16. Arneson also points this out and draws what are ultimately similar conclusions from it.
17. G. A. Cohen, 'The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12 (1983), pp. 3–33.
18. Philippe Van Parjis, 'Why Surfers Should Be Fed: A Liberal Case for an Unconditional Basic Income', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20 (1991), pp. 101–31 and Andrew Levine 'Fairness to Idleness', *Economics and Philosophy* (forthcoming) both argue for a basic income grant.
19. I'm grateful to some of the other contributors to this volume as well as Daniel Wikler, Daniel Hausman, and Lynn Glueck for discussions of previous versions of this chapter, and to Randy Blumenstein, Noel Carrol, A. J. Julius, David Pagac and Kirk White for discussions of the section on workplace democracy.

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What Do Socialists Want?

Richard J. Arneson

Discussions of the ethics of socialism have tended to focus more on the scholastic issue of what Karl Marx really thought than on the substantive issue of what socialists ought to affirm. For the past several years John Roemer has brought to bear the techniques of contemporary theoretical economics on the latter issue, with illuminating results.[1] In *A Future for Socialism* he characterizes the socialist project in terms of commitment to the goals of 'equality of opportunity for (1) self-realization and welfare, (2) political influence, and (3) social status'.[2] As he recognizes, each of the terms in this sketch calls for interpretation. In these comments I do some preliminary spadework toward clarifying these proposed ideals and revealing their mutual tensions. Although I criticize Roemer's tentative affirmation of principles of equality of opportunity, at the end of this comment I strongly endorse Roemer's call for articulate clarity about the relationship between plans of economic and political reconstruction that might reasonably march under the socialist banner and the moral principles that would justify such plans in specified circumstances.

Equal Opportunity for Political Influence

It is readily shown that the affirmation of these three abstract goals, far from having the quality of truism, is highly controversial and indeed probably incorrect. To illustrate, consider the single ideal of equality of opportunity for political influence. This phrase has a nice radical democratic ring to it. The socialist, one might suppose should not be contented with merely formal democratic citizenship rights, which are compatible with the control of politics behind the scenes by fat cats. 'Equal opportunity for political influence' announces a substantive ideal of democratic equality in the sphere of citizenship. But under examination the ideal shows itself to be not quite what we had in mind and not truly an ethically desirable goal.

Let us say that equality of opportunity for political influence obtains among the citizens of a society – just in case, if any two citizens were to put forth equal effort and sacrifice toward influencing in the same direction a policy choice by the government or by the voters, each would have the same prospect of exercising the same degree of impact on the outcome. Equality of opportunity so defined is not violated when Smith has more political influence than Jones, provided that if Jones were to exert herself to the same degree that Smith does, she could have the same influence as he. Suppose, in contrast, that Smith has inherited great wealth and so is far wealthier than Jones, and that in other respects they command similar resources for influencing political outcomes. Since Smith could have greater political influence than Jones by putting forth less sacrifice, equal opportunity for political influence is violated in this case. So far, so good.

Suppose that Lenin is more intelligent than I, has a greater capacity for insight into public affairs, and has a greater ability to marshall clear and cogent arguments and articulate them persuasively. Given the political culture of the society we inhabit, these intellectual capacities tend to give their possessor access to political influence. Then, other things being equal, these differences between Lenin and me will bring it about that he will have more political influence than I, and the factors that give him greater political influence also produce a violation of the norm of equal opportunity for political influence. But no ideal of equality worth upholding is violated in these imaginary circumstances. For all that has been said so far, the society in which Lenin has greater opportunity for political influence than I might be an ideal deliberative democracy in which only the force of the better argument prevails and political policies are chosen by a consensus of voters all seeking conscientiously and reflectively to determine where the common good lies.[3]

It might seem that my argument has gone off the track by assuming a plainly incorrect account of how equal opportunity for political influence should be understood. Try this instead: equal opportunity for political influence obtains among the citizens of a society just in case, if any two citizens were to put forth equal effort and sacrifice toward influencing in the same direction a policy choice by the government or by the voters, and if the two equally striving citizens had the same intellectual capacities for political reflection and persuasion, each would have the same prospect of exercising the same degree of impact on the outcome. By this revised conception, in the example described above, Lenin and I have equal opportunity for political influence, because our unequal ability to make an impact on public affairs results from differences in our political talent, and such differences do not destroy equality on this revised conception.

Notice the disparity between this conception of equal opportunity and Roemer's characterization of the equal opportunity idea as it operates in the context of concern for self-realization and welfare: 'equality of opportunity requires that people be compensated for handicaps induced by factors over which they have no control.'[4] But surely my lack of political talent arising from my genetic endowment and early socialization experiences is a factor beyond my control, hence a factor that should be counterbalanced if equality of opportunity in the same sense that is operative in the self-realization and welfare sphere is to be applied in the sphere of political influence. Thus it seems that we must invoke different and opposed conceptions of equal opportunity in the two spheres. The question naturally arises why this should be.

I would venture the hunch that we should not seek equality of opportunity for political influence construed so that politically talented and politically untalented alike have the same prospect of influencing political process outcomes because we should want the political process to be set so that it is as likely as possible to produce good political outcomes: good in the sense that they improve the prospects that people will lead rich and satisfying lives and that distribution of these prospects is equitable.[5] Setting up the political process so that talented and untalented alike have the same access to levers of political power is a manifestly poor strategy for producing good outcomes in this sense. One powerful argument for political democracy is that, over the long run, majoritarian political procedures structured by freedom of expression and other civil liberties tend to do better than less democratic procedures at selecting qualified and conscientious political rulers. (For this argument to succeed, it is not necessary to show that democratic procedures work well, just that they are less bad than feasible alternatives.)

The opportunity for political influence is a mode of power over the lives of other people. In general, one does not have a right to power over the lives of others unless the expectable outcome of one's exercise of that power is better for those affected than what would be produced under alternative distributions of power. This is true even of the democratic franchise, which is a small lever giving the possessor of the vote a small bit of power over the lives of those affected by the decisions reached by democratic votes. For this reason there is no moral presumption that if the distribution of political intelligence and other aspects of political talent takes the form of an arbitrary natural

lottery, then everyone should be entitled to equal opportunity for political influence regardless of one's share of talent, which must be undeserved.

The ideal of equal opportunity for political influence is vulnerable to criticism from another direction. The ideal could in principle be fully met in a society in which only a small subset of people participate in political affairs and have an influence on political policy making. There is equal opportunity, but very unequal exercise of the opportunity. The political process is then formally democratic but in practical terms elitist.

Equal opportunity for political influence might then be contrasted with the ideal of politics as a deliberative democracy in which citizens equally participate in public reflection with a view toward achieving a consensus on the common good. This ideal might be embraced either as intrinsically desirable or as desirable for the expected consequences for human lives of organizing politics this way. Equal opportunity for political influence is neither necessary nor sufficient for the existence of deliberative democracy. Not necessary because in an ideal deliberative democracy, where the force of the better argument determines the choice of political policy, not all citizens have equal access to the force of the better argument, so not all have equal opportunity for political influence. Not sufficient because equal opportunity for political influence, as described above, could be satisfied even if few exercise the opportunity to exert influence, but the ideal of deliberative democracy requires that all citizens participate in the deliberative process, not merely that all have the opportunity to participate.

Equal opportunity for political influence does not capture the ideal of political democracy. Moreover, it is unclear whether or not the ideal of political democracy, however it is conceived, should be regarded as morally desirable for its own sake besides as a possible means to further good goals.

Equal Opportunity for Social Status

Karl Marx detected class hierarchy within the formal equality of market trading relationships, so that when the subject of his analysis shifts from the circulation of commodities to the production of surplus value, the economic agents significantly change their demeanor: 'He, who before was the money owner, now strides, in front as capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his labourer. The one with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other, timid and holding back, like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has

nothing to expect but – a hiding.'[6] One would suppose the socialist, whatever her other aspirations, would be committed to the abolition of the indignity of hierarchical social status.

The phenomenon of status involves at least the following elements: (1) a ranking by each of the members of a group of all the rest along some dimension of worth; plus (2) the further fact of sufficient agreement among the individual rankings to generate a social ranking. We should add that (3) occupying a position at the top of the social ranking induces significant desired behavior from group members and occupying a low position attracts significant undesired treatment. Status so characterized could be momentary or longlasting. It might be based on ascribed or earned characteristics. Notice also that the ranking by each of the members of a group can involve deference by individuals to rankers deemed authoritative, as when all members of society prize scientific achievement but the rankings of elite scientists determine everyone's rankings. We should also distinguish the one-dimensional status that accrues from scoring high on one such rating and all-things-considered status, which exists among the members of a group when (1) each member constructs an overall ranking of all the rest of the members by assigning weights to each person's score on all significant one-dimensional status rankings and summing the scores, and (2) there is sufficient agreement among the individual overall rankings to generate an overall or all-things-considered social ranking.

To simplify, let us confine our attention to overall social status. Let us say that equality of opportunity for social status obtains in a society just in case any member of society could achieve the same likelihood of obtaining the top overall status if she sought high status with effort and sacrifice equivalent to that associated with the striving for status of the individual who currently has achieved the top likelihood of occupying the top position. In other words, given that an element of luck enters the determination of status, equal opportunity for status obtains when anyone could gain the same prospect of top status as the person whose prospect of top status is highest, if one was willing to work for status as hard as the person who is now most likely to gain it. (Do not worry that equal opportunity for status so understood is utopian. If the ideal were desirable but unattainable, it might be worthwhile to strive to achieve it to the greatest feasible extent.) But is equal opportunity for social status a desirable social ideal?

Notice that the society of equal opportunity for status might be a society in which overall social status is highly salient in social life, conditioning one's treatment by others in all social encounters. The society is organized around competitive jostling and jockeying for

position in one big social ranking, and this endless competitive striving for advantage conditions all of social life. In this imagined society, one's place in the pecking order matters a great deal, and much of social life is given over to ritual deference and acceptance of deference by persons occupying lower and higher rungs of the social hierarchy. In all social encounters some persons strut with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business, while other persons slink behind, diffident and obsequious. But unlike what occurs in capitalist and other class-divided societies, in our imagined society everyone has equal opportunity to attain the top status positions which confer the privilege of smirking.

For that matter, a society which exhibited equality of social status might also be a society in which much of social life is dominated by jockeying and jostling for status position, and by making and accepting gestures of deference. For example, the society of equality of status might be divided into Walzerian separate spheres, with a rigid pecking order determining the quality of social interactions in each sphere, but with different persons attaining the top status positions in the various spheres, so that everyone's overall status ranking is approximately the same.[7] This could come about in two ways: either all members of society agree in the weightings they assign to different dimensions of status, and everybody's overall status orderings rank everyone about the same, or the members disagree in the weightings to be assigned to different dimensions of status, so that even though there is overall inequality of status according to everyone's overall rankings, the individual members' rankings do not agree sufficiently to determine an overall society-wide status ranking. In either case a society could exhibit equal opportunity for status or even equality of status yet be thoroughly shaped by status-conscious behavior conditioned by recognition of significant hierarchy.

These examples suggest that alongside the ideals of equal opportunity for status and equality of status one should also consider the distinct ideal of statuslessness or freedom from status consciousness. This ideal could be attained if social rankings of individuals along dimensions of worth either ceased to exist or ceased to play a significant role in determining the character of social interaction. The latter half of this disjunct coincides with failure of condition (3) for the existence of status to obtain. In the society marked by freedom from status, either there are no pecking orders or one's place in the pecking orders that do exist does not significantly condition how one treats others and is treated by them. There might be social rankings, but no smirking.

I conjecture that once the ideals of equal opportunity for status, equality of status, and freedom from status consciousness are distinguished, the first two will appear more problematic and less attractive once they no longer benefit from the halo effect emanating from the third ideal.

Rather than view this last comment as a criticism of Roemer's views on socialist ethics, I take myself to be following up Roemer's explicit statement that his list of fundamental goals is provisional and in need of further analysis. Moreover, I view it as entirely an open question whether or not any of the ideals of equal opportunity for status, equality of status or freedom from status is intrinsically morally desirable (as opposed to desirable as possibly effective means toward some other goal). Perhaps status competitions of some types, in some circumstances, are on the whole desirable.

No doubt social life provides many examples of debilitating status competition. Society upholds an unworthy standard such as getting one's livelihood by unearned rather than earned income, and people waste their lives trying to outdo each other according to the false standard. This sort of example does not show the badness of status competition, just the badness of status competition organized around an unworthy standard. But one can conceive worthy standards. Imagine that people are competing for status by striving to achieve excellence according to the standard of virtuous public service directed toward the common good. Even if the standard that determines status is worthy, one might worry that focussing people's attention on their relative standing with respect to this standard rather than on their absolute level of performance or satisfaction of the standard is bad. But why? Why is it inappropriate to wish to be best, or better than most, and appropriate to wish to be good or excellent? For many activities in which humans engage, the standards of good performance are essentially comparative, so there is no saying what is good performance without having an idea of how people on the average tend to perform. And even if one's conception of good in some sphere is not parasitic on one's notion of better, still, what is wrong with wanting to be better?

Another thought that suggests the undesirability of status hierarchy is that it may induce wasteful or unprofitable competition. But this criticism applies to particular forms of status competition, not to status competition per se. Surely competition for status along some dimensions of worth is socially useful. If excellence in playing basketball is desirable, then upholding basketball excellence as a goal worthy of pursuit is probably desirable, and inevitably the Michael Jordans of

the world will be esteemed above their fellow athletes. Perhaps in some contexts status can serve as a cheap reward motivating people to socially useful action; if medals could sometimes substitute for cash prizes, the resources saved could be put to alternative good uses. Perhaps it is the idea of competition for all-things-considered or overall status that is felt to be meretricious. Whether this is so or not would seem to depend on the difficult issue of whether or not it is good that there should be sufficient agreement among the values of the members of society about the comparative value of the goods that serve as dimensions along which status is measured to permit society-wide overall rankings.

The desire for high status might be derogated as essentially competitive, necessarily producing losers as well as winners. If all want to be best, all but one individual (except in the case of ties) must be frustrated. But of course, since most valued goods are in scarce supply, even when the goods are not essentially competitive in character, it is often contingently the case that your desire for a good can be satisfied only if other people's desires for that good are frustrated. It may simply be a fact about the world we inhabit that many goods worth having are either essentially or contingently the object of competitive striving. Moreover, even if many want to be best and only one can win, perhaps the nature of the competition is such that the gains of the winner overbalance the losses of the losers (who do not much care about losing). And again, we often judge status competition to be invidious when the competition generates aggregate negative total utility; the losses of the losers outweighing the gains of the winners (here I assume cardinal interpersonal utility comparisons can be made). But this objection does not tell against all status competitions, just against those that generate aggregate utility loss.

A clue that may be worth seizing is the distinction between the classless society envisaged by Marx and the society free of status distinctions envisaged by some as a generalization of Marx's concerns.[8] Class and status are of course different ideas. Your status is determined by how other members of society regard you, but your class membership is determined by the extent of your control over means of production, whatever the attitudes of other people toward you might be. But insofar as Marx is concerned with status, what concerns him are status distinctions arising from class relations. Perhaps something could be done with this. Perhaps status distinctions arising from certain sorts of economic relationships should be singled out and opposed on principle. I suspect that opposition to status distinctions should be limited to some types rather than directed toward the abolition

of all types, but it is not obvious that economic status singles out a universally obnoxious variety.

In the light of these various considerations, a plausible position is that status distinctions and competition for status are intrinsically neither desirable nor undesirable, but can be either depending on their effects on people's life prospects. If it is feasible to abolish a particular realm of status, and doing so would tend to make people's lives better on the whole or bring about a more equitable distribution of chances to lead rich and worthwhile lives, then one should support that abolition, otherwise one should not.

Equal Opportunity for Self-realization and Welfare

This norm to my mind cuts much closer to the heart of the matter than the two norms just reviewed. After all, the traditional socialist critique of capitalism targets the extremes of wealth and poverty that a market economy based on private ownership continuously generates and perpetuates. Intellectually sophisticated attempts to characterize these great disparities as morally deserved may impress us with their cleverness but ultimately appear unconvincing.[9] As we will see, within the socialist critique several different objections are jostling for attention. We may object to the magnitude of the gap between the living conditions of the poor and the wealthy or to the disproportion between the ratio of the deservingness of the rich to that of the poor and the ratio of the wealth of the rich to that of the poor. On the other hand, we may find most objectionable the avoidable bad quality of the lives the poor can anticipate. Marx suggests yet another objection when he observes that for a given state of technology, the time at the disposal of society 'for the free development, intellectual and social, of the individual is greater, in proportion as the work is more and more evenly divided among all the able-bodied members of society, and as a particular class is more and more deprived of the power to shift the natural burden of labour from its own shoulders to those of another layer of society.'[10] I hear in this comment an appeal to a norm of reciprocity: To the extent that everyone shares in the benefits of social cooperation, those who are able should reciprocate this benefit by putting forth (to an equitable extent) effort aimed at contributing to the cooperative pool from which these benefits are drawn.

One plausible interpretation of the moral norm underlying the socialist critique of capitalist inequality is equality of life prospects: all members of society should have equal opportunity to lead good lives.

Roemer asserts this norm and decomposes the idea of a good life (meaning a life that is good from a self-interested standpoint for the person who lives it) into two components: welfare, which is having one's personal preferences satisfied; and self-realization, which Roemer, following Jon Elster, glosses as the development and exercise of the powers and abilities of the individual in ways that are observable by others and that admit of public evaluation.[11] Roemer like Elster finds the affirmation of self-realization construed as essential to human good expressed in the writings of Marx.

Given Roemer's understanding of what welfare is, it is not surprising that he does not take welfare to be all there is to the good life. I would go further. Sometimes welfare as Roemer conceives it makes no contribution at all to the goodness of someone's life. Consider preferences based on confused reasoning or false belief. Imagine that my older sister devotes her entire life to constructing monuments to my virtue (which she supposes to be of high caliber). This is overwhelmingly her most cherished personal preference and it is satisfied abundantly. At her deathbed the landscape is dotted with massive monuments to my virtue. However, my virtue level is nothing special, but well below average. Given that her personal preferences are overwhelmingly satisfied, my sister obtained a high level of welfare-as-construed-by-Roemer, but her life was a tragic waste. The problem here is not that 'self-realization' was lacking. We can add to the story the detail that my sister strained her talents to the limit in constructing her grotesque pointless statues, which were thoroughly evaluated and judged worthless by the public. The problem is that her preferences were ill-considered and based on cognitive error; hence their satisfaction does not significantly contribute to her welfare, if we are to understand welfare as what makes someone's life go better, what adds intrinsically to one's flourishing. Since preference satisfaction per se does not always enhance the quality of a person's life, preference satisfaction is a poor candidate for the role that Roemer assigns it – one of two fundamental elements that together determine the goodness of a person's life.

To figure out what is really meant or should be meant when we assert that someone's life goes better or worse is to plunge into deep and incompletely charted water. In the previous paragraph I appealed to the idea that what makes a person's life go well is determined by the judgments that she herself would make about what is valuable for her for its own sake, if she were to make these judgments without suffering from cognitive defects such as false belief or confused reasoning. In other words, each person's good is determined from that very person's

evaluative perspective, as formed by her own experiences and dispositions, but it is her evaluations not as they are but as they would be if she were suffering from no cognitive errors that settle the standard by which her quality of life is to be measured. This proposal encounters puzzles and difficulties which I cannot enter into here. My point is limited and simple. I do not believe that welfare-as-construed-by-Roemer is rightly viewed as a fundamental component of a person's good.

To my mind, if we had a more adequate conception of welfare than Roemer's in place, we would be less tempted to suppose that some other element such as Elster-style self-realization must be added in order to capture what makes a person's life go well. (Let's call the whole of which preference satisfaction and self-realization are claimed to be the parts 'well-being'.) Roemer is persuaded that preference satisfaction is not all there is to well-being by considering the example of Tiny Tim, the Charles Dickens character who is crippled, but very cheerful, and has many easily satisfied preferences.[12] Tiny Tim is happy and enjoys a far-above-average level of welfare (that is, preference satisfaction), but we are still inclined to suppose that Tiny Tim is badly off, not well off, and according to egalitarian norms of distributive justice is entitled to compensation that alleviates his handicap, such as a state-of-the-art wheelchair or mechanized crutches.

If welfare is not preference satisfaction as Roemer thinks but satisfaction of well-considered judgments about what would be valuable for oneself, the example looks less puzzling, and the identification of welfare and well-being looks less problematic. The Tiny Tim story might be elaborated in two significantly different ways. In the first version, Tim's evaluations and preferences simply fail to register the extent of the loss that being a cripple entails. If this cognitive deficiency were repaired, his evaluations and preferences would place a high premium on the mobility he lacks, and he would not qualify as having high welfare despite his cheerfulness and obliviousness. In the second possible version of the story, Tim's character and dispositions are such that, even if his evaluations and preferences were formed without any taint of cognitive error, he would still count as nothing the satisfactions that lack of physical mobility denies him. Playing chess rates high in Tim's well-considered preference ordering and traipsing around the countryside or the shopping malls and the like rates very low. In this second version of the story, if it is plausible to suppose that Tim has the opportunity for a high level of satisfaction of well-considered judgments of what would be valuable for himself, it is ipso facto plausible to suppose that Tim has the opportunity for a high level of well-being (a good life).

Let us set aside the concern voiced in the previous paragraph and assume for the sake of the argument that Roemer is correct that welfare-construed-as-satisfaction-of-one's-actual-preferences is one element of well-being. Does adding Elster-style self-realization to Roemer-style welfare produce a satisfactory and complete notion of well-being (what makes a person's life go well)? No, I think not. Whereas it is very plausible to suppose with Roemer that there are some things which are objectively valuable for individuals and enhance the quality of their lives whatever their attitudes toward these things may be, it is very implausible to identify the set of objective goods with exercise and development of talents in a way that admits of public evaluation.

The point that worries me is not that there are trivial talents and abilities, such as building houses of cards, the development and exercise of which contribute little if anything to well-being: I suppose that a full account of self-realization would include a norm that distinguishes trivial from significant human talents and forms of excellence. My worry is that there are many important human goods which have just as much title to be classified as objectively valuable as the development and exercise of talents in ways subject to assessment. In this category of valuable goods other than talent exercise I would include taking enjoyment from passive consumerist experiences (such as lying on the beach and eating ice cream), having intense aesthetic experiences (such as seeing plays, reading books, listening to music, perhaps taking mind-altering drugs), having relations of friendship and love, and so on. It is plausible to suppose that these experiences can enhance the quality of a person's life, even if having them does not contribute toward one's preference satisfaction. A religious ascetic in the grip of a misguided religious doctrine may attach no value to having carnal pleasure and may not want it, but still, getting such pleasure would do him good. The various putative goods listed above either do not involve any exercise or development of talent or do not involve it in a way that admits of public assessment.

I conclude that on the assumption that equal opportunity for having a good life is a plausible rendering of the norm underlying the socialist critique of capitalist inequality, Roemer's proposed decomposition of the idea of a good life into the elements of welfare and self-realization is not successful.

Equality of Opportunity versus Equality of Outcome

Why should a just society concerned with equality be concerned to provide individuals with equality of opportunity for valued things rather than equality in the resultant shares of the valued things that individuals ultimately gain from whatever opportunities are provided? Why have equal opportunity rather than equal outcome?

Speaking specifically of equal opportunity for welfare, Roemer has a sensible answer: 'Were equality of welfare the goal rather than equality of opportunity for welfare, then society would be mandated to provide huge resource endowments to those who adopt terribly expensive and unrealistic goals.' In contrast, equality of opportunity for welfare 'puts some responsibility on [the individual] for choosing welfare-inducing goals that are reasonable.'[13]

Several different thoughts might be expressed by this answer. In my judgment none of these thoughts ultimately generates a defense of the idea that a society's fundamental principles of justice should be concerned with opportunities not outcomes.

One thought is that the announced commitment by society to guarantee all citizens equality in the distribution of some value would give rise to horribly perverse incentives. Roemer provides the example of a cultivated expensive taste. If Smith cultivates modest goals and hence can reach a high level of satisfaction with modest resources, but Jones cultivates grandiose ambitions which cannot be satisfied without enormous expenditures by society, it does not seem fair to deal with Smith and Jones in such a way as to induce equal welfare for them. For that matter, why should I get out of bed in the morning if society is committed to guaranteeing that I will reach exactly the same level of welfare overall as anyone else in society, no more and no less, whether I exert myself vigorously on my own behalf or pull up the covers round my head and vegetate?

This line of thought appears to offer a pragmatic objection against the announcement of a commitment on the part of society to sustain equality of outcome along some dimension. The objection seems to be that such a commitment would cause an enormous welfare loss, so that even if the commitment is met and equality is achieved, this will be equality at a low level of welfare compared to what is feasible. Suppose in the light of this worry we amend equality of welfare so that it becomes a principle that requires equality of welfare at the highest feasible level for all. The objection then can be revised to target this new principle: if society undertakes a public commitment to ensure equality of welfare at the highest feasible level of welfare

for all, this public commitment will be self-defeating in the sense that equality at a higher feasible level of welfare could be obtained in the absence of this commitment.

The objection appears to be pragmatic rather than principled. That is to say, the objection seems to locate a problem not in the principle of equality at the highest feasible level but in the untoward consequences of the public adoption of the principle by society. The conclusion then should not be that the principle is false or morally unacceptable. Rather the conclusion should be that public adoption of the principle is unlikely to be the best means of satisfying it to the fullest possible extent. Perhaps public adoption of equal opportunity would better secure equality at the highest feasible level than would public adoption of the revised equality principle itself. This finding would be interesting but would not suffice to show that anyone should believe that equal opportunity is the better candidate for the role of fundamental principle. For one cannot justify a proposed fundamental principle by observing, even if correctly, that adopting it would be an efficient means to the achievement of some further, different principle.

This point can be put another way. If one is concerned that implementation of a principle of equality would give rise to perverse incentives, this indicates that one's ultimate concern is oriented to the final outcomes that perverse incentives would worsen. This line of thought cannot provide grounds for affirming an equal opportunity principle except as an instrument for obtaining better final outcomes.

Another possible line of thought in defense of equality of opportunity invokes the responsibility of an individual to exercise reasonable prudence in the conduct of her life. How exactly do we get from the supposition that the individual is responsible for behaving with reasonable prudence to the different thought that if the individual fails to exercise reasonable prudence and as a result he is threatened with harm, no one else is responsible for taking effective steps to avert the harm or for compensating the person for the harm if it becomes unavoidable? Let us say that to be responsible for an outcome is to be obligated to bring it about that the outcome fall within an acceptable range. In this sense the fact that Smith is responsible for outcome X obviously does not preclude others also being responsible for outcome X. If a small child is drowning in shallow water at a public beach in plain sight of a hundred nearby adults, each individual may be responsible for the outcome, obligated to save the child provided that no other adult has saved her. From the fact that the individual has primary responsibility (obligation) for acting prudently

to safeguard her own welfare, it does not follow that society does not have a back-up responsibility (obligation) to act charitably to forestall harm if the individual acts imprudently and harm threatens her. One responsibility obligation need not crowd out another; both may coexist.

Exactly the same point holds true if responsibility is understood as answerability. Given that it is within Smith's power to influence which outcome within a certain range occurs, we may hold Smith responsible for the outcome, meaning she is answerable for its quality, liable to praise or blame depending on its quality. But holding Smith responsible in this sense is compatible with holding others responsible as well for the same outcome. We may hold Smith responsible for a drowning that she could have prevented and also hold Jones responsible for the same drowning, and we may hold the individual responsible within limits for the quality of life she secures for herself while also holding society responsible for the quality of life of the same individual. (I believe these points broadly support generous policies of income support to poor people in capitalist democracies, policies different in spirit from what is currently in favor in the US.)

Another line of thought lurking in the neighborhood of the expensive tastes worry is that the responsibility (obligation) of society to cater to the welfare of any individual may be limited in stringency in the sense that those bound by the obligation are only required to fulfill it if the sacrifice they must incur in order to fulfill it is below some threshold value. Imagine that Smith needs help in order to attain a decent level of welfare, but every time we offer help, he squanders it, over and over again. At some point in this cycle, given our limited responsibility, our obligation to help gives out. Perhaps the same goes for expensive tastes, at least voluntarily cultivated ones. Given the assumption that the responsibility of society with respect to the maintenance of tolerable levels of welfare for all members of society is limited in stringency, it remains an open question whether within the limits deemed reasonable, the responsibility (obligation) we do have is oriented to welfare outcomes or to opportunities for welfare.

If the responsibility were oriented to provision of opportunities as their ultimate concern, then it would seem that our limited obligation to provide opportunities would not diminish or cease just because we happen to know that provision of opportunities in this case is pointless because the opportunities will certainly not be utilized. Imagine that Smith and Jones live on separate islands, and that they can interact in only one way: knowing that the island she inhabits is rich in resources and that the island Jones inhabits is barren by

comparison, Smith can provide Jones with extra resources by placing them in a boat that will drift with the tides to the shores of Jones's island. On some views of distributive justice, Smith is obligated to help Jones by transferring resources to Jones in the example as so far described. Now suppose that Smith knows the further fact that any resources she sends Jones will certainly be left to rot on the beach (perhaps Jones has strict religious scruples against profiting from a gift or perhaps Jones will just procrastinate endlessly and fail to move the goods from the beach). The opportunities Smith is providing Jones are just as much opportunities, just as rich in potential welfare, whether they are used or wasted, so if the ultimate obligation of society is to bring about equality of opportunity for welfare, it is hard to see why the obligation should lapse in this example. If you think the obligation does give out here, and that Smith is not responsible for making sacrifices to supply Jones pointless opportunities, my conjecture is that you are valuing opportunity provision just insofar as that is a means to ethically desirable outcomes, rather than as ethically desirable for its own sake.

An equal opportunity norm tolerates leaving an individual in a worse condition if she conducts herself imprudently through her own fault, than the condition she would have reached had she been prudent. A finegrained equal opportunity principle is formulated so that it respects the maxim that people should be held responsible only for what lies within their control. According to the finegrained version of the principle, two people do not have equal opportunities (for self-realization and welfare, say) if they could reach the same level of the target goods if they behaved in a perfectly prudent way, but one would have to exert herself to a greater degree or resist temptation to a greater degree or the like in order to achieve this perfect prudence. According to the finegrained version of equal opportunity, the responsibility of the individual must be tailored to her particular choice-making and choice-following deficits. Make the heroic assumption that we can make this determination and hence can determine when any two individuals truly enjoy equal opportunity for self-realization and welfare. We might think that once the members of society enjoy equality of opportunity understood in a finegrained way, it is better that society allow any member's level of attainment of self-realization and welfare to be determined by her own choices in the circumstances she faces. Given that finegrained equality of opportunity has been achieved, it is morally preferable that people who behave imprudently through their own fault should tend to do worse than people who are prudent. An equality of opportunity principle tolerates this outcome,

and hence is morally preferable to any equality of outcome principle, we might be inclined to think.

This inclination is wrong. At least, the intuition that the extent to which people attain the target goods with which distributive justice is concerned should be allowed to vary with the quality of their personal conduct does not uniquely favor an equality of opportunity principle. The problem is that even finegrained equality of opportunity will forbid providing further opportunities to someone who already has enjoyed an equal share of opportunities and squanders them, but in some circumstances the refusal to tender more aid is unfair.[14] Consider Bert, a young adult who enjoys finegrained equality of opportunity, but then behaves imprudently in a way that is unequivocally his own fault: he rides a motorcycle fast on a deserted terrain without protective headgear and without insurance. Suppose a crash occurs and Bert could be restored to good health if society provided surgery: if not Bert will become a vegetable for the rest of his life. Since Bert has already received his fair share of opportunities, he should not get more according to equal opportunity, but this seems cruel. The problem seems to be that Bert's 'punishment' exceeds his 'crime'. He is imprudent, but he is also very unlucky, so that one act of imprudence threatens to ruin his entire life. Given that Bert has behaved imprudently and costs must now be paid, it is perhaps morally appropriate that he should suffer for his imprudence, but equal opportunity imposes excessive suffering.

An equal opportunity principle is blind to results once equal opportunities have been provided. A more outcome-oriented view that respects the intuition that the truly undeserving should be permitted to suffer the costs their conduct causes might include a presumption in favor of equality of outcome (equal self-realization and welfare for all) but would qualify the presumption by a norm that fault forfeits first: when truly faulty conduct generates unavoidable costs, it is better other things equal that these costs be imposed on less deserving individuals (those whose true fault is greater) than on more deserving individuals (those whose true fault is less). Applied to the Bert case, the norms of equality of outcome qualified by fault forfeits first would hold that Bert should be given the operation that will restore his health, to prevent his self-realization and welfare levels over the course of his life from falling far below average; if possible, however, the costs of the operation and similar restorative measures necessitated by faulty conduct should be imposed on the faulty in proportion to the true faultiness of their conduct.

I conclude that, even if one does not challenge the conceivability

of obtaining sufficient information about individuals to implement, even in thought, a finegrained equality of opportunity principle, this principle is still shown by the Bert case to be too punitive in its implications. The motivating idea that seemed to support equality of opportunity makes a better fit with the norm of fault forfeits first. Moreover, the equality of opportunity norm has been shown to be unsupported by reflection on our concepts of responsibility and vulnerable to the pointless opportunities objection.

Why Equality?

Not all political egalitarians favor equality as a moral ideal. That is to say, some who favor redistributionist, traditionally left-wing policies (involving transfers of resources and opportunities to worse-off members of society for the purpose of bringing about improvement in their life prospects) support these policy preferences without appealing to any principle of distributive justice that holds it to be intrinsically morally desirable that everyone should have the same in some respect. Let us say that a *true egalitarian* is one who does take some form of distributive equality to be significantly morally desirable; be it equality or equal opportunity with respect to welfare, some mix of welfare and self-realization, primary goods, some other measure of resources, functionings, functioning capabilities, achievement of excellence according to a perfectionist measure, or some other equalisandum.[15] Then not all political egalitarians are true egalitarians. Some see equality or equality of opportunity as at most, in some circumstances, a useful means to the attainment of other, genuinely important moral goals.

In other writings Roemer himself has expressed agnosticism as to whether true egalitarianism is the correct line for political egalitarians to embrace.[16] I agree that there are grounds for doubt. For example, if your sole principle were, say, equality of resources, even if you qualified the principle as Roemer suggests by stipulating that the equality to be sought is equality of resources for all persons at the highest possible level, you would still have to favor wastage of resources that could be used to improve people's lives in some circumstances. If George has more resources than others, and there is no way to transfer resources from George to the others, and no way to bring the others up to the resource level of George, then equality of resources at the highest possible level must hold that George's extra resources should be destroyed in order to create equality. But many

have found it a hard saying that it is better to make George worse off in resources without making anyone else better off in resources, just in order to ensure that everyone's resource holdings are the same.

One might respond that perhaps sustaining relations of equality in people's resource holdings, even when achieved by destroying rather than transferring resources, might make people's lives go better, for example, by reducing envy and fostering communal fellow feeling. But to respond in this way is to suppose that equality of resources is valuable as a means. If what really matters is how people's lives go, the well-being levels they reach, then the question would become: is equality of well-being intrinsically morally important? A version of this worry would again be relevant. If one's ultimate aim is to achieve *equality* of well-being at the highest possible level, then if George has had a nicer life so far, it should be morally desirable to give George's life a nasty turn, so his overall well-being level decreases, even though hurting George in this way does no good to anyone else. There is nothing incoherent in this doctrine, but to many of us it seems inhumane. I suspect that commitment to equality for its own sake is more often attributed to the Left by right-wingers intent on discrediting their rivals than unequivocally affirmed by left-wingers.

In order to cast some doubt on the supposition that political egalitarianism requires true egalitarianism for its defense, I sketch here an alternate principle that would generate justification of political egalitarian policies in many circumstances. This principle helps itself to the assumption that cardinal interpersonal measurements of well-being are possible. Of course, even if this large assumption is granted, measurability in principle does not guarantee measurability in practice. The justification of political egalitarianism that relies on the alternate principle I shall describe also requires the assumption that at least rough interpersonal comparisons of well-being are feasible in societies as we know them, with existing limited technologies relevant to the assessment of well-being.

The central idea of the proposed rival of true egalitarianism is that the strength of the moral reason to bring about a small gain in well-being for a person varies inversely with the person's cardinal level of well-being before receiving this benefit (on the assumption that the level exceeds zero). In other words, the less well-being a person enjoys, the greater the moral value of bringing about a small improvement in the person's well-being. The overall moral value of bringing about a small improvement in anyone's well-being then varies directly with the size of the gain and inversely with the person's previous well-being score. Building on this approach, the doctrine

holds that institutions and policies should be set so that moral value so measured is maximized. The position has been called the weighted well-being view.[17] It will turn out in many possible circumstances that more moral value is created by giving a dollar to a person who is badly off in well-being than by giving a dollar to a person who is well-off in this respect, even if the receipt of the dollar would produce a greater increase in well-being for the already better off person (who may be an efficient transformer of resources into well-being). Such a position quite obviously has an affinity for political egalitarian policy measures.

Further discussion of weighted well-being is beyond the scope of this discussion. The aim of the present discussion is limited to arguing for the following claim. True egalitarianism in distributive justice (the position that holds that equality in all persons' shares of some target good is morally desirable for its own sake) encounters objections which do not attach to at least one rival moral doctrine (weighted well-being) which, like true egalitarianism, offers broad support to political egalitarianism. Asked to choose between a norm of equality of outcome and a norm of equality of opportunity, one should perhaps reject both.

Conclusion

Unlike John Roemer, Karl Marx eschewed discussion of first principles of ethics, at least in his published writings. Insofar as Marx's writings contain ethical condemnation of capitalist institutions, the principles that ground the condemnation are not the focus of attention. I think it is fair to say that Marx tends to assume that those readers who can be brought to accept the empirical characterizations of capitalist society that he is at pains to establish, would overwhelmingly converge, from a variety of commonsense perspectives, on the judgment that the society truly characterized in these ways is ethically indefensible beyond the pale.[18] One could say that Marx's approach to moral issues is political not metaphysical. He does not try to justify communism or condemn capitalism by appeal to first principles of ethics; rather Marx implicitly appeals to a wide range of plausible mid-level principles that have the property of converging in support of the political assessment and proposals that he is concerned to advance.

Moreover, leaving Marx's example aside, I note that the term 'socialism' is used to refer to a family of proposals for reconstructing

the economic and political organization of society that center on the idea of public rather than private ownership of the major means of production. For clarity's sake one might well wish to resist Roemer's reidentification of the socialist project with commitment to a set of egalitarian first principles and to a pragmatic orientation to the issue of how these principles might best be achieved. Invoking the authority of Marx, one might suspect that agreement on first principles of ethics is neither necessary nor sufficient for achieving a consensus in society on a political program that is morally continuous with the socialist and communist tradition.

Nevertheless I strongly agree with Roemer that socialist theorists today are well advised to be explicit about the moral underpinnings of their institutional critiques and proposals. Theorists should not merely invoke principles but should try to motivate their acceptance. The reason that Marx's example in this regard should not be followed is simple. Contrary to what Marx supposed, his criticisms of capitalism rely on highly controversial moral claims, not on obvious commonsense truisms. The work by Roemer and others, that traces Marx's critique of exploitation back to egalitarian moral principles, definitively shows that Marx's 'political not metaphysical' moral opinions are revisionary and controversial or at least that, when one deletes certain false social scientific claims from Marx's analyses, to support his criticisms of capitalist society as he modeled it one must appeal to moral claims that may be true but are far from obvious.[19] Hence there is no getting around the need to be clear about the claims and about how they might be best supported by sound principles. If you cannot assume a prior moral agreement with your audience you have no choice but to try to create a new consensus by moral argument. In this larger context, although I might disagree with this or that ethical formulation that Roemer proposes, I strongly endorse his broad strategy of redefining socialism in terms of basic ethical commitments and keeping an open mind about the political and economic arrangements that would be required to fulfill these commitments so far as is feasible. Socialism on this reconstruction becomes a variety of liberal political morality not a rival to it.

Notes

1. Several of these essays have been collected in John E. Roemer, *Egalitarian Perspectives: Essays in Philosophical Economics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994. See also his books *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1982 and *Free To Lose: An Introduction to Marxist Economic Philosophy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1988.

2. John E. Roemer, *A Future for Socialism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1994, p. 11.
3. On deliberative democracy, see Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, tr. Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press 1979; also Joshua Cohen, 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy', in Alan Hamlin and Philip Pettit, eds, *The Good Polity*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1989, pp. 17–34.
4. Roemer, *A Future for Socialism*, p. 12.
5. See Richard J. Arneson, 'Socialism as the Extension of Democracy', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 145–71; also Arneson, 'Democratic Rights at National and Workplace Levels', in David Copp, Jean Hampton and John E. Roemer, eds, *The Idea of Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993, pp. 118–48.
6. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, tr. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, New York: Charles H. Kerr 1906, p. 196.
7. On separate spheres of distribution, see Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*, New York: Basic Books 1983. See also David Miller, 'Complex Equality', and Richard Arneson, 'Against "Complex Equality"' both in David Miller and Michael Walzer, eds, *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (forthcoming).
8. The idea that Marx is concerned to eliminate inequalities of class hierarchy rather than all manner of social inequalities is explored in Allen Wood, 'Marx and Equality', in John E. Roemer, ed., *Analytical Marxism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 283–303.
9. See Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, New York: Basic Books 1974; also David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1986.
10. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 581.
11. Jon Elster, 'Self-realization in Work and Politics: The Marxist Conception of the Good Life', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1986), pp. 97–126.
12. The Tiny Tim example is drawn from G. A. Cohen, 'On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice', *Ethics* 99, no. 3 (1989), pp. 906–44.
13. Roemer, *A Future for Socialism*, p. 12.
14. I borrow this point from Marc Fleurbaey.
15. On the issue, what sort of equality is intrinsically morally important, see Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1992.
16. John E. Roemer, 'The Morality and Efficiency of Market Socialism', *Ethics* 102, no. 3 (April 1992), pp. 448–64.
17. See Paul Weirich, 'Utility Tempered with Equality', *Nous* 17, no. 3 (September 1983), pp. 423–39.
18. This point is explored in Allen Wood, 'The Marxian critique of Justice', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1972), pp. 244–82.
19. See Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*; also Roemer, 'Property Relations vs. Surplus Value in Marxian Exploitation' and 'Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?', both reprinted in his *Egalitarian Perspectives*, pp. 37–64 and pp. 65–96; also Richard Arneson, 'What's Wrong with Exploitation?', *Ethics* 91, no. 2 (January 1981), pp. 202–27; and Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990, ch. 5.

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Saving Socialism and/or Abandoning It

Andrew Levine

I confess to a deep ambivalence about *A Future for Socialism*.[1] On the one hand, it is plain that much of what Roemer says about socialism, both critically and constructively, is on target. Anyone committed to retrieving what remains vital in the socialist tradition cannot fail to appreciate the importance of this contribution to socialist theory. On the other hand, it is hard to resist the conclusion that socialism after Roemer is hardly socialism at all; that in order to save socialism, he found it necessary to abandon it. My aim in these remarks will be to articulate this ambivalence and to try to move beyond it. To this end, I shall take issue mainly with Roemer's claims about what socialists want.

Roemer thinks that socialists, whether they knew it or not, have always wanted what contemporary liberal egalitarians want: equality construed in roughly the way(s) that have emerged in the ongoing 'equality of what?' debate.[2] Roemer's aim is to show how equality, so conceived, can be achieved or at least approximated without sacrificing economic well-being. His central claim is that socializing property relations, through a radical transformation of control and revenue rights in non-labor productive assets, is instrumental and perhaps indispensable for realizing equality, and that market mechanisms are instrumental and almost certainly indispensable for economic well-being. *A Future for Socialism* is mainly devoted to developing and defending these theses.

What I will suggest is that those of us, like Roemer, who want the socialist tradition to develop and flourish risk being led astray by Roemer's account of what socialists want. Socialists do want equality and efficiency, though perhaps not quite, as Roemer assumes, in the sense(s) that have come to dominate contemporary academic discourse. They also want peace, sound environmental policies, the end of racial, sexual and ethnic oppression and many other laudable