is the only way in which the democratization of governance can be achieved. Not only will this attitude help in the constant improvement of institutions, but it will also guarantee their adaptation in circumstances of constant change.

Granting that institutions promote active citizen participation, one could then ask why we should focus so much on regulatory agencies. Following Rahman (2017), one could argue that it is at the regulatory level, and not at the legislative level where policy actually takes form. by deciding on the trade-offs from which conflict usually emerges; regulatory "agencies thus provide a 'central linchpin' in linking democratic consent with concrete problem-solving" (Rahman, 2017:143). If so, they would be empowering citizens' democratic agency directly in the concrete problem-solving context, so that they would be able to overcome the constricted democratic agency dictated by the liberal division of political labor.

Rahman sets forth three general ideas of how enhanced democratic agency could be institutionalized. First, it could do so through the active implementation of e-rulemaking. This exercise has already been used in the past, and it allows citizens to directly formulate policy in an active fashion. Citizens can give feedback to each other's proposals, can reject or endorse the input of their fellow citizens, and can monitor whether the ideas that gain support from the majority are the ones enacted in the end. A second mechanism would be that of citizens juries. In this case, regulators would invite a representative group of stakeholders regarding a particular issue and give them the information based on which to deliberate, debate, and take the necessary decisions.

Finally, another way in which institutions could be designed to foster democratic agency is by institutionalizing direct representation of stakeholders inside institutions. In this way, deliberation and decisions will always count with the input of those affected. This model could be realized through the creation of institutions that represent the interests of particular groups or through figures like regulatory public defenders or regulatory ombudsmen. Nonetheless, the implementation of this last mechanism might fall prey to the Machiavellian idea that intra-institutional conflict can be fatal for institutions. Depending on how such institutionalization of contestation gets done, the outcome might be counterproductive.

Rahman's proposal of the democratization of regulatory agencies is an excellent example of how, regardless of the mechanisms of the affluent to advance antidemocratic aims, citizens can set up institutional mechanisms with which to enforce democratic decisions. Yet, once again, it is not clear how the institutionalization of democratic agency would be able to neutralize the direct translation of economic might into political power. At best, institutions that gather stakeholders will be able to create scenarios of dialog in which economically powerful stakeholders and others affected can discuss issues of interest. Nonetheless, this does not guarantee at any point that private interests are not going to be able to countervail democratically determined aims if there are legal ways to do so.

III. Limits of the proposals of institutional design and other considerations

In this section, I will round off this research by discussing three topics. First, I will examine how the republican framework deals with the translation problem in light of its institutional proposals. In this regard, I will claim that although this framework does not capitulate to the translation problem, ultimately it cannot deliver an institutional solution that neutralizes the translation problem by merely enhancing citizens' democratic agency. Second, I will contrast the liberal and the republican framework. Here, I will contend that looking at the translation problem as a problem of domination paves the way for the formulation of policies that can actually tackle it by enhancing citizens' democratic agency.

Nevertheless, the lingering tension between liberalism and democracy, as identified by the liberal framework, is a problem that none of these two frameworks can fully overcome. Finally, I will explicate to what extent the institutional proposals outlined in this chapter are compatible with the liberal framework. In this respect, I will argue that while the democratization of regulatory processes is compatible with the liberal framework, this is not the case for the People's Tribunate.

Overall examination of the republican framework

By framing the translation problem in terms of domination, republicans bring out an enriching way to understand why the translation of economic power into political influence hinders citizens capacity to self-govern themselves. Furthermore, by explaining that this type of domination is both dyadic and structural, they point out that focusing only on the behavior of some particular agents, or on certain policies, will not lead to the solution of this problem. On the contrary, it is necessary to focus on the architecture of social institutions and on the practices that give rise to this structural domination in the political system.

With this diagnosis in mind, republicans address the issue through institutional proposals that target both dimensions of political domination. They address dyadic domination through the creation of an institution that excludes those with oversized political power. In this way, they expect to neutralize the imbalance in political power that the affluent have over ordinary citizens. Nevertheless, when we think about this mechanism in a liberal democratic society, we realize that it fails to deal with the third mechanism that the affluent use to exert their oversized political power: the direct translation of economic might into political power.

The same is true for the mechanism that tackles structural domination. The democratization of regulatory agencies and other governmental institutions might be successful in involving more actors in the policy-making process. Nonetheless, this institutional reform would not avoid the sabotage of democratically determined aims that those with economic might could carry through if they wished to do so.

At this point, it is worth asking if this is a problem for the republican framework. After all, it is clear that this is a problem for liberals who think of political equality as the capacity of citizens to determine the aims of society and for their representatives to work towards their realization. However, republicans are not worried about political equality understood in such liberal terms, but instead citizens' self-government as a way of avoiding domination – a condition in order to be politically equal. If so, the fact that private citizens can hamper democratically determined aims is also a problem for republicans but one that cannot only be addressed from the political arena, but also the economic one. In other words, this type of domination is not only political but also economic. Therefore, its solution demands that the necessary measures in the economic system are taken, so that no citizen is capable of exerting arbitrary influence on the life and opportunities of their fellow citizens.

This also goes the other way around, from a republican perspective, as the translation problem cannot be solved by only targeting the economic system insofar as it entails both a problem of economic and political domination. If so, the dichotomy made at the end of the first chapter – even if just for analytical purposes – that differentiated between solutions through economic reform and solutions through the enhancement of citizens' agency becomes a false one. Accepting that the translation problem is a problem of domination demands action on both fronts.

In light of this, one could say that the republican framework does not capitulate to the translation problem, but it fails to deliver a solution through the enhancement of citizens' agency. Here, the theoretical framework is not to blame, given that in itself, it recognizes that this is a one-armed strategy that cannot encompass the overall dimensions of the problem. Nevertheless, when judged under the same terms as the ones by which we judged the liberal framework, we come to realize that neither of them offers the solution that we were looking for: a way of neutralizing the translation problem without having to dig into economic reform.

Contrasting the republican framework with the liberal framework

We can now contrast the way in which both frameworks deal with the translation problem. In this respect, I do think that the republican insight on the economic nature of the translation problem – one that cannot be dealt with unless deep economic reform is undertaken – is tantamount to the liberal notion that there is a lingering uneasy relationship between basic liberal rights that structure the market economy and the democratic ideals that liberal democratic societies aim at. Nonetheless, the rhetorical difference in how these two theories frame the problem is not superficial. On the contrary, it discloses the underlying commitments that separate them.

It is true that political theorist can work out a liberal republicanism or a republican liberalism (Dagger, 2005:200) that would bring the two theories closer. Likewise, we do not have to read the republican concept of freedom (freedom as non-domination) and the liberal one (freedom as non-interference) as incompatible (Dager, 2005:181-187, 2006:155). Nonetheless, denying the tension between the two traditions – regardless of the attempts to gain insight from both – is at odds with the fact that they do not share the same normative framework.

By recognizing the difference between each theory, we can focus on the insights that each one can give to the other. I take the liberal insight to be the recognition of the lingering problem that will be in place when liberal property rights and democratic governance are put together. The fact that they both have the capacity of undermining each other places citizens in a position in which they have to decide the trade-offs that they are willing to accept.

While recognizing this liberal point on its own terms, the republican framework adds their own insight to the discussion of the translation problem. I take that insight to be the understanding that political domination can be alleviated through institutional mechanisms that enhance citizens' democratic agency. Although, this does not mean that economically based political inequalities can be neutralized through such mechanisms.

Of the republican insight, how much can the liberal framework take on board? Only part of it – at least when considering the two examples of institutional reform that aim at enhancing citizens' political agency. In the case of the People's Tribunate, endorsing this policy would require governments to commit themselves to a quasi-formal class distinction between their citizens. By creating a class-specific institution that excludes a group of its citizens, a polity would be going against the liberal commitment of equality of citizenship.

As we said when referring to Green's plebeian theory of democracy, his liberal commitments hold him – as they would do for any liberal – from endorsing something more than a phenomenological acceptance of the condition of second-class citizenship. Going beyond this limit would be at odds with the normative framework of liberalism – from which one cannot justify the institutionalization of class conflict.

Nonetheless, I find no reason that liberals should not endorse a version of Rahman's proposal regarding the democratization of governmental institutions. After all, the inspiration of this proposal is already part of the liberal tradition, albeit of the more progressive one. One could argue that endorsing this view would force liberals to change their view of the division of political labor. Although this might be the case, it would not mean that liberals should henceforth endorse a demanding idea of citizens' political participation. Just like voting, the democratization of governmental agencies would be a way of allowing citizens to determine the aims of society. Furthermore, it would be a way of expanding citizens' capacity of holding accountable those in charge with the realization of said democratically determined aims. Therefore, although insufficient to neutralize the translation problem altogether, the institutionalization of enhanced democratic agency can alleviate the negative impact that the translation problem has in contemporary liberal democracies.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this research, I have content that the economic reforms necessary to counter economically based political inequality seem unfeasible under the current conditions of liberal democratic societies. Rising economic inequality put hampers the thriving of democracy and fosters the development of oligarchic tendencies within democratic regimes. It was in light of this that I decided to explore to what extent institutions that enhance citizens' democratic agency could neutralize the translation of wealth into political power.

Now, at the end of this research, the answer is partially negative. It is the case that the enhancement of citizens' democratic agency can alleviate the power imbalance that stems from economically based political inequality. However, the threat that this power imbalance entails for democracy cannot be thoroughly neutralized. In other words, without economic reforms that reverse the current trend of wealth accumulation, affluent citizens will have private power that hampers democracy, and that creates dynamics of domination.

In this regard, although this research concludes that the two frameworks studied do not offer the ultimate solution to the translation problem, this conclusion is also partial. The current research only looked into one of the two strategies from which to deal with the translation problem. Therefore, it might be the case that the conjunction of the two strategies can indeed thoroughly neutralize the translation of wealth into political power – both in the sense of rendering economic inequality irrelevant for democracy and in the sense of countering all economic and political domination.

Nevertheless, the feasibility problem remains in its place. Given that the current political systems are managed by elites that benefit from the status quo, it is hard to imagine how can the incentives mechanisms change in a way that those in charge of the political decision-making process advance policies that go against their current interests. This takes me to one of the central claims that this research advances, namely, that although the enhancement of citizens' democratic agency will not fully counter economically based political inequality, it is the necessary means to achieve the economic reforms that democracy demands.

This claim finds support in the current literature on the political economy of constitutions (Fishkin & Forbath, 2014; Sitaraman, 2015). Legal scholars currently working on the topic are rediscovering the neglected economic nature of democracy and a republican government. In other words, society's interpretation of its more basic legal statutes regarding economic issues impinges on its political regime. For example, Sitaraman (2015) distinguishes between class-warfare constitutions and middle-class constitutions - while the former has an institutional framework that allows for high inequalities of wealth, the latter hinges on the existence of a robust middle class. Therefore, a society with a middle-class constitution is not well suited for high levels of economic inequality. In such scenarios, political and social unease is to be expected.

Institutions that enhanced citizens' political agency help societies adapting to rising economic inequality. Furthermore, given that they are inspired in an anti-oligarchic rationale, they also empower citizens to push for redistributive policy effectively. The two institutions presented in the third chapter are good examples of how institutions that enhance citizen's democratic agency can give them decision-making power to enact the policy that they think is necessary or they can create new incentives for political elites to live up to their commitments.

On this regard, two questions become pressing: (i) To what extent can the class-based or interests-based democratization of political life be in line with governmental efficiency instead of leading to endless conflict and governmental idleness? (ii) Can liberalism and such a level of democratic politics work together?

The first question is an empirical one that demands both constant experimentation and research on how societies can secure a level of bureaucratic efficiency that contemporary societies demand while sustaining high levels of democratic engagement. The second one compresses both an empirical and a theoretical element.

When dealing with the latter one, we find in the literature different positions. There are those who dismiss liberalism as an ideology that ought to be overcome – as many others have been in history. We can find this position in both on the republican and the radical democracy camps. Nonetheless, there are others, such as Green, that defends the relevance of liberalism while also upholding the importance of plebeian institutions.

Although in his book Green offers a liberal argument for a cap on wealth, he also thinks that the same argument he used to justify the overburden of the affluent works to justify other plebeian institutions – including those put forth by McCormick[17]. This claim opens an interesting research line in which liberalism is understood as an open field of ideas capable of adapting to the needs of its time. If, in fact, class-based institutions can be justified from liberal grounds is something that would make me reconsider the conclusions of my research. However, looking into Green's argument for economic reform falls out of the scope of the current work.

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[17] I thank Jeffrey Green for his reply to my emails in which he clarified to me some doubts I had about how he view the relation between liberalism and plebeianism, among other things.

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