

## Why Not Socialism?

Ryan Doody

February 23, 2016

### The Two Principles of Socialism

Two principles are realized in Cohen's example of the socialist camping trip: an *egalitarian principle* and a *principle of community*.

**Socialist Equality of Opportunity:** "Socialist equality of opportunity seeks to correct for *all* unchosen disadvantages, disadvantages, that is, for which the agent cannot herself reasonably be held responsible, whether they be disadvantages that reflect social misfortune or disadvantages that reflect natural misfortune." (pg. 18)

If this principle of equal opportunity held, there might yet still be difference in outcomes — some might have more goods than others — but they would "reflect nothing but differences of taste and choice, not differences in natural and social capacities and powers."

**Socialist Community Principle:** "[T]he requirement of community that is central here is that people care about, and, where necessary and possible, care for, one another, and, too, care that they care about one another." (pg. 34-5)

This principle curbs some of the inequalities that the egalitarian principle permits.

### Three Principles of Equal Opportunity

1. **Bourgeois Equality of Opportunity:** removes socially constructed status restrictions (both formal and informal) on life chances.
  - *Examples:* serfs; rigid legally-encoded class system; racism; sexism; etc.
2. **Left-Liberal Equality of Opportunity:** removes the constraining effect of social circumstances — "those circumstances of birth and upbringing that constrain not by assigning an inferior *status* to their victims, but by nevertheless causing them to labor and live under substantial disadvantages" — on life chances.

Egalitarianism is a view about equality: everyone should have an equal amount. An equal amount of *what*, though? An equal amount of money? An equal amount of happiness? An equal amount of sandwiches? How about: *an equal amount of opportunity?*

Corrects for *social* disadvantage, but not for inborn, *native* disadvantage.

- *Examples*: social background; early education; etc.

3. **Socialist Equality of Opportunity**: removes *all* unchosen disadvantages (including those that result from natural misfortune) on life chances.

- *Examples*: height; strength; intelligence; agility; attractiveness; creativity; etc.

Socialist Equality of Opportunity still allows for three kinds of inequalities: those that arise from *variety of preference and choice across lifestyles*, those that arise from *regrettable choice*, and those that arise from *option luck*.

1. **Differences in Goods**. "People differ in their tastes, not only across consumer items, but also between working only a few hours and consuming rather little on the one hand, and working long hours and consuming rather more on the other. . . . [A]nd there can be no objection to differences in people's benefits and burdens that reflect nothing but different preferences, *when* (which is not always) *their satisfaction leads to a comparable aggregate enjoyment of life*." (pg. 18-9)
2. **Regrettable Choice**. Inequalities of aggregate benefit that arise from "differential exercises of effort and/or care by people, who are, initially, absolutely equally placed, and who are equal even in their *capacities* to expend effort and care." (pg. 27)
3. **Option Luck**. Inequalities that result from luck — from taking a reasonable gamble, and losing.

Cohen thinks that the first two sources of inequality are unproblematic. The first is unproblematic because it isn't really an inequality all things considered — a difference in material goods doesn't necessarily translate into a difference in aggregate enjoyment. What about the second? What about the third?

### *The Principle of Community*

Cohen believes that inequalities of certain kind are incompatible with enjoying full community together. Why?

. . . because my life will then labor under challenges that you will never face, challenges that you could help me to cope with, but do not, because you keep your money. (pg. 35)

Cohen cites another reason, unrelated to inequality, in favor of the Principle of Community.

**Communal Reciprocity**: "Communal reciprocity is the antimarket principle according to which I serve you not because of what I can get in return by doing so but because you need or want my service, and you, for the same reason, serve me." (pg. 39)

Is Cohen right that this principle is required for human relationships to take a desirable form?

Consider Cohen's *Car vs Bus Example*. What does it show (if anything)? Are all differences in lifestyles incompatible with community? Or only those differences that arise from economic inequality?