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LIBERALISM, CAPITALISM, AND "SOCIALIST" PRINCIPLES

By Richard J. Arneson

I. Introduction

After hundreds of years of debate, political theorists are still divided, or at least ambivalent, as to the moral desirability of the capitalist economic market. This essay explores some areas of festering disagreement.[1] The aim is not so much to render verdicts as to what views are correct or incorrect, but rather to advance the understanding of opposed positions. In broad terms, liberalism champions individual liberty. We can distinguish (a) political and civil liberties (the right to vote and stand for office in free elections, the right to freedom of speech and thought, the right to freedom of association), and (b) personal freedom (the freedom to live one's own life in one's own way, as one chooses). In this essay, I am going to set the type (a) liberties to the side. I shall just assume that all the positions regarding desirable economic arrangements that I am highlighting will agree in defending strong guarantees of political and civil liberties.[2] There is much to say on this topic, but not here.[3]

My aim is to examine some moral principles of social justice that are invoked to guide the choice of economic systems, and to see where these principles stand on type (b) personal freedom. A particular focus will be on clarifying the theoretical options available within a welfarist-consequentialist tradition of thought, according to which liberal doctrines, or rather, the values that liberal doctrines affirm to be fundamental, are regarded instrumentally, as helps or hindrances to bringing about good outcomes.[4]

[1] The disagreements are both empirical and normative. Normative disagreement is disagreement about values, about what states of affairs are intrinsically good and bad, and about what choices of actions and policies are morally forbidden, permissible, or required.

[2] I do not have any profound rationale for dividing the liberties in this way. I mean simply to set aside political liberties that are not going to be central to the dispute between capitalism and socialism as G. A. Cohen (whose views are the target of this essay) and I understand that dispute.

[3] I say more about one aspect of political liberty, the right to a democratic say, in Richard Arneson, "Democracy Is Not Intrinsically Just," in Keith Dowding, Robert E. Goodin, and Carole Pateman, eds., *Democracy and Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 40–58 ; and Arneson, "The Supposed Right to a Democratic Say," in Thomas Christiano and John Christman, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 197–212.

[4] Welfarist consequentialism is itself a large tent. It houses many doctrines, including right-wing views such as those of Richard Epstein, who holds that a capitalist market

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This essay follows a sideways approach to its topic. I begin by considering an evocation of the ideal of socialism, regarded as opposed in principle to private property, market exchange, and a capitalist economic organization. By "capitalism" here I mean an economic system in which economic production is organized through voluntary contracts among owners of resources, in which individuals are free to contract on any mutually agreeable terms so long as these do not generate certain types of harm to third parties, and in which economic production is undertaken for the most part, by business firms that consist of owners of capital who hire nonowners as workers.[5] I examine moral principles that have been proposed[6] as the core principles underlying the socialist ideal, and I suggest revisions that render them more plausible. The revisions move toward a consequentialist standard that might justify various social arrangements depending on the circumstances. From this standpoint, liberal freedoms like ownership rules are means not ends. The upshot is convergence: a new way of supporting the familiar suggestion that capitalist economic institutions might be part of the overall mix of institutions that would best fulfill socialist ideals reasonably interpreted.

II. The Camping Trip Economy

In his essay "Why Not Socialism?" the late G. A. Cohen describes a likely mode of organization of a camping trip excursion undertaken by some friends.[7] He finds this mode of organization attractive, and tries to

economy embedded in a classical liberal framework of laws is an effective and efficient engine for producing human good. It also houses views such as those of the nineteenth-century utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill, whose views, though nuanced, all in all place him in the company of left-wing critics of the capitalist market economy. See Richard A. Epstein, *Simple Rules for a Complex World* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1995). See John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism; On Liberty; Principles of Political Economy; Autobiography; Chapters on Socialism;* and *The Subjection of Women.* These works by Mill are all available, with details of first publication, at http://www.utilitarianism.net/jsmill/.

[5] The characterization in the text is rough. There is also an important ambiguity here. Recall Mill's hope that as the population becomes more competent and morally minded, superior individuals will be unwilling to work for a boss and will instead form labor-owned cooperative firms. Eventually, the economy mainly contains cooperative firms, and would-be capitalists can only hire the least competent and morally minded workers, and have little real freedom to form and sustain capitalist firms. But in the mainly cooperative economy Mill envisages, full rights of private ownership and free exchange are upheld, so "capitalist acts between consenting adults" are not banned, and no expropriation of private property occurs (or need occur) to bring about this outcome. The legal framework is capitalist, but capitalist firms are few. I disagree with Mill that there need be anything problematic or undesirable about working for a boss, in a privately owned or publicly owned firm, but the distinction between (1) guaranteed legal rights for capitalist activity and (2) actual capitalist activity occurring makes sense. Mill's discussion is in his *Principles of Political Economy,* Book IV, chap. VII, sections 3–4. The phrase "capitalist acts between consenting adults" is taken from Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 163.

[6] By G. A. Cohen. See the next section of this essay.

[7] G. A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). See also Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

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distill its principles. He suggests that there is no principled bar to scaling up the camping trip ideal, and affirming it as the ideal way for a society to organize its economy. The camping trip principles oppose the idea of organizing an economy by market exchange, so if after reflection we find we love the camping trip ideal, we hate the market. The camping trip principles encapsulate the socialist ideal.[8] However, it does not follow that we ought to abolish capitalism and establish socialism, because the former, we know, is feasible, whereas the latter might well not be. We should remake the economy on the camping trip model, but only if we should come to discover that this is a feasible project. So urges Cohen.

Cohen asserts that when friends go together on a camping trip, a spirit of camaraderie prevails. For the duration of the trip, items of gear are not treated as private property, but as commonly owned. Everyone is committed to everyone's having fun and, in a rough way, to everyone's having equal fulfillment. Chores are shared, and divided fairly and efficiently, so that the necessary burdens impinge on each member of the party in about the same way and impose similar levels of sacrifice on each. Claims to justified inequality in benefits—on the basis that some have contributed more to the group enterprise even though they have not put forth more sacrifice than others, or on the Lockean basis that some of the resources that emerge in the course of the enterprise were initially unowned resources privately appropriated—would be met properly with derision by the members of the party.

Finding the camping trip ideal ethically attractive, we imagine extending this mode of organization to the economy as a whole, and find the extension ethically attractive. We then are picturing a socialist economy. What would appear to be the case is that the economy is organized as, in effect, one big pot, from which each member of society is free to withdraw goods, and to which each member of society is free to contribute goods or to cooperate with others in the production of goods to be commonly owned.[9] This procedure does not result in the emptying of the common pot, because each

[8] My understanding is that Cohen stipulates that a *socialist economy* is (a) not capitalist (not organized around private ownership of resources and market exchange) and (b) fulfills the egalitarian principles he outlines. According to this usage, it is left an open question what set of institutional arrangements would satisfy (a) and (b); socialism is not then by definition identified with public ownership of the means of production.

[9] The image of the socialist economy as a big pot, with people free to take from the pot and add to it as they choose, comes from Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, chap. 7. Nozick's characterization is pejorative, but I suppose Cohen would have held that a centralized planned economy that imposes slight coercion on those who participate to sustain it would be desirable if feasible. One might query the characterization that says people are free to contribute to the common pot or not, as they choose. Are people in Cohen's imagined socialist society free not to contribute? Answer: yes and no. Yes, it is true that no threat of coercion binds them to contribute, but no, they are morally bound to contribute to the common good and if they are well socialized they will feel pangs of conscience if they do not do what is morally required. Here Cohen and Karl Marx disagree. Marx at least flirted with the thought that a post-capitalist society would be free from moral constraints, so that people would just do what they want and would spontaneously like to do what facilitates

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individual's free choices to produce and consume are made in accordance with the slogan, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."[10] Appearances here may be somewhat deceiving, however. Cohen is careful to identify socialism as a noncapitalist economy that fulfills the camping trip ideal, and does not commit to the identification of socialism with any particular set of economic arrangements.

Cohen sees two principles underlying the camping trip ideal: a principle of equal opportunity and a principle of community. The first principle is a strong norm of equal opportunity that Cohen calls "socialist equality of opportunity." This principle is fulfilled when (1) each individual has the opportunity to be as well off as anyone else, and (2) if any individual becomes worse off than others, the worse off individual can reasonably be held responsible for that outcome. Socialist equality of opportunity is contrasted with two weaker versions of equal opportunity. "Formal equality of opportunity" is fulfilled when no one becomes worse off than another as a result of ascriptive caste or class status (e.g., only those born as aristocrats are permitted to enjoy cakes and ale, while commoners must make do with bread and milk), bigotry, or social prejudice. "Bourgeois equality of opportunity" is satisfied when no one who has the same native talent and ambition as another has lesser life prospects than that other.[11]

The second camping trip principle identified by Cohen is community, which has two aspects. Both are forms of caring for one another. One is that each person cares about every other person, and in particular cares that no one be significantly worse off than others in terms of fundamental life prospects. We all want to be in the same boat, so to speak. Communal caring about equality can require compensation to reduce or eliminate inequalities that socialist equality of opportunity tolerates.

The other aspect of community is communal reciprocity. Communal reciprocity obtains in a society when each individual is moved to serve the others with whom she is interacting not in order to gain a benefit for herself but in order to fulfill their needs, and each expects the others to be similarly motivated. Each then values serving others and being served by them.

Communal reciprocity is contrasted with market reciprocity, the disposition to serve others only insofar as that is necessary to induce others to serve oneself. Serving others is valued only as a means, a way of gaining advantages for oneself. This motive can take the form of greed

efficient social production. Cohen rejects the freedom-from-morality idea. See G. A. Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[10] Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader,* 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1978), 531.

[11] Bourgeois equality of opportunity is what John Rawls endorses under the name "fair equality of opportunity." See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

(wanting a maximal profit for oneself in exchange) or fear (wanting to avoid losses to oneself that will ensue unless one makes a deal that will prevent the loss). Nothing in the idea of market reciprocity as so far characterized says anything about the ultimate aims of the market agents. In interaction with others, the market agents seek maximal gain for themselves. Behaving this way does not say anything about what these profit-seeking agents might ultimately be seeking. They might be aiming to use their profits in many different ways, such as improving their own lives, improving the lives of those near and dear to them, giving aid to the community, or even giving aid to distant needy strangers.

III. The Camping Trip Model and Coercion

One might object straightaway that if the camping trip Cohen describes sounds attractive, that depends on the voluntariness of the endeavor. Nobody joins who does not agree to come on the terms proposed, and anybody who changes her mind and wants to leave is presumably free to do so. To organize an entire economy as a big camping trip would involve imposing this mode of cooperation on everybody independently of any individual's will. In effect, Cohen is describing a voluntary friendship relationship, and then claiming that it would be great to require everybody in society to be everybody's friend. This would not be great.

This criticism does not inflict damage on Cohen's proposal. In the nature of the case, the form of economic organization of a society cannot be left to the voluntary discretion of each individual. From the individual's standpoint, the basic social arrangements are given, and not up to her to choose. Basic social arrangements are arguably morally acceptable if they are supported by good reasons (and so are rationally endorseable) and are in fact endorsed and accepted by those who live under them.[12] Cohen is not suggesting that the camping trip economy should be imposed on people when they are opposed to it.

Still, one might wonder whether any sensible scaling up of the camping trip model will alter its character. In his "Chapters on Socialism," John Stuart Mill raises a concern that some versions of socialist economic organization might be suitable for small groups of competent and virtuous agents but would be ruined by extension across the entire society, since in that case the entire spectrum of economic agents (including malcontents, cheats, free-riders, exploiters, and other types of scoundrels) would be expected to live up to the high standard of conduct required by socialist ideals.[13] It would be unwise to organize the economy as one big pot from which people may take what they think they need and to which they may

[12] This is a sufficient, not a necessary condition for justification.

[13] John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy and Chapters on Socialism,* ed. Jonathan Riley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 423–25.

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contribute what they think they ought to contribute according to their own lights, freely and spontaneously. This vision of voluntary, frictionless social cooperation would, with people as they are, swiftly turn into a nightmare. Of course, a socialist organization of economic activity is fully compatible with monitoring and surveillance. The economy might be a big lake with fish, and the social planner determines what level of fishing is socially best and assigns quotas to each individual who makes her living by fishing, so that no one draws too much or too little from the common stock.[14] Socialist inspectors monitor compliance, and the system can work tolerably well if most individuals are disposed to comply with the sensible rules imposed, provided most others are also complying. But in thinking along this line to respond to Mill's worry, we have moved a long way in thought from the idyllic camping trip model.

IV. Does Cohen's Ethical Vision Oppose a Capitalist Market Economy?

Although Cohen says that a one-for-all-and-all-for-one spirit prevails in the camping trip scenario, further opinions he espouses indicate that this is true only up to a point. Cohen is not an act consequentialist; he does not hold that in all one's actions one should be doing what best promotes the common good. According to Cohen, each person has a prerogative to pursue her own projects and aims to a degree, even when other available choices would do more to promote best consequences impartially assessed.[15]

The individual-prerogative idea seems to me to be difficult for the camping trip advocate to resist, but if it is not resisted, then acceptance of something like ordinary market relations seems to follow. Here is what I have in mind. Suppose Bob is a skilled navigator of cross-country terrain; it would be beneficial for us if he accompanies us on our trek to a distant spot. We invite him, but he declines. He would rather stay in camp and rest. There may still be the basis of a mutually profitable exchange: we offer to pay Bob to accompany us, and at that price he is better off than he would be staying behind and we are better off than we would be if we left without him. Bob then is not acting selflessly to serve us, but we have already agreed there is a personal prerogative to favor your own interests; and we can suppose Bob's initial decision not to accompany us falls

[14] I borrow this example from John E. Roemer, "A Public Ownership Resolution of the Tragedy of the Commons," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 6, no. 2 (1989): 74–92.

[15] Here Cohen follows a line of thought advanced by Samuel Scheffler. See Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). For the record: I myself espouse act consequentialism (one should always do whatever would produce consequences no worse than anything else one might instead have done), so I reject the Scheffler prerogative, at least at the level of first principles. Still, if one accepts a nonconsequentialist morality, something like the prerogative looks very plausible.

within its scope. Bob does not do wrong to follow his own interests here, so what can be wrong with altering his incentives by offering him a deal?

This objection can be pressed further. Economic and social life ought to be arranged so that each person enjoys wide freedom to contribute to the aggregate economic production and make a living in any of a wide variety of significantly different ways. Organizing the economy as a market safeguards this morally important freedom, and organizing the economy as a big socialist camping trip would not. Moreover, since individuals reasonably pursue long-term projects, and require secure access to particular material things in order to carry out some of these long-term projects, private property is morally necessary.

Notice first that two ideas of individual freedom are now in play: (1) the prerogative to choose to favor one's own aims over the common good to some extent; and (2) wide-option freedom, that is, having the real freedom to choose among a wide variety of significantly different options, each of which one has reason to value. I have the real freedom to go to Paris or not if there are some courses of action I can choose, such that if I choose one of those options, I get to Paris, and if I do not so choose, I do not get to Paris.

This line of thought grounds something in the neighborhood of private ownership rights, but not necessarily full private ownership. In principle, a camping-trip mode of organization that eschews full private ownership rights can satisfy the demands for wide individual freedom here affirmed. If the economy is organized as a big pot from which people take and into which they give freely, it need not be the case that one's options are limited. To switch the metaphor slightly, the economy can be organized as a big loose machine, with individuals instructed to interact with it productively, but this might be done in a wide variety of ways, and can be done with a view to minimizing constraint on individual economic choices. To see how this might go, picture an economic plan that takes people's labor and consumption desires and likely spontaneous choices as inputs, and organizes production so that people spontaneously coordinate and work gets done without any onerous compulsion that presses one individual to do one particular task. At this juncture, some might object that any such scheme would prove unimplementable. However, that objection is not in play here. Cohen is urging that the vision of socialism he espouses is ethically attractive and should be implemented if that is feasible. He does not claim that implementation in present or likely circumstances would in fact be feasible. On that issue he is explicitly agnostic.

In a similar way, if people need secure long-term access to particular material things in order to carry out their projects, individuals can be granted rights to keep communally owned items and use them exclusively for long periods of time without having full ownership rights in those things. Compare: the books in a public library, without ceasing to be

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public property, may be checked out and renewed for indefinitely long periods of time, to accommodate people who want to do things with books that take a long time. One presumes these use-rights will be limited in some way, so that a book you have checked out for a ten-year loan period may, under certain specified conditions, be subject to immediate recall by someone desperate to have that book in short order. Your long-term project may suffer in consequence, and knowing that the communal item you are privately using is subject to recall may make you somewhat anxious, but if the system is working well, your losses will be morally outweighed by others' gains. However, if we imagine people having entrepreneurial projects, the practical case for secure private ownership rights over things is strengthened.

If free use rights (under a system that eschews private ownership) take on the characteristics of property rights, we might as well say we are endorsing limited private ownership rights. We could also arrive at this position by starting with permanent nonoverrideable private ownership rights and seeing that these rights need to be weakened for various reasons (for example, progressive income taxes and estate taxes to keep inequality within bounds). As free use rights under common ownership are adapted to allow secure long-term use by an individual of particular pieces of property, and as full permanent bequeathable Lockean property rights are weakened to allow various forms of taking for the public good, eventually what is being affirmed under the rubric of socialist egalitarianism becomes close to what is being proposed by the private ownership advocate.

V. Responses to the Camping Trip Economy Ideal: Goals and Devices for Implementing the Goals

We should distinguish sharply between a set of principles or goals that specify an ideal of social organization and a set of proposals for implementing that ideal as best one can in given circumstances. In particular, let us focus on possible means for achieving Cohen's socialist goals.

The choice between socialism and capitalism as ordinarily understood involves shifts along several dimensions. The major means of production might be privately owned or owned by the public via its agent, the government. In the latter case, there might be centralization (all workers are employed by one big public bureaucracy) or decentralization. If the latter, many public firms might compete in the market, with the market results determining the remuneration to participants, or there might instead be varying degrees of insulation of individual enterprises from the sting of competition. Going back to the centralization model, there might be more or less coercion to induce individuals to play their assigned roles. Insofar as one gets an idea of Cohen's model of how a camping trip

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economy would actually be organized, he seems to have in mind centralization plus little or no coercion.[16]

We should note that there is a familiar set of devices that might be employed with a capitalist free-market economy to equalize the distribution of resources and opportunities. Alongside the free market economy with private ownership there might stand a redistributive state that taxes the income of high earners and redistributes it to low earners, compressing the distribution of income and wealth over time. To roughly the same end, one might impose taxes on gifts and bequests.[17] Another device is using the tax system to channel public funds toward subsidizing the education of children of parents who are themselves below average in income, wealth, and educational attainments. The supposition here is that the children targeted for aid are likely to have the bad luck of a worse genetic endowment and a less nurturing childhood social environment than others. Better education is conjectured to improve the lives of the recipients both by improving the marketable skills they will deploy over their adult lives and by improving their personal choice abilities to organize their lives in ways that benefit themselves and others. Both cognitive and noncognitive skills are in play here. Another possibility is to set the tax system to encourage philanthropy, voluntary giving to good causes. Who benefits from philanthropy depends on the tastes of givers, but we might expect some equalizing effect as the level of giving increases, especially if there are in place social norms and a public morality that promote Cohen-type ideals of the good society. (If we happen to know of any reliable means to alter over time the character of social norms and public morality, then add those means to the set of devices available to society for achieving broadly socialist ends by nonsocialist means.)[18]

Finally, note that coercive and noncoercive paternalism is another means by which society might work to improve the lifetime condition of the disadvantaged. Paternalist policies are policies that aim to improve the lives of adult persons and that involve a judgment on the part of the agent that the intended beneficiary of the policy is likely to be making mistakes concerning her own well-being—mistakes which the policy will ameliorate or prevent. Noncoercive paternalistic policies

[16] This last point is not a criticism of Cohen. Recall once more that his aim is to elicit the reader's assent to the principles he associates with the socialist ideal, to note that these principles cannot be fulfilled under capitalism, and to urge that if it is feasible to arrange the economy to satisfy these principles, we should do so. Which noncapitalist institutions and practices would best achieve the socialist ideal is a question he sets aside.

[17] A device favored by John Stuart Mill. See his *Principles of Political Economy,* Book II, chap. II, section 3; see also Mill, *Autobiography.*

[18] Sometimes enacting a legal prohibition can help to crystallize a social norm against what is prohibited. Allowing one's dog to defecate in public spaces and oneself not to clean up the mess used to be socially acceptable in the United States but is no longer so in many communities.

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include provision of aid to the poor from tax and transfer policies in the form of specific goods and services rather than cash.[19] Coercive paternalistic policies include the use of criminal law penalties to prevent an individual from harming herself. Whether coercive paternalism, if successful in its own terms, specially aids the disadvantaged, depends on the extent to which the mistake-prone segment of the population lies in the advantaged or in the disadvantaged group. Since, in practice, no coercive paternalist measure can be precisely set to constrain only those who would be making self-harming mistakes, such paternalism typically imposes costs, perhaps large costs, on those not prone to such mistakes, who might be concentrated among the more advantaged members of society.

The devices described above are means consistent with capitalism by which a society might seek to achieve socialist equalizing goals. Notice that to the degree that all members of society, including better-off people who are being asked to sacrifice their interests for the sake of those who are worse off, willingly accept and embrace these equalization devices and practices, society exhibits a spirit of reciprocity not captured by Cohen's idea of communal reciprocity, which is a function of how one is motivated with respect to the particular individuals with whom one is interacting. Call this willingness to accept sensible equalizing policies *wide reciprocity* or *solidarity.* A society of people who are market reciprocators, as Cohen defines the term, might also score high on solidarity. In this way, a capitalist society that achieves Cohen-style equalizing aims by the devices described above could also be one in which people's actions toward one another manifest a spirit of caring about each other in the broadest sense—each cares about all of the others. Just as the shift from a racist to a nonracist society is thought to involve a shift not only in institutions but also in the hearts and minds of men and women, a shift from capitalism simpliciter to capitalism reformed to achieve socialist goals also involves a transformation in individual motivations.

VI. Summing Up

The argument we have been examining may be summarized in this way:

1. If organizing a camping trip on socialist principles is feasible, doing so would be ethically desirable (superior to other feasible alternatives).
2. Organizing a camping trip on socialist principles is feasible.

[19] The policies mentioned here are noncoercive with respect to those who are the objects of the paternalism. Of course, they might be coercive with respect to others—for example, those taxed to provide aid in kind, take it or leave it, to people who need help and are not trusted to use cash grants wisely. On this point, thanks to Ellen Paul.

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3. Therefore, organizing a camping trip on socialist principles would be ethically desirable.

4. If organizing a camping trip on socialist principles would be ethically desirable, then if organizing an entire economy on socialist principles is feasible, doing so would be ethically desirable.

5. Therefore, if organizing an entire economy on socialist principles is feasible, doing so would be ethically desirable.

6. We don't know whether or not organizing an entire economy on socialist principles would be feasible.

7. Therefore, we don't know whether or not organizing an entire economy on socialist principles would be ethically desirable.

We should add:

8. Organizing an entire economy on socialist principles precludes maintaining capitalist economic institutions.

Our assessment of this argument to this point may be summarized as follows: First, in order to interpret the camping trip ideal as ethically attractive, we have to incorporate within it a guarantee of personal freedom—to some considerable extent, each of us should be left free to live her own life as she chooses. Since each of us wants to pursue her own projects in her own way, requiring each of us always to be devoted heart-and-soul to pursuing the common good is not fair or reasonable even in the context of a small voluntary association. Once we make this concession, we see that we must allow into the camping trip ideal some rights of private ownership of resources and some market freedom to make voluntary contracts with willing others and to cooperate on whatever terms are chosen. If we do this, we have a mixed economy. The upshot of this discussion is an amendment of premise 1, along with denial of premise 8.

Second, it is very much an open question what sorts of institutional arrangements would best promote Cohen's proposed goals of radical equality of opportunity, community solidarity, and communal reciprocity. Organizing the economy as a common enterprise, to which people are free to give and take as they choose—with the announced social norm being that they should do so in such a way that the economy sustainably achieves a high level of productivity and an equal sharing of the products—might generate lots of shirking, greedy grabbing, disgruntlement, and decreasing social productivity. This point challenges premise 8 in the argument above.

Finally, what does feasibility amount to in this discussion? The question calls into doubt the meaning of all of the premises in which feasibility figures. I take it up at the end of Section VII.C.[20]

[20] Here is one possibility: organizing an economy to achieve socialist principles is feasible if and only if making the organizational changes does lead to the fulfillment of the principles *and also* promotes people's living genuinely good not squalid lives *and*

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VII. Objections to the Principles of the Camping Trip Economy

To this point I have not directly criticized the principles that Cohen finds latent in the characterization of his ideal camping trip and that he identifies as expressing core socialist norms. I turn now to this task. In subsection A below, I challenge the particular version of luck egalitarianism that Cohen espouses. In subsection B, I criticize the principle that Cohen calls "socialist equality of opportunity." Here I challenge the idea that we ought to embrace any principle that affirms that any form of distributive equality as such—everyone having the same or getting the same—is intrinsically morally desirable. Subsection C criticizes the principle of communal solidarity or compassion, and subsection D targets the principle of communal reciprocity.

A. Luck egalitarianism: Choice versus desert

Cohen is an unreconstructed luck egalitarian in his account of distributive justice. (In his view, what justice requires is modified by the nonjustice principle of community or solidarity.) In a just luck-egalitarian regime, institutions and practices are arranged so that each person receives an initial stock of resources such that, if she conducts herself throughout her life as prudently as can reasonably be expected, and obeys moral requirements as far as can reasonably be expected, she will end up with a lifetime advantage at a level no less than anyone else achieves. "As reasonably as can be expected" signals that we should adjust the conduct that we normatively expect from a person depending on how difficult and painful it would be for her to make and execute the right choice. "Advantage" is a measure of individual welfare that amalgamates different independent dimensions of what makes someone's life go better—including, at least, material resources like income and wealth, informed preference satisfaction, and perhaps real freedom to achieve what one has good reason to value. (If equality of opportunity as just specified is unachievable owing to uncompensable differences in the brute luck that befalls people, a fallback luck-egalitarian position would be satisfied if each person has the opportunity to achieve a prospect of lifetime advantage no less than anyone else gets.)

This version of luck egalitarianism is vulnerable to the charge, first leveled by Marc Fleurbaey, that it is too unforgiving.[21] Slight imprudence

does all this without running afoul of other moral norms and constraints that we ought to respect.

[21] Marc Fleurbaey, "Equal Opportunity or Equal Social Outcome?" *Economics and Philosophy* 11 (1995): 25–56; Fleurbaey, "Freedom with Forgiveness," *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics* 4 (2005): 29–67; and Fleurbaey, *Fairness, Responsibility, and Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), chap. 10.

in youth might send one's lifetime well-being plummeting. According to luck egalitarianism, there is no justice-based case for further compensation to boost the lifetime well-being of the wayward youth. The counterclaim is that there are reasons of justice to favor compensation.

Several possible lines of criticism converge here. One seems especially compelling. This criticism holds that the moral urgency of providing aid to rescue a person from a predicament of poor life prospects varies depending on the degree to which the person's conduct in life is morally deserving.

To see the case for a desert-oriented version of luck egalitarianism, consider that if Mother Teresa has a fair initial set of opportunities and resources, and then voluntarily and freely chooses to devote herself to the poor of Calcutta, then if she ends up heading for low lifetime well-being, there is, according to choice-oriented luck egalitarianism, no case for compensation to boost her well-being. She had her chance. Or consider a spendthrift. Given an initial fair share of resources and opportunities, the spendthrift expends her resources on lesser goods now and, after failing to save for the future, faces a grim future. If the rules of society provide no compensation for people in her position, then her spendthrift ways are viciously imprudent. Suppose instead that the rules of society are set up in a very forgiving spirit, so that if you squander resources early in life, you get more, and if you squander resources again, you get still more, and so on. If faced with this set of rules, the spendthrift is being unfair to others in society if she squanders resources on lesser goods and then keeps taking more from the common pot to which all contribute. To my mind, the spendthrift in the second scenario is exploiting the compassion of her compatriots. In either scenario, the one in which the rules are unforgiving or the one in which they are forgiving, if the spendthrift is fully responsible for her choices, then they render her undeserving. Given that she is undeserving to some degree, the value of bringing it about that she gains extra units of well-being declines to some extent.

Or consider a prudent investor. She makes a wise investment in a venture that has a very good chance of success, but it turns out that the investment turns sour. Let us assume that no moral requirements should inhibit her from making the investment. This was the best deal she could get. In the terminology of luck egalitarianism, she suffers bad option luck. The social rules in effect in her society might dictate that no compensation will be forthcoming to deserving persons (or undeserving persons) who suffer bad option luck, but such rules seem unfair from a desert-oriented perspective.

To my knowledge, Cohen, while affirming choice-oriented luck egalitarianism, does not address the issue of whether that variety of luck egalitarianism is inferior to a desert-oriented egalitarian distributive principle in terms of the fairness of its implications for policy. I submit that once this issue is raised, the desert-oriented version of egalitarianism emerges as more plausible than the choice-oriented version.

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B. Rejecting the camping trip principles: Against equality

This section argues that the ideal camping trip as described by Cohen satisfies strong norms of equality that we should judge to be not attractive at all, but rather morally objectionable.

Cohen himself announces two ideals of equality as inherent in the socialist project, properly conceived. One of these is a principle of justice, a socialist ideal of equality of opportunity. This is the doctrine also known as luck egalitarianism: institutions and practices in society are to be arranged so that everyone has the same life prospects except insofar as inequalities in persons' life prospects satisfy a specific condition, namely, that anyone who ends up getting less than others gain could have obtained that greater set of advantages for herself if she had followed a course of conduct that was available to her and would not have been unreasonable for her to pursue. Or, at least, she could have chosen a course of conduct that would have given her just as good a prospect of gaining the better advantages others now have as the prospect that the others had when they chose the conduct that led to their good fortune.

Socialist equality of opportunity does not condemn great inequalities between persons that arise when some persons gain by taking risks that turn out well when those same risky choices were also available to others (and would not have been unreasonable for them to take). But another socialist principle, community, will condemn such inequalities, at least when they become sufficiently large that those whose life prospects are smaller cannot be in a relation of community with those whose life prospects are greater. Fellow members of the same community will help those who are far worse off than others if the better-off people can do so, and they will do this whatever the cause of some people's being far worse off.

Socialist equality of opportunity is a justice principle that permits us to allow people to languish in their bad fortune if they brought it on themselves by their choice or neglect. Socialist community equality is a principle of compassion that requires better offs to improve the lot of worse offs even if the latter are worse off than others through their own fault or choice.

Neither form of equality is morally compelling, so even if these norms militate against acceptance of the capitalist market economy, that does not give us good reason to reject the capitalist market economy. This seems to me the true reason why the description of the camping trip, and of the projected extension of the camping trip into a camping trip economy, does not generate grounds to reject the institutions of the capitalist market economy, on the assumption that capitalist institutions cannot satisfy the camping trip ideals. The ideals, in any case, should not command our allegiance.

Recall that socialist equal opportunity (SEO) requires that no one be disadvantaged by inequality in the distribution of social benefits unless

the person could have avoided a lower than average share by some action that he could have taken and that it would have been reasonable for him to have taken. For example, if others now have more income and job satisfaction and I have less, and if I could have undertaken a job that would have afforded me as much as the fortunate ones are now getting, and if taking that job would have been a reasonable choice for me to have made, then the inequality does not violate SEO. If others are in robust good health, because they brushed their teeth daily and submitted to regular dental check-ups, and I could have enjoyed the same robust good health had I reasonably done the same, then, again, this inequality does not violate SEO. In contrast, if you are strong and I am weak, and you are smart and I am dull-witted, by dint of unequal endowments of native talent, and if we work equally assiduously to contribute to economic production, and you produce and earn a lot and I produce and earn a little, and in consequence your life prospects are better and mine worse, then SEO is violated.

What, if anything, is wrong with SEO? My objection is not to the socialist component of the ideal, but to the equality component. A broad objection sweeps away doctrines that hold that it matters morally—intrinsically and for its own sake—how one person's condition compares with the condition of others, and, *a fortiori,* doctrines that hold that it matters that everyone have the same in some respect, or have equal opportunity in some respect.

Think back to the camping trip scenario. Suppose some campers are more naturally fit and athletic than others. There is a fantastic climb to a magnificent view, which some of us can manage, and some cannot. If the more fit and athletic are already enjoying advantages on the trip that others lack, then organizing a climb to the view for the best climbers will improve the condition of the better off and will make the overall distribution of advantages even more unequal, and we can easily imagine that the inequalities are going to the better endowed just in virtue of their unchosen and undeserved special good luck. So equality of outcome and socialist equality of opportunity condemn the climb, unless the pattern of benefits and burdens it generates can be offset by some compensating redistributive mechanism. Suppose any such deliberate redistribution would involve costs that outweigh its advantages. So then we should forgo the climb? I think not. A sensible community of campers will not merely allow the climb, which promises a windfall benefit to some, but will take steps to make it possible. Unfit to participate in the climb myself, I should be willing to undertake some moderate sacrifice to make it possible for others, if the benefits they will get sufficiently outweigh my sacrifices.

If you share my endorsement of the imagined nonegalitarian camping ethos, notice that various rationales might underlie this response. One rationale is straight utilitarianism: In the situation as described, helping to

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bring about the special climb that boosts the well-being of the already better off yields a net gain in aggregate well-being (well-being summed across all persons), and *that* is why doing so is morally right. I suggest that a more appealing principle is priority: gaining a benefit for a person is morally more valuable, the greater the amount of well-being increase the benefit will yield, and also morally more valuable, the worse off the person would otherwise be in lifetime well-being. The worse off a person would be over the course of her life absent the benefit we might gain for her now, the greater the moral priority that attaches to the project of bringing about this gain. We should maximize, not the aggregate sum of well-being, but priority-weighted well-being.[22] This means that further benefits to people who are already very well off are discounted somewhat, the amount of the discount depending on how well off they are, in determining the moral value of generating the further benefits. If there was a limited quantity of mosquito netting available, and if anyone would gain about the same amount of well-being from netting protection, then there is more value to be gained by giving the netting to a person who would otherwise be more worse off, in the absence of this benefit. So it matters to the judgment about the special climb, on this view, that those who can benefit from it would gain a very great benefit, so that it is worth incurring some cost to help them get the benefit, even if they are already better off than anyone else. The same reasoning applies to decisions that involve preventing, lessening, or channeling losses.

From the prioritarian standpoint, equalizing moves are often morally desirable. For example, any time you can bring about a reduction in the well-being of someone who is enjoying an above-average life, and thereby bring about a same-sized gain in the well-being of a person who now is below the average, without reversing their position, and without affecting anyone else's well-being, one should bring about the equalizing transfer, according to the prioritarian.[23] This is so not because it matters how much one person has relative to another, but rather because benefits matter more to a person, the worse off in absolute terms she would otherwise be. Favoring those who are worse off than others is, for the prioritarian, sometimes a shadow cast by what genuinely matters, never something that is morally desirable per se. The same goes for equality of opportunity in any version. More opportunities for people are better than fewer (so long as the opportunities will be used in ways that improve the quality of people's lives), and gaining opportunities for a person is likely to be more

[22] On the idea of priority, see Derek Parfit, "Equality or Priority?" reprinted in Matthew Clayton and Andrew Williams, eds., *The Ideal of Equality* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 81–125. See also the discussion of "extended humanitarianism" in Larry S. Temkin, *Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), chap. 9; and Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[23] The condition described in the text is the Pigou-Dalton axiom from welfare economics, which any version of priority satisfies.

valuable, the worse off the person would otherwise be. But equality of opportunity is not a concern for the prioritarian.

Priority conflicts with SEO when achieving or sustaining the latter ideal requires an expenditure of resources that would do more to improve people's lives, in priority-weighted terms, if deployed in some other way. SEO requires eliminating inequalities due to unchosen luck at whatever cost, whereas priority may require letting some such inequalities stand. Another source of conflict between priority and SEO comes into view when people have had the opportunities that SEO demands, and some have squandered these opportunities and now face very grim life prospects, which reasonable action on their part could have avoided. SEO is satisfied in such cases, and is not troubled by inequalities of this sort; but if these people are now very badly off in absolute terms, then priority assigns high weight to benefits that might be secured for them. To revert to the camping trip scenario, suppose some campers recklessly go kayaking without considering the likely dangers, and end up in danger of drowning. They will die unless helped, but if assistance is provided, their life prospects become as good as anyone else's. Given that the inequality of condition here is one for which the threatened kayakers can reasonably be held responsible, the huge looming inequality in life prospects between them and the other campers is not an inequality that violates SEO and calls for correction. In contrast, priority regards it as an especially urgent matter to help them, given the low well-being they will have without help and the great gain in well-being that help can provide (presumably at moderate cost).[24]

SEO is a radical and demanding ideal, one that contemporary wealthy market societies surely are far from satisfying. However, as the example of the imprudent kayakers illustrates, it is also a harsh, unforgiving doctrine in its implications for situations in which individuals bring about very bad outcomes for themselves that they could have avoided by reasonable, prudent choice of conduct.[25] SEO represents an attempt to weld

[24] If priority is yoked to desert, then there may be a consideration that dampens the reason to aid those whose lives are going badly (depending on the degree, if any, to which their conduct has been undeserving) as well as the prioritarian consideration that amplifies the reason to aid. The point in the text still holds. Giving weight to how much benefit to people one's actions would achieve, and giving weight to how badly off they would be absent that benefit, renders priority more prone to recommend extending aid than Cohen-style luck egalitarianism in many circumstances.

[25] There is a large literature debating the merits of socialist equality of opportunity, the doctrine also known as luck egalitarianism. On luck egalitarianism, see Richard Arneson, "Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare," *Philosophical Studies* 56 (1989): 77–93; Arneson, "Egalitarianism and the Undeserving Poor," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 5 (1997): 327–50; and G. A. Cohen, "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice," *Ethics* 99 (1989): 906–44; see also Nagel, *Equality and Partiality;* Ronald Dworkin, "What Is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare; Part 2: Equality of Resources," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 10 (1981): 185–246, 283–345; and Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). For criticism, see Fleurbaey, "Equal Opportunity or Equal Social Outcome?"; Jonathan Wolff, "Fairness, Respect, and the Egalitarian Ethos," *Philosophy and*

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concern for equality and concern for personal responsibility. Integrating personal responsibility into moral doctrines about what we owe one another is perhaps reasonable, but if construed as a fundamental principle of justice always to be obeyed, rather than as one consideration among many in a pluralist theory, SEO carries out the integration in an excessively rigid way.[26]

C. *Rejecting Cohen's principles: Communal compassion*

Cohen's statement of socialist principles is responsive to the problem just noted. As I noted previously, he sees two principles as expressing the camping trip ideal: socialist equality of opportunity and a principle of community with two components. Members of an ideal community care about each other and care about belonging to a society whose members care about each other. This caring includes a disposition to help out those who are worse off than others. This component generates principled reasons to equalize people's condition beyond what SEO demands.

My objection is not to a requirement of compassion, which could naturally take the form of a principle of beneficence, but to the requirement that compassion should dispose us to promote equality. Again, if it does not matter morally how one person's condition compares to that of another, it does not matter morally whether or not one person's condition is equal to that of others.

One might suppose that a central animating aim of socialism would be to bring it about that people have good lives, and that the better their lives go, the more the socialist aim is achieved. More exactly, the aim is to bring

Public Affairs 27 (1998): 97–122; Elizabeth S. Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109 (1999): 287–337; Samuel Scheffler, "What Is Egalitarianism?" *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 31 (2003): 5–39; and Susan Hurley, *Justice, Luck, and Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). For responses to criticism, see Richard Arneson, "Equality of Opportunity for Welfare Defended and Recanted," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 7 (1999): 488–97; Arneson, "Luck Egalitarianism and Prioritarianism," *Ethics* 110 (2000): 339–49; Arneson, "Luck Egalitarianism Interpreted and Defended," *Philosophical Topics* 32, nos. 1 and 2 (Spring and Fall 2004): 1–20 (actual date of publication September, 2006); and Carl Knight, *Luck Egalitarianism: Equality, Responsibility, and Justice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). See also Kok-Chor Tan, "A Defense of Luck Egalitarianism," *Journal of Philosophy* 105, no. 11 (2008); and Shlomi Segall, *Health, Luck, and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[26] If priority by itself swings too far in the other direction, giving no intrinsic weight (just instrumental weight) to factors of responsibility and individual deservingness, one can restore balance by embracing a double priority—priority for the worse off along with priority for the more deserving. Each person earns a deservingness score on an absolute scale, and the individual's score dampens or amplifies the moral value of gaining a benefit or avoiding a loss for that individual. I interpret deservingness subjectively, roughly as conscientious effort, trying to conform to the right and the good—but this is a large issue. See Richard Arneson, "Desert and Equality," in Nils Holtug and Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, eds., *Egalitarianism: New Essays on the Nature and Value of Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 262–93. See also Arneson, "Moral Worth and Moral Luck" (work in progress; essay available from the author).

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about good for people, fairly distributed across people. Priority gives one interpretation of the requirement that the aim of achieving more good be balanced appropriately against the further aim of fairly distributing the good. In Cohen's camping trip model of the socialist ideal, the goal of bringing about good lives for people fades into the background, if it can be located within the ideal at all. In the foreground is the aim of equalizing people's condition.

When Cohen adds the qualification that socialism, though desirable, might not be feasible, he evidently does not mean merely to ask whether there is any way his stated ideals might be achieved, at whatever cost to other values. He means to ask whether his ideal can be achieved consistently with adequate fulfillment of other values that he leaves unstated. Clearly a major element of these unstated values is quality of life. Would the attempt to implement socialist equality in given circumstances lead to a malfunction of the economy and a deterioration of the quality of life that people can achieve with the resources and opportunities the economy provides? If the answer is yes, then socialism is not feasible. There is in this way of putting the issue an odd displacement of values. To my mind, what Cohen shoves to the side under the heading of "feasibility" should come front and center. I cannot argue for this claim here, but I would claim that once one gives good for people its due in the formulation of animating principles, one ends up with prioritarian beneficence: choose policies that bring about the best outcome one can achieve, where the best outcome is the one in which moral value is maximized, and where moral value is a function of achieving good for people and priority for the worse off.

D. Rejecting Cohen's principles: Communal reciprocity

Cohen's camping trip model exhibits the fulfillment of yet another norm, besides socialist equality of opportunity and communal equality, that a society whose economic relations are organized around private ownership and market exchange will have no tendency to fulfill. This is community in its second, motivational aspect: communal reciprocity. This is "the anti-market principle according to which I serve you not because of what I can get in return by doing so but because you need my service, and you, for the same reason, serve me."[27] I act for your benefit, and securing an expectation of benefit to myself is not a necessary condition for my choice, but I do, as a matter of fact, expect that some return will

[27] Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* 39. Communal reciprocity is not unconditional provision of service to others; one does not continue to serve others who are able to reciprocate but do not. The communal reciprocator would prefer to cooperate with others who are similarly disposed to cooperate with her, even if she could escape the burdens of cooperation and benefit from the cooperation of others without contributing to the cooperative scheme herself.

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be forthcoming, and it is. Cohen contrasts communal reciprocity with market reciprocity, according to which, when interacting, I agree to serve you only because I expect to profit, and you agree to serve me on the same conditional basis. Also, as a market reciprocator, I try to arrange the service so that I benefit as much as I can from the interaction. (My motivation need not be self-interested, but in economic interaction I do not aim to benefit those I interact with except insofar as that is a means to maximizing my profit from the interaction.) In contrast, when motivated by communal reciprocity, each person prefers "I serve you and you serve me" to "You serve me and I don't serve you."

Communal reciprocity has a certain appeal. I doubt that it is morally required. A moral agent should dispose herself to conform her conduct to moral principles, to do what is morally right in whatever circumstances she might face. That might or might not involve actual reciprocity with those with whom one interacts. Perhaps I am disabled and you are able, and morality requires that you steadily serve me without any pay-back from me (if we are disposed to be moral, we are disposed to treat one another well in any possible circumstances in which morality requires doing so). Perhaps you are very talented and I am not, but I can exploit a bargaining advantage and negotiate interaction with you on lopsided terms, in order to help distant needy strangers (as morality, let us say, requires). In this imagined scenario, the spirit in which I ought to interact and negotiate with you is not the spirit of communal reciprocity as Cohen proposes, but rather the spirit of market reciprocity. Does my hard bargaining preclude community between us? If the hard bargaining on my part is justified by moral principles, then in theory you should appreciate this, and endorse what is being done to you in a cool moment (even if you would not voluntarily sacrifice yourself to aid the distant needy strangers if you were given the choice).

One should be motivated to interact with others in ways that are justifiable, and hence justifiable to those with whom one is interacting. But this need not involve being motivated to interact with others only in ways that are of benefit to them. Sometimes *A* using *B* as a means to help *C* is morally acceptable, and hence morally justifiable to *B*, who is being used as a means in the interaction.

E. Further comment: Promoting socialist reciprocity and rejecting the market

I have been criticizing communal reciprocity as morally undesirable per se. However, suppose one rejects these criticisms, and affirms communal reciprocity as ethically desirable. One cannot will Cohen-style reciprocity into existence, but where it is feasible to try to inculcate it, this is a sensible policy. But so interpreted, a choice for communal reciprocity over market reciprocity does not seem to have much to do with a choice

between a private market and a socialist mode of economic organization. A society entirely free of private ownership and market exchange could be populated with market reciprocators, and a capitalist society could be populated with communal reciprocators.

There is no necessary connection between maintaining capitalist institutions and promoting market reciprocity. First, a capitalist market is defined in terms of the rights of property owners and the rules regulating contract and exchange. Nothing is stipulated about motivation. Nothing in the institutional set-up requires that individuals interact on a purely self-interested basis. It is supposed to be a nice feature of the system that it facilitates mutually beneficial cooperation among mutually disinterested agents, but the idea here is not to celebrate selfishness but to note that the system can produce pretty good results when staffed with people pretty much as they are, not as we might wish them to be. Maintaining a capitalist set-up is consistent with instilling an ethos that encourages workers to give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, encourages sellers to prefer to provide good products rather than shoddy ones to consumers even if the profit from shoddy products would be greater, encourages employers to provide good jobs at good pay to their workers in exchange for good work, and so on.

In a society with a capitalist economy, the legal rules tolerate profit-maximizing within the legal constraints. But this legal toleration of profit-maximizing leaves it entirely open whether or not public morality should condemn certain manifestations of greed and whether social norms should frown on some kinds of behavior that are neither legally nor morally impermissible but nevertheless not done by the best people. If the public morality condemns and the prevalent social norms frown on these kinds of behavior to some degree, the capitalist market economy reflects a wide range of possible compromises between extolling the pursuit of self-interest within broadly tolerant moral constraints and flatly requiring that each person always should behave as an altruistic impartial angel would.

Second, in any event, a capitalist market economy, to function well, requires agents who are not motivated purely by self-interest, but rather disposed to constrain their pursuit of gain by refraining from theft of property, cheating in dealing with those with whom one is bargaining and interacting, fraudulent treatment of others, using the threat of force to induce others to interact with one on favorable terms, and so on.

Cohen urges that in market interaction, participants standardly act from greed or fear or some mix of these unsavory motives. I act from greed insofar as I hope to gather as much as I can of the gains from our cooperation, and from fear insofar as, when acting within a competitive market, I am concerned that unless I behave in whatever way is maximally efficient, the forces of competition will drive me to the wall (and even if I do behave efficiently, the ensemble of others' behavior may bring

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it about that I lose my job or my business and hence my livelihood). This is a morally bad situation, from which we should extricate ourselves if we can. In Cohen's words: "Every market, even a socialist market, is a system of predation. Our attempt to get beyond predation has thus far failed. I do not think the right conclusion is to give up."[28]

In response I would say that how fearful it is reasonable to be in market interaction depends partly on the likelihood that I will suffer bad luck and partly on how bad the consequences of bad luck would be for me. If the labor market is tight, losing my job leaves me with lots of alternative jobs I can secure. If there is a safety net in place, the consequences of losing my job and being unable to find another will not be too bad. If I now have an especially favorable position, there is the chance of losing it, but presumably this will be true under any mode of economic organization in which there is coordination to keep the economy performing efficiently. Loving my baking job under socialism, I must fear a shift in consumer tastes that would require the bakery I work for to close and me to seek another line of work. Cohen is indulging in purple prose here.

Nothing in the nature of a market requires that anybody be motivated by greedy selfishness. Leaving aside the point already made, that the desire to get as much as I can in interaction with you is compatible with my ultimate goal being the achievement of maximal fair gains for others, it is also true that the rules of market exchange allow me to share the gains of trade with those with whom I interact. Even if the market for babysitting services is competitive, nothing blocks me from paying the babysitter I employ an above-market rate of pay. The "market" does not block people engaged in exchange from softening the terms of exchange in the direction of egalitarian sharing. When I engage in arm's length transactions, as when I purchase books online, I simply pay the going price, but I do not see why the motives of greed or fear must be assumed to be driving the parties on either side of the exchange. Again, I see purple prose in Cohen's texts.

It is possible that, over time, interacting with people through institutions of market exchange tends to cause people to become more greedy and fearful in their underlying motivations, compared to the motivations they would tend to acquire under alternative institutions, but Cohen provides no empirical evidence for a broad causal claim of this sort that would justify the conviction that endorsing his moral vision should press one to reject market institutions.

F. Summing up

Cohen suggests that reflecting on his camping trip story should lead us to embrace the moral principles the camping trip exemplifies: socialist

[28] Ibid., 82.

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equality of opportunity, communal reciprocity, and communal solidarity. I have criticized these principles. In my view, the ideal that better encapsulates what we should find worthy of endorsement in traditional egalitarian socialist aspirations is desert-oriented priority. This says that we ought to maximize moral value, which resides only in individual well-being or personal good weighted by fair distribution concerns. The moral value of getting a benefit to a person is (1) greater, the greater the well-being gain it would bring to her; (2) greater, the worse off in lifetime well-being she would otherwise be, absent this benefit; and (3) greater, the more morally deserving the person is. (One becomes deserving by conscientiously striving to conform one's behavior to what one takes to be correct moral standards, while conscientiously striving to identify those standards.) I admit that desert-oriented priority is a mouthful, not an inspiring slogan to emblazon on one's banners and bumper stickers. Desert-oriented priority is an abstract principle that, in my view, incorporates the plural goals that a decent society with a sensible orientation to human equality would be dedicated to fulfilling.

Priority appears to be silent on the issues of desirable human motivation that Cohen takes to be at the core of the socialist vision. If we drop the motivational ideals of communal reciprocity and communal solidarity that Cohen affirms, what replaces them? To this question no simple answer is adequate. I say that one is more deserving, the more committed one is to doing what is morally right and the more committed one is to trying to figure out what that is. However, human motives are also tools and impediments to getting good for oneself and others, so we should strive to shape our own motives, our dispositions to act, so that they help us achieve sensible goals. To be a good friend, one needs to develop the motives appropriate to friendship; to be a good soldier or entrepreneur or mechanic or jazz performer, one needs to acquire motives suitable for the chosen role. One size does not fit all in this domain of life. Cohen prescribes that one should engage in economic activities moved by concern to help others and to foster equal shares, and he disparages competitive self-seeking, which he associates with capitalism. To this, my principled reply is evasive: It all depends. What motives will be the best we can acquire will vary with our circumstances, the underlying bent of our personality, and our morally appropriate plan of life.

VIII. The Subordination of Liberalism, Capitalism, and Socialism to Priority

Although the previous section discusses what I have been calling "socialist" moral principles—socialist principles of social justice—we should recall that, so far, it is entirely an open question what sort of economic and social arrangements would be the best means of implementing these principles. Laissez-faire capitalism might be the best institutional arrange-

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ment, the one that best promotes the principles in some possible circumstances, and perhaps in likely or actual circumstances. This point holds for Cohen's proposed set of socialist principles as well as for my suggested replacement set, although this point is somewhat obscured by Cohen's highlighting of justice as equality and his sidelining into constraints of feasibility his commitment, implicit but surely real, to the aim of improving people's lives by the measure of the total well-being they achieve. At any rate, although I am happy to present prioritarian consequentialism as a good representation of the animating ideals of the socialist tradition, the doctrine is definitely noncommittal on the choice of economic systems. Priority tilts toward socialism only by ruling out any affirmation of fundamental moral rights that by themselves guarantee capitalist property rights independently of the empirical facts.

How strongly does priority tilt toward equalization of people's prospects on the ground that benefits to a person matter more, the worse off in absolute terms the person otherwise would be over the course of her life? This depends on how much weight is assigned to benefiting the worse off as compared to increasing the size of the well-being boost for the one who is benefited. Priority as characterized so far identifies a family of principles, not a particular position; one gets a determinate principle only by specifying these weights. In other words, priority is a proposed framework for determining what social justice requires, not a proposed specific moral principle. I suppose the objectively correct weights are determined by reflective equilibrium methods—what would an ideally competent judge determine as correct weights after reflectively considering all relevant examples where this trade-off issue arises?

The policy implications of priority, even with determinate weights assigned, depend on what will happen in the long run under various policy choices. Policy choices made now affect the level and substance of resources and opportunities that the economy will make available to future people, so the interests of future well-off and badly-off persons hang in the balance when one decides to what extent social policy should equalize resource holdings to increase the life prospects of people who are currently disadvantaged. The empirical facts here are hard to discern, and left-wingers and right-wingers notoriously disagree as to what they are. For example, we might agree that priority rightly interpreted tells us that if a certain tax cut would reduce the unemployment rate over the next five years to a greater extent than would feasible alternative policies, we ought to implement the tax cut—but we might disagree on the relevant facts. Since the empirical facts are, after all, empirical facts, with improved social science we should eventually tend to agree about what to do insofar as we are in agreement on the norms that should govern our actions.

The reader will have noticed that in the course of the discussion of the camping trip ideal and the principles we should embrace as a result of reflection on it, liberalism in the sense of a fundamental moral

commitment to strong guarantees of individual freedom has dropped out of the picture. I have mentioned already that it is implicit in Cohen's discussion that the pursuit of the common good is morally constrained by a prerogative of each individual to pursue her own projects and live as she chooses to some extent. But this idea stays latent in his treatment of socialism-versus-capitalism. My critique of Cohen and my suggested revision of the principles he embraces leaves this fundamental commitment to individual freedom by the wayside. If affirming and implementing rights to individual liberty are part of the best strategy for achieving prioritarian justice, then priority calls for affirming and implementing those rights to liberty, and if not, not. Individual freedom becomes an entirely derivative (and in that sense subordinate) ideal. Both freedom as wide-option freedom and freedom as personal prerogative have only this derivative, subordinate status. Is the proposal then to abandon liberalism?

I do not want to argue about who is entitled to attach the appealing word "liberalism" to his favored doctrine, but I note that the broadly egalitarian consequentialism being proposed here can be associated with a fairly robust contingent commitment to liberal norms. These norms affirm individual rights and freedoms because, and insofar as, they function as core means needed under broad conditions of modern society to implement prioritarian aims as far as that can be done. This is the liberal tradition of which John Stuart Mill is perhaps the foremost theorist. Commitment to liberalism on this basis is not a matter of commitment to liberal rights come what may, but to the goal of good for people fairly distributed, a goal that will be best fulfilled, in certain circumstances, if we adhere to familiar liberal rights. Fundamental principles plus the empirical facts imply liberalism—in certain respects, and to a degree. In the following section, I indicate a further respect in which priority affirms only a conditional, "iffy" commitment to liberal freedoms. The freedom to live as one chooses is prized, roughly speaking, as a means to the good life for oneself and others, not as morally valuable per se. The discussion proceeds once again by criticizing Cohen's position.

IX. Against Multidimensional "Advantage"

A surprising aspect of Cohen's critique of free market exchange economies is that he does not criticize the market on the ground that it caters to effective demand—that is, to choices, induced by preferences, backed by dollars. Resource egalitarianism aims to equalize the resources that people command, so that each person has a comparable opportunity to pay for goods and services according to the strength of her preferences for them. Cohen is not a pure resource egalitarian, so he holds that justice should look beyond the distribution of resources in order to see what distribution of opportunities for advantage, for well-being in some sense,

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is thereby generated. If you are large, and I am small, then equal external resources would not give us equal opportunity for adequate nutrition, and if your nonvoluntary or reasonably formed preferences are expensive to satisfy, and mine cheap, then equal external resources would not, according to Cohen, secure equal opportunity for advantage in the relevant sense, whatever exactly that is.

In fact, a market economy has no necessary tendency to satisfy people's overall preferences over the course of their lives. The market caters to what one wants now. If I want to eat doughnuts, and it is predictable in advance that there will be consumer demand for doughnuts, then the competitive market tends to elicit provision of doughnuts for sale. If I later come to want to stop eating doughnuts and lose weight, the market provides diet aids, and even weight-loss resorts in remote doughnutless settings. If still later I want doughnuts, the market will tend to provide taxi drivers who will take me from the remote resort to the doughnut store, or entrepreneurs who will offer to toss me doughnuts over the resort walls for a fee, and so on.[29]

But suppose the market economy, suitably regulated, provides equal opportunity for equal proportionate satisfaction of everyone's life aims or preferences weighted by their importance (as rated by the individual who has the aims and preferences). An advocate of equal informed desire satisfaction might protest that the market economy as described might not be offering equal opportunity to all to become well informed. Progress on this front could be made by insistence on a fair system of education coupled with requirements that sellers of goods and services must provide potential purchasers full relevant information about them. A socialist might object that an economy organized around market exchange might do a good job satisfying individual preferences but still be unjust in virtue of its failure to provide adequately for fulfillment of everyone's needs. Distinguishing preference satisfaction from need fulfillment in this way involves an appeal to a perfectionist or objective-list account of human well-being—according to which there is a correct list of items that are together constitutive of well-being, and the more one gets of the items on the list, the better one's life goes for one.

Cohen appeals to the idea that the just economy is organized to provide equal opportunity for fulfillment of human needs, but to my knowledge he does not invoke the contrast between preferences and needs to express agreement with a perfectionist or objective-list account of individual well-being.

[29] See Robert Sugden, "Why Incoherent Preferences Do Not Justify Paternalism," *Constitutional Political Economy* 19 (2008): 226–46; and Sugden, "Opportunity as Mutual Advantage," *Economics and Philosophy* 26 (2010): 47–68. Sugden is responding to Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). I borrow the example of the individual's changing diet preferences from a lecture presentation by Sugden.

The omission seems consequential for the character of his critique of market exchange. In principle, a market economy could operate under constraints that render it an egalitarian market economy by some measures of equality, while providing almost no human need fulfillment. In this imagined market economy, exchange always has this character: I offer to sell you cotton candy, and you willingly purchase and consume it, thereby satisfying a trivial desire (for now) but fulfilling no significant need. (Notice that Cohen-style communal reciprocity could take the form of my desiring to serve you by doing what satisfies your desires now, in the expectation that you will want to do the same for me.)

Affirming or rejecting an objective-list account of human well-being should have a significant impact on one's position on the desirability of organizing economic life around market exchange. Be that as it may, Cohen surely owes us some account of what is to be equalized under an egalitarian theory such as the one he espouses. If Cohen affirms equality, he must uphold some standard for measuring people's condition, such that, in principle, given any two individuals, we can tell whether their condition is the same, or the condition of one is inferior, or perhaps that the situation is indeterminate in this respect. If there is *equal,* then there is *more* and *less.*

Here is Cohen's account.[30] (1) What is to be equalized is advantage, and there are several dimensions of advantage. (2) There is no exact formula or index for determining, given a person's scores on each of the various dimensions of advantage, what her overall score is. (3) Some overall comparisons can be made, and thus it is sometimes the case that, say, Smith is overall in a more advantageous condition than Jones, and sometimes we can detect that this is so. (4) The dimensions of advantage include resources, welfare (by this Cohen means desire satisfaction or maybe informed desire satisfaction), and need satisfaction (by this Cohen means gaining items on the list of objectively valuable goods). There may be further dimensions; Cohen is noncommittal on this point. (5) The morally right measure of advantage need not correspond to what an individual rationally aims at, when she is trying to make her life go better for her rather than worse. Cohen explicitly denies that "[t]he egalitarian distributor should distribute according to what sensible people care about, as such."[31] For example, perhaps no sensible person cares about desire satisfaction, as such, but because people embrace different conceptions of the good, proper respect for people may require distributing on the basis of desire satisfaction, as a way of maintaining neutrality across people's differing conceptions of their good.

One might worry that if people value resources instrumentally (that is, for what the resources can do to help advance their aims), then if

[30] Cohen, "Expensive Taste Rides Again," in Justine Burley, ed., *Dworkin and His Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).
[31] Ibid., 16.

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life-aim fulfillment (desire satisfaction) is deemed a determiner of advantage, resources should not be. To count both aim fulfillment and resources as determiners of advantage would be, in effect, to count people better off if they maintain a comfortable body temperature, and also to count, as separate dimensions of how well off they are, the number of blankets and parkas and air-conditioning units they possess (valued only as means to comfortable body temperature maintenance). I believe Cohen's response would be that resources constitute an important kind of freedom, and this counts as a distinct component of advantage or overall good condition of a person's life. Someone with more money in his pocket, in the context of a well-functioning economy, has more choices than someone with less money. Freedom has more than an instrumental value.

As I read Cohen, he is not skeptical concerning the existence of an objective standard of well-being or human need satisfaction. But if one has this standard, the further dimensions of well-being he adds are otiose. If one holds that no such objective standard is available, one should uphold a standard in the family of Ronald Dworkin's "no envy" test, which does not require interpersonal comparisons of welfare or well-being.[32] The middle ground that Cohen tries to occupy is unstable.

Suppose for simplicity that the items on the objective list include pleasurable or happy experience, significant achievement, systematic knowledge, friendship and love, and healthy family ties. Now imagine a person who achieves no desire satisfaction, never gets what he wants for its own sake, over the course of his life. What he aims at he fails to get, but as a by-product of his efforts he gains rich fulfillment in terms of the objective list. (He does not form retrospective desires for the good things he gets; his desires are always forward-looking, itching for what he is not going to get.) He does not experience the continual frustration of desire as deeply frustrating; he is happy. Zero preference satisfaction or desire fulfillment, I submit, is compatible with living an excellent life, rich in fulfillment, high in well-being. This is still compatible with holding that one's life would be still better if, in addition to objective goods, it contained desire fulfillment. But suppose there is a trade-off: to gain any desire satisfaction, one must sacrifice some objective good. If the objective list is correctly conceived, I would maintain that one should regard desires purely as helps or hindrances to

[32] On the theory of fairness, see Hal Varian, "Equity, Envy, and Efficiency," *Journal of Economic Theory* 9 (1974): 63–91. The "no envy" test is satisfied with respect to a group of persons, each of whom has a bundle of resources, if and only if no individual would prefer to have the bundle of any other person rather than his own bundle. The idea is deployed in Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), chap. 2, pp. 65–119. For a philosophically sophisticated discussion of the family of fairness views (principles of distributive justice that do not rely on any interpersonal comparisons of welfare or well-being or the like), see Marc Fleurbaey, *Fairness, Responsibility, and Welfare.*

getting what matters. (If desire satisfaction did matter, it should be included as a component on the list of objective goods.)

Suppose, in contrast, that a person is fortunate in gaining huge piles of resources throughout his life. However, by some fluke, he fails to satisfy any of his desires or life aims and fails to achieve any items at all on the objective list. Enormous wealth or resource accumulation, I submit, is compatible with a zero score in fulfillment on any dimension that matters. Perhaps I had lots of opportunities and options, but failed to use any of them well, and gained zero fulfillment. In this scenario, I submit that the piles of resources are no consolation.

Freedom in certain respects may be partially constitutive of valuable achievements and valuable human relationships. Freely and voluntarily devoting oneself successfully to scientific achievement is intrinsically superior to coerced equally successful achievement. Acceptance of this point does not require, or support, upholding resource holdings as constituting a separate and distinct dimension of the advantage that makes a person's life go better rather than worse for her.

If the idea of an objectively correct standard of human good is an illusion, then it is disrespectful for an egalitarian society to treat an individual as though there were such a standard that is the appropriate measure of her condition for purposes of determining what we owe to her and she to us. However, if there is an objectively correct standard, I do not see how it is wrongfully disrespectful to me to rely on this standard to measure my condition against others', even if I myself embrace some mistaken standard. Cohen's position on what is to be equalized under an egalitarian theory of distribution mixes and matches elements of opposed views that do not cohere together.

X. Conclusion

Cohen argues that the principles that are implemented in the camping trip model cannot be implemented to any great degree in an economy organized around market exchange and private ownership. These principles are ethically attractive, so if we can achieve them to a greater degree by abolishing market exchange and private ownership and organizing the economy on the camping trip model, without sacrificing other values to an extent that morally outweighs any gains we can make by embracing the camping trip ideal, we ought to do so. I have argued that it is not clear to what extent market exchange and private ownership must be hindrances to greater achievement of camping trip ideals, and that in any case those ideals appear to require market exchange and private ownership. Moreover, I have argued that the camping trip principles as interpreted by Cohen are not ethically attractive; they are inferior to rivals. Some of the values Cohen leaves out of

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his discussion altogether, or at most treats as part of a catch-all category of constraints on feasibility, deserve to be included as an explicit part of the socialist or camping trip ideal suitably amended. Among these occluded values are good lives for people. Cohen's opposition to the market rests partly on a mistaken affirmation of equality as intrinsically morally valuable, and in other respects is more verbal than substantive.

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