

A theory of communal reciprocity

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This thesis sets out an interpretation of the value of community that I call communal reciprocity. It charts the history of that ideal, analyses its use in the work of an important academic proponent, G.A. Cohen, and develops a more comprehensive account of its main features. It also discusses the implications of communal reciprocity, including whether or not it conflicts with certain freedom-based concerns and its application, including in the assessment of market economies.

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For my parents.

Introduction

This thesis identifies, analyses and applies an interpretation of the value of community which I call 'communal reciprocity'. This fundamental value has a distinguished history in the canon of socialist political and economic thought but has been under-analysed in mainstream political theory. Here, I redress that deficit.

In doing so, I start from the basis that any good political argument must be grounded in sound normative principles, of which the ideal of communal reciprocity that I set out here is one. The central contribution of political theorists to the process of political argument is to explore and - to some extent - apply these fundamental political ends. My aim here is to contribute to that process in three ways: first, to arrive at a better understanding of communal reciprocity as a political objective; second, to see how it relates to other such objectives; and third, to suggest some of the implications for political action if it is taken seriously.

Before we move on to the substance of that discussion, it is worth starting, as it were, at the end by saying something about status of the conclusions that will be reached. There is an important division of labour in the process of constructing political arguments, of which theoretical work of the sort undertaken here is just one part, and that division of labour helps determine the kinds of conclusions that political theorists can justifiably reach. Most of the time, the theoretical arguments below will not by themselves be decisive in recommending political or policy action, for the obvious reasons both that other fundamental principles besides community are important and will need to be borne in mind, and also because *non*-theoretical considerations need to be taken into account. To take an outlandish example, communal reciprocity might recommend following Charles Fourier and dividing the population into self-sufficient groups of around 1600 people, but considerations of

efficiency may count against the proposal even in theory, and the sheer impracticality of doing so might kill it off entirely as a good thing to try to achieve. In what follows, I shall spend some time trying to persuade the reader that communal reciprocity is important. But it's clearly not the only thing that's important in coming to decisions about what political or policy course to take.

This obvious point is worth stressing at the outset primarily because good theoretical argument of the sort aspired to here must be conscious of the limitations of the conclusions that it reaches. Political theorists should, in general, I think, be a bit more conservative about the status of the claims they make about what should and should not be done – more wary than they often are. As the example of Fourier suggests, this conservatism about the status of the claims that political theorists make follows in part from an appreciation of the constraints that the real world impose on theoretical recommendations. It also follows, to give a label to the other idea just referred to, from a recognition of *value pluralism*: the view that political argument is almost always based upon a number of different fundamental aims, which are not readily reconcilable and none of which on reflection we are inclined to discard.¹

This understanding of political argument as resting on (a) fundamental values, which (b) can conflict with one another, has practical pay-off because it immediately suggests that we should be sceptical of two ways of approaching political argument, that have been prominent in some of the literature with which I engage below. The first identifies the goal of political argument fundamentally with a particular *institutional* set-up - for socialists of the last 150 years, this is often thought to be public ownership of productive assets. But as the example of socialism amply shows, historical developments can quickly mean that such rigid prescriptions become overly restrictive when interpreted as immutable aims, and what was once seen as desirable loses its primary importance.² So the first lesson is that values not institutions must provide the bedrock for political argument.

¹ See further, part two of chapter two.

² As it happens, the case that socialists have historically placed public ownership as a *fundamental* goal is not compelling. See Leslie MacFarlane, 'Socialism and Common Ownership: An Historical Perspective' in King (ed.) *Socialism and the Common Good*.

A second approach seeks to avoid the difficulties of competing political ends by conflating them into one ‘master goal’ or, more nuanced but no less problematic, into a set of goals that are nonetheless mutually supporting; each consistent with or re-enforcing the other. In his book *Choose Freedom: the Future for Democratic Socialism*, Roy Hattersley commits himself to this type of reasoning when he says “The immediate intention of socialist policies is the creation of a more equal society... But socialism’s fundamental purpose – indeed, the purpose of the equality we seek – is the extension of liberty.”³ Hattersley’s attempt to shoehorn two transparently distinct ends together in this way is untenable, but unfortunately not uncommon.⁴ In the academic literature this kind of approach is often associated with those socialists and non-socialists who following John Rawls concern themselves with analysis and application of the concept of ‘justice’.⁵ But this sort of thinking is surely an error. Whether or not we can come to an acceptable *compromise* between such values, we should not hope to satisfy them all together, all of the time. Contra Hattersley, liberty can conflict with equality, which, for that matter, can conflict with community too, and value trade-offs are an essential part of political life. That will become clear as we elucidate the content of communal reciprocity in the chapters that follow. Political theorists can of course help make sense of these trade-offs and adjudicate on disputes by assessing the nature and extent of the conflict, and this is a large part of what I attempt to do below.

The resulting discussion is not entirely devoid of political action. I take it that, in a way made most clear in the final chapter six, communal reciprocity weighs in favour of parts of a recognisably socialist political programme, and thus the intention in the intervening chapters of showing the importance of communal reciprocity - and demonstrating its immunity from common criticisms made of it - is at least in this way of some immediate political relevance. More broadly, it is hoped that readers will be persuaded that a socialism which delivers on a norm of communal reciprocity is, at least to that extent, worthy of their allegiance. Despite socialism being an

³ *Choose Freedom*, p. 21.

⁴ This kind of reasoning has been adopted unthinkingly by some who see themselves as descendants of Hattersley-type ‘revisionism’. See e.g. Paul Richards, *Labour’s Revival*, pp. 117-121.

⁵ Rawls of course thought that justice as fairness was compatible with socialism, albeit of a liberal or market variety. See part IV of *Justice as Fairness*. For an unrivalled discussion of value pluralism and Rawls’s work see Brian Barry, *Political Argument*, pp. xxxviii–xliv and pp. lxi–lxxii.

unfashionable thing to defend, I do not think this is a hopeless task. A community-sensitive, or communitarian socialism builds in deep-seated ideas of responsibility, reciprocity and fellowship that pervade our social and political culture. Part of the importance of theoretical and conceptual work of the type undertaken here is to uncover the content of these views which are sometimes deeply held, and often implicit in everyday judgments, even those seemingly quite unconcerned with politics. In this way, not only is the content of an important value clarified, but the tools of persuasive political argument are sharpened, ready for use.

1. The idea of communal reciprocity

Community obtains in a general form when good interpersonal relationships flourish, where such relationships have at least the feature of mutual, non-instrumental concern. Now it is often said by critics that such general definitions are the best we can do when it comes to talk of community and that it is thus a value that will always remain too vague to do any useful political work. In this vein, Andrew Mason argues that “the notion of community is fundamentally ambiguous” and the sociologist A.H. Halsey says that community “has so many meanings as to be meaningless”.⁶

This pessimism is rejected by example in what follows, with communal reciprocity given rigorous definition. Alongside the standard tools of philosophical analysis, I am aided in this task by recent developments in utility theory, prompted by the prevalence of empirical experiments showing that modelling participants as entirely self-interested actors produces dramatically inaccurate predictions of their behaviour.⁷ While in the hands of economists this burgeoning literature on ‘social preferences’ is primarily a way of achieving more accurate descriptions of people’s actual behaviour, it can readily be turned to our normative purposes as way of describing the set of individual preferences consistent with the political end of

⁶ Andrew Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging*, p. 4. A. H. Halsey, ‘Government Against Poverty’, p. 140.

⁷ In a version of a two person ‘ultimatum game’ based on the ‘I cut, you choose’ principle, with the stipulation that neither person gets anything if the offer or ‘cut’ is rejected, the modal offer was found to be 50%, despite the fact that it would be in the responder’s self-interest to accept *any* percentage, and so in the proposer’s interest to offer it. See e.g. Charness and Rabin, ‘Understanding Social Preferences with Simple Tests’ and Bowles and Gintis, *The Evolution of Reciprocity*.

community. A few introductory comments on communal reciprocity follow, in lieu of the substantive discussion below, particularly in chapter three.

In a simple, two person world, communal reciprocity is satisfied when person j 's preferences about the outcomes for a second person i are a function of the needs of i (j 's concern is higher the greater i 's need) and of the reciprocal intention of i towards j (j 's concern is higher the more reciprocal i 's intention). Communal reciprocity is thus formed of two related ideas – concern for others, and reciprocity. It is emphatically not merely altruism; to obtain there must be reciprocal concern from the second person i to the first person j 's concern. Unreciprocated concern isn't a weak form of community, it's no kind of community at all. But likewise, communal reciprocity is not just what is referred to in the social preference literature as 'reciprocal altruism', which is in fact merely enlightened self-interest (I'll happily give to you only if I think that at some stage I'll get something back in return) – the reciprocal concern that i has for j is genuine and not merely tactical.

When we move from a two-person situation to a multi-person situation as found in most actual social situations, it becomes clear that not every communal interaction will involve every person as per our simple two-person case. How then does the account of communal reciprocity conceptualise these more complicated interpersonal interactions? Here I make use of the well-established notion of generalised reciprocity, whereby the appropriately motivated act of j towards i need not always be returned in kind to j by i , but can fall to person k instead. Similarly, k 's act might then be reciprocated by j . In this way, we create chains or networks of reciprocal interaction, in a manner which will be familiar from everyday life. We can see this in the norms that govern practices such as holding a door open for someone. If you arrive each morning at work around the same time as a colleague and she holds the door for you, for example when she sees you carrying a heavy load of books, and you her when, for example you see she's late for a meeting, a reciprocal relationship may be established over time whereby each recognises the value of this small action for the other, and also the importance of it being met in kind. But when one morning you meet a different colleague in the same situation, if acting from generalised reciprocity you will still hold the door open for him and he, if acting from the same motivation will hold the door open next time he sees the first colleague, or

any other. In this way, the reciprocal motivation becomes detached from what any one individual has done for you – you don't pause by the door and study the person approaching in order to work out whether s/he has held open the door for you in the past, or has held open less doors for you than you have for her; there is a generalised norm of holding door-opening that exists within the group.

With reciprocity in either its generalised or simple form, this shared motivation is violated when a colleague purposely lets the door slam in your face.⁸ Here as in general for communal reciprocity, it is the intention or motivation of the other that counts. If you are obscured from Anna's sight as she enters the door, meaning that she consequently lets it shut, you don't think of her as having violated the door-holding norm, and so sullied the relationship between you. If Bob trips and falls through the door and is lying prostrate as the door closes while you approach, you will likewise not think him at fault. It is the motivation of each to the other that binds groups together, and the need for appropriate recognition and response to that initial motivation which makes reciprocity an integral part of a full understanding of community.

I discuss this point further in chapter three but it is worth registering here that some might protest that we need *behaviour* instead of, or as well as, *motivation* consistent with communal reciprocity for that value to be satisfied: it is not enough for the relevant persons to merely have a preference for reciprocal concern, they must also act on it. To such critics I respond that when attempting to translate communal reciprocity into real-world situations, proceeding on such a basis is indeed likely to be sensible. It is often the case that the behaviour of individuals is the best proxy for *genuine* intention, and so requiring that putative intentions be acted upon and thereby verified as such by others will likely be the best way of holding members of a community accountable to the standards consistent with that membership.

⁸ It might be the case that the person approaching the door is a door slammer, but this is unknown to you as he approaches. This problem of lack of information about the motivation of others is an important one, discussed further below, but it is not a question about the very nature of the value of communal reciprocity. That value, as we shall see, is quite clear about the normative boundaries in such a situation. If it is indeed the case that the person approaching is not someone who will reciprocate your action of holding open the door then there is no demand of community for you to hold the door for them. There is neither, we should note, any demand (of community) for you to *not* hold the door open: it is permissible but not required as far as community is concerned. See further, section two of chapter three.

Nevertheless, while it is true that action is a good proxy for intention, precisely by that token it is not the appropriate *locus* of concern. In the face of real world information constraints about people's actual as opposed to professed preferences, we look to behaviour as the best guide. But that behaviour is looked for only as evidence of what is really at stake, namely intention. The examples of Anna and Bob above show that it is the latter idea not the former that is fundamental here.

Finally, it is worth at this stage noting that not all forms of community are of the 'socialist' form that I outline above. The subservient relationship of a courtier to his king might be seen as a form of communal relationship.⁹ There may even be some weak form of reciprocity such that a slight nod of the monarch's head greets the courtier's toil. In what follows, the form of community that I outline and endorse is distinguished from this and other variants of community not only by its commitment to reciprocity, but also notably by a commitment to the equality of each party to the relationship. These features are expanded in subsequent chapters.

2. The importance of community

A desire for community in some form or other has been a persistent driving force in political movements. This has notably included the socialist traditions, as explored in the subsequent chapter. As we shall see there, from the nineteenth century utopian socialists such as Robert Owen, to Marx, to R.H. Tawney and the ethical socialists of the mid twentieth century, community has been an important motivating ideal among the major socialist sub-traditions which they represent. It is the same ideal recognised in the version of the old union song 'Which side are you on?', in which a striking worker complains that: "the family's suffered, but it hurts me more to hear a scab say 'sod you, Jack'": the message, pithily put, is that the flouting of the communal relations between striking workers by a co-worker is more important to that protagonist than even the welfare of his own family. Invocations of community are also found in justifications for the welfare state, for example in the rejection by Anuerin Bevan of an insurance-mechanism for healthcare, that would have

⁹ See further, section five of chapter two.

prevented the financial risk of any one person suffering ill health being shared by all, as it is in a National Health Service funded out of general taxation.¹⁰

But community is not a value that is found only in the socialist tradition. Something like community is present, for example, in a New Testament Christianity which teaches us to ‘love thy neighbour’ and the Papal texts of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (social concern) and *Populorum Progressio* (development of the people). It is also found in some form in the speeches of right-wing politicians: British Prime Minister David Cameron’s justification of the idea of a ‘big society’ was ostensibly founded on “a broad culture of responsibility, mutuality and obligation”.¹¹

For some this broad acceptance of community might be proof that it is an idea that is vague - and ultimately impotent. I take a different view: that rather, this widespread in-principle support – which is sometimes disingenuous or confused – is proof that like well-established ends such as fairness or efficiency, community is something that almost *everyone* would want to enlist in support of their political prescriptions. This underlines the importance of community as a subject of academic scrutiny, rather than suggesting that political theorists should steer clear.

This widespread support comes about because a wide range of people think that community is a thing that has value. Partly that is surely because it is non-instrumentally valuable – valuable, that is, irrespective of its consequences – in a sense that I shall explore below, but it is also of significant instrumental value. It is a feature of the definition of communal reciprocity given above, for example, that it is the intentions rather than the outcomes of interpersonal commitment that matter fundamentally. One clear sense therefore in which communal reciprocity is of instrumental value, is when those intentions do in fact bear fruit. Indeed, it is likely that, from an evolutionary perspective, the affinity for communal, reciprocal relations in humans was first inculcated precisely as a result of the efficacy of those types of preferences in pursuing certain necessary co-operative activities, such as hunting big game.¹² The likelihood that communal reciprocity results in these sorts of beneficial outcomes can also lead to further positive effects. There is now a

¹⁰ Bevan, House of Commons Debates, 30 July 1958.

¹¹ The Conservative Party, *Building a Big Society*.

¹² See Bowles and Gintis, *The Evolution of Human Reciprocity*, chapter one.

weighty economics and political science literature on the efficiency gains made possible when people are able to trust one another, which is an imperfect but reasonable proxy for relationships of community.¹³ The distrust that is a feature of relations which lack communal reciprocity means that individuals don't engage in some collaborative productive activities that they could do because the risk that they will be taken advantage of by their erstwhile collaborators is deemed too great. Some of these instances of instrumental value are drawn out in the second part of chapter three.

3. G.A. Cohen

The term communal reciprocity and its definition as a socialist ideal of community owe their provenance to G.A. Cohen.¹⁴ In a chapter in a 2001 anthology called *Democratic Equality: What Went Wrong?* and then subsequently and more famously in a short book entitled *Why Not Socialism?* Cohen set out communal reciprocity as one of the two core socialist values, alongside equality. Perhaps surprisingly, this short book and a few other essays comprise the sum of Cohen's explicit advocacy for socialism.¹⁵ Still less space in his corpus of work is devoted to communal reciprocity, which he only lately recognised as one of the core ends of socialist endeavour.

The work presented in this thesis owes a great deal to Cohen's work, both in terms of approach and in terms of the substance of the political argument. This is indicated most clearly in chapter two which is entirely dedicated to elucidating Cohen's ideas on community and socialism. Other chapters also involve substantial discussion of his work - especially chapters four, five and six. Indeed, it would not be unfair to describe the project undertaken here as a qualified defence of Cohen's work. The vigorous, original arguments he made aside, an abiding result of Cohen's labour has been to ensure that the academic study and advocacy of socialism

¹³ The seminal study of the effects of 'social capital' is Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. The UK ONS, the OECD and the EU have now all measured the degrees of social capital within different countries. See ONS, 'Social Capital Indicators Review'.

¹⁴ Although the term and the sometimes similar phrase 'social reciprocity' had been used before Cohen popularised it, it's fair to say there was no popular settled definition.

¹⁵ The primary source is his 'Back to Socialist Basics', written in frustrated response to the work of the Institute for Public Policy Research's *Commission on Social Justice*, co-ordinated by future Foreign Secretary, David Miliband. Other examples include his unpublished paper in response to David Miller's *Market, State and Community*: 'David Miller on Market Socialism and Distributive Justice'.

remains an intellectually acceptable exercise, at least in his own field of political theory. For that, I and many others, owe him no small measure of gratitude.

The case made in the chapters below does however progress and depart in a few significant ways from Cohen's work. The analysis of the content of communal reciprocity itself is mainly sympathetic, but involves a substantial extension of aspects of that idea which Cohen touches upon in his brief exposition. In particular, questions about needs, and the notion of reciprocity remain unresolved in Cohen's work and need to be tackled here. In theoretical approach, there is also something of a departure. I spurn his use of the term 'justice' and also argue that his use of 'equality' to describe his socialist principle of equality of opportunity is arguably inaccurate but, more importantly for us, unhelpful given that communal reciprocity is at least as egalitarian.¹⁶ These differences of nomenclature betray, I believe, a more demanding application of what Cohen called his 'radical value pluralism', an outline idea of which was mentioned above. Taking the diversity of political ends seriously means being more attentive to the dividing lines between those ends than Cohen always was, and tracking conceptual exploration against the distinctive value of each. The substantive pay-off from this move is evident in chapters two and five in particular, where normative considerations that Cohen brackets under fairness or equality are seen to in fact be topics of communitarian interest, with wide-ranging consequences for how we understand Cohen's work. Finally, a potential area of substantive disagreement with Cohen occurs with respect to markets. I do not share Cohen's stated view in *Why Not Socialism?* that any use of markets must violate communal reciprocity, although as I set out in chapter six, most markets will in practice fall short of that standard.

4. An outline

The thesis unfolds over the course of six chapters as follows. It may help the reader to think of it as falling into two halves. The first three chapters develop the content of the socialist ideal of community that I call communal reciprocity, including

¹⁶ A number of critics have pointed out that Cohen's luck egalitarianism isn't strictly an egalitarian ideal – unchosen equalities can be just as condemnable as unchosen inequalities, although there do remain good contingent reasons for the emphasis on *inequalities*. See Cohen, *Luck and Equality: A Reply to Hurley*, pp. 444-5.

through discussion of the major socialist sub-traditions of the last 200 years, and Cohen's work. Chapters four to six interrogate and apply that ideal, in doing so spelling out some of its main implications.

Chapter one traces the intellectual heritage of the value of community in the socialist tradition, thereby making good on the assertion that the idea of community has a strong *socialist* lineage. More importantly, it also recruits various strands of socialist thought on community which are put to use later on. The chapter concentrates on three groups of thinkers. First, what have become known as the 'utopian socialists', focusing on Owen, Fourier and Saint Simon; second, Marx; and third the 'ethical socialists', focusing almost entirely on the thought of R.H. Tawney. Apparent in each group of thinkers is a communitarian concern, whether 'harmonism' as the supreme human passion in Fourier, criticism of the selfishness of civil society under capitalism in Marx, or the relational equality of Tawney. The chapter concludes by collating seven important points of agreement, and difference, from the discussion, which inform the chapters that follow.

These historical reference points in place, chapter two discusses a more recent philosophical exponent of community as a socialist ideal: G.A. Cohen. Cohen presents perhaps the most sophisticated, albeit brief, understanding of what a communitarian socialism looks like. The centrality of community to Cohen's socialism is underlined by the importance that the ideal is given in Cohen's final book *Why Not Socialism?* where it sits alongside equality as one of two distinctively socialist values. But there is in fact a continued commitment to community running through Cohen's corpus of work, which has passed unnoticed by Cohen and his critics alike. This chapter critically discusses three separate instances in three separate works where community is invoked by Cohen, establishing community as a running theme in Cohen's work, and interrogating his use of this idea.

Building on chapters one and two, chapter three is the theoretically central chapter of the thesis, which sets out in detail a reformulated idea of communal reciprocity. The first part of the chapter describes the two constituent parts of the ideal – concern for others and reciprocity. In elucidating the first I sketch an expansive account of needs, before addressing the *scope* of communal reciprocity, arguing against the domain of community being artificially restricted in certain ways.

The second part of this section looks at the reciprocal nature of the socialist ideal of community, drawing out two sorts of ‘in-kind’ responses that community demands of its participants, which I term ‘producer’ and ‘consumer’ reciprocity.

The second part of the chapter looks beyond the conceptual requirements of communal reciprocity to what its *empirical* prerequisites might be. I discuss three potential constraints – material or economic inequality; distance; and ‘cultural’ differences in race, religion and ethnicity. The empirical evidence suggests that all can, and typically do, make it more difficult to realise community. A further section distinguishes the socialist conception of community from conservative and liberal rivals, outlining variously how communal reciprocity is egalitarian, how it rejects a privileging of the status quo, how it has an expansive scope, and how it is probably more demanding in what it asks of individuals than other, rival interpretations of community. A final, section reviews the reasons for thinking that the ideal of communal reciprocity is worth writing about, talking about and championing.

With the ideal of communal reciprocity now more fully set out, chapter four goes about interrogating it. One of the most persistent criticisms of communitarianism in general, and the socialist variant in particular, is that it infringes freedom, and such a charge demands full response. Two sets of freedom-based criticisms of community are discussed courtesy of Miriam Ronzoni and David Miller. I argue that in both cases, and drawing on the previous chapter, that a suitably sophisticated understanding of the value of community enables communal reciprocity to sidestep Ronzoni’s and Miller’s doubts. One important truth exposed in this defence is that it is mistaken to believe that adherence to socialist community necessitates commitment to a ‘thick’ conception of the good life. Another lies in the fact that the presence of reciprocity in the communitarian ideal is important in precluding egregiously ‘engulfing’ communitarian relationships.

Chapter five sees communal reciprocity in action, applied to the problem of explaining what is bad about exploitation. Exploitation is an important bad for socialists yet as I show in the first half of the chapter, popular fairness-based luck egalitarian accounts of exploitation look unable to adequately ground a normative complaint against it. This suggests an incompleteness in such accounts, and I argue that a plausible way of filling that gap is to employ the standard of communal

reciprocity discussed in previous chapters. Doing so not only showcases the application of such a standard but also, given that the charge of exploitation is particularly important for socialists, cements the importance of a value of community in the socialist armoury.

Chapter six brings the idea of communal reciprocity to bear on the issue of markets, seeking to answer the question – ‘does communal reciprocity condemn market activity?’’. I start by interrogating G.A. Cohen’s brief remarks in *Why Not Socialism?* on community and markets and find them wanting, identifying an apparent contradiction in what Cohen writes, which generates a dilemma. The discussion establishes that *in theory* at least there are certain types of market interaction that are permissible at the bar of communal reciprocity – for example, to use a system that Cohen references extensively, the utopian market envisaged by Joseph Carens. However, the remainder of the chapter goes on to argue that it remains a contingent truth that a great many types of market activity will violate communal reciprocity and should be condemned for that reason. I defend that conclusion by criticising two recent papers by David Miller and Hillel Steiner, conclude that socialists are justified in having pro tanto reasons to favour non-market ways of organising economic activity.

I conclude with some thoughts on the process of political argument, and the role of communal reciprocity within it.

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throughout, and to Frances who provided support and solace far beyond that which I deserved.

1

Community and the socialist tradition

1. Introduction

The first step in our investigation of the socialist ideal of community is to look at the history of that ideal. No important political value is immaculately conceived, and community is no different. What follows in this chapter is not a full history, but a partial and political history. Partial because it considers only a select few, relatively recent sources beginning in the early nineteenth century and continuing until the mid twentieth; political because it focuses on the idea of community as embedded in the writings of socialists, and is therefore intimately bound up with the politics of this tradition.

In tracing this history, my objectives are twofold. First, to pick out the ways in which community has been used in the socialist tradition, bringing to the fore important features of that value which will be of direct use in later chapters when we come to define a socialist idea of community in full. This exercise will be continued in the next chapter, looking at the work of G.A. Cohen, before culminating in chapter three which offers a full account of a reformulated ideal of communal reciprocity, drawing upon this historical precedent. A second objective is to motivate the claim that the idea of community discussed here is a *socialist* one by showing the importance of community across each of three major traditions of socialist thought over the last 200 years. The task suggested by this second point - of partially defining an ideological tradition - is a different enterprise to that of conceptual description

and application which is the main object of the thesis.¹ I follow here in the footsteps of those such as John Stuart Mill who have argued that a certain ideal of flourishing interpersonal relationships is intrinsic to socialism.² The best way of showing that this is the case is to show that socialist theorists have in fact held and used an evaluative standard of this sort. This chapter does exactly this, and so goes some way to justifying the claim that the chapters which follow are of political and ideological rather than merely conceptual interest.

In order to look for evidence of communitarian argument in the canon of socialist theory, we must first know what we are looking for. The word 'community' it scarcely needs to be said is often ill-defined and this has led some theorists to despair of it ever being usefully employed as a political concept.³ A much fuller elaboration of the concept of community is given in section one of chapter three, but until then we can give enough of a definition to indicate what is being searched for in the work of the theorists discussed below. Community as I shall understand it is an *evaluative* rather than merely descriptive ideal in the following sense. The word 'community' is sometimes used to describe a group of people who share some characteristic, even when that shared attribute is not always of value. This is clear if we consider statements such as 'for 10 years the French community has been at war with itself', which would be simply self-contradictory if the word community was *always* used in a normative way (whatever you think the normative meaning of community is, it surely excludes being at war). Such sentences are not necessarily self-contradictory because 'the French community' *can* function as a merely descriptive phrase, describing a group of people who are merely of French nationality or origin, rather than a group amongst whom communal relations prevail,

¹ Principally because, as Tawney says "Socialism... is obviously a word with more than one meaning. As always in the case of political systems, its character varies with practical realities, political cultural and economic, of the specific environment in which it develops." 'Social Democracy in Britain', in *The Radical Tradition*, p. 140. I don't believe the same is true for community.

² As Mill observed: "In [socialists'] eyes the very foundation of human life as at present constituted, the very principle on which the production and repartition of all material products is now carried on, is essentially vicious and anti-social. It is the principle of individualism, competition, each one for himself and against all the rest." J.S. Mill, 'Chapters on Socialism' in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Volume V - Essays on Economics and Society Part II.

³ See e.g. Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy: A Beginner's Guide for Students and Politicians*, p. 133; Andrew Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging*, p. 4; and A.H. Halsey, 'Government Against Poverty in School and Community', p. 140.

something which *is* a valuable attribute of a group. It is the latter idea that we are interested in.⁴

The normative idea of community used in the analysis below is only briefly and broadly defined for the time being. It is relevantly broad in that I do not differentiate before the event between any particular *socialist* idea of community, and other articulations of that value. Given what I have just said about the definition of socialism, such an approach would risk being question begging. Instead the idea is to cast the net sufficiently wide that in the course of looking at our selected socialist theorists we take in all normative work that can be justified as concerning community, rather than some other value. All that is required at this stage therefore is enough detail to distinguish between community and other political ideals such as fairness, or efficiency, or freedom. For the purposes of the analysis carried out in what follows, I take it that a writer is discussing community, rather than some other evaluative standard, when there is open or implicit (i.e. because it is the basis of criticism) advocacy of a model of society where there are *good relationships between people*, which involves, at minimum, that *each holds the interests of the others to have at least some non-instrumental value*. Such a definition is purposefully broad, but it is not without conceptual bite. Community is not fundamentally concerned, as (many would agree) fairness is, with the proper distribution of some good; nor, as freedom is, with the removal of constraints on action, nor, as efficiency is, with the achievement of the highest level of welfare (or something like it). Instead it is concerned with the quality of interpersonal relationships, where good quality relationships have the essential characteristic of non-instrumental concern. It is this feature that shall be discussed in the work of the socialist writers covered below.

My method is to divide the socialist canon into the three major intellectual sub-traditions of the last 200 years: utopian socialism, Marxian socialism, and Christian or ethical socialism, which will be explored one by one. The division between sub-traditions is inevitably not entirely neat. There are some theorists (William Morris springs to mind) who at different points in their careers could be

⁴ While straightforward in theory this distinction is muddled in practice – we shall see in cases such as the use of the idea of ‘harmony’ in the work of the so-called utopian socialists, that it is not always clear whether this term and its cognates are being in an evaluative or merely descriptive sense. In instances such as these, the context of a given passage must play a definitive role.

placed in any or all groups. Nevertheless, these three traditions are commonly recognised as distinct ideological groupings, and between them cover the major socialist theoretical traditions since the French Revolution.⁵ The first is the so-called ‘utopian’ – or, less disparagingly, pre-Marxian - socialists, in which I will include the three pre-eminent theorists of that group: Robert Owen, Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint-Simon. A full three theorists are discussed here both because there exist significant differences between them and because their theoretical contributions are individually somewhat fragmentary, to a degree that is not the case with our other two socialist traditions. I discuss each in turn.⁶

Robert Owen is well known for his experiments in a new type of model society at New Lanark in Scotland, and his association with the early co-operative movement. From his more theoretical writings it emerges that his plans for a better form of industrial organisation are based not only on a kind of radical behaviourism which asserts the malleability of individuals, but also on a normative complaint against the *type* of conduct currently being instilled in workers by the rules and norms of early capitalism – namely, self-interest and non-cooperation. Thus, Owen’s plans for the progressive education of the workforce are conceived in part with communitarian intent.

Charles Fourier’s political plans are less worked out, and more justifiably described as utopian, than Owen’s but his defence of the creation of a network of ‘phalanxes’ consisting of groups of people who work together on common projects is rich in communitarian rhetoric. Furthermore, and unlike Owen, Fourier develops a philosophical basis for his political recommendations which employs an account of human passions, including those which are explicitly communitarian: ‘harmonism’, friendship and love.

Saint-Simon’s project is different again in that it focuses not on justifying intricate blueprints for small-scale communities, but on the principles that should

⁵ For use of some of these socialist groupings see Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* and also Crosland, *The Future of Socialism*, pp. 51-71.

⁶ Note that in the course of this discussion it is not necessary to make the very ambitious claim that community in the sense defined above was *the central*, or *most important* notion employed by these theorists. In many cases it was not. All of those writers featured below were interested in a broader political argument than the one attempted here. Those broader projects inevitably meant drawing upon more than one strand of argument, and so more than one political ideal.

shape the reform of society. His motivating desire is to replace the nascent bourgeois class with what he calls industrialists – by which he means those individuals who work productively to satisfy the needs of society. Replete with Christian imagery, Saint-Simon's work castigates what he sees as the idle self-interest of those at the top of society, and seeks to replace it with a communitarian norm of production for the sake of others.

The second substantive part of the chapter (section three) is able to spend a little more time looking at Marx. To make sense of the changing tenor of his thought over time, I tackle him in two parts, looking first at the early Marx, where passages from writings such as 'On the Jewish Question', and 'The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' invoke a conception of man as a social being, whose good consists in satisfying not just his own needs but the needs of others too. Post-capitalist society, Marx implies, will honour that part of human nature where capitalism cannot. While this language is less common in the later Marx, we nevertheless find enough examples of communitarian rhetoric to justify thinking that this strand of Marx's thought was not entirely exorcised from his mature writings, whatever he claimed.

The third and last substantive part of the chapter (section four) discusses the ethical, or Christian, socialism of R.H. Tawney. I focus here principally on Tawney's early work *The Acquisitive Society*, which best encapsulates his argument for a 'functional society' – where what Tawney describes as the avarice of contemporary society is replaced by one where remuneration is a function of service rendered to the community. What matters, Tawney makes clear, is not only the increase in the total welfare of society encouraged by a better kind of work ethic, but also that people act towards one another in a better, and more interpersonally justifiable way.

A final section concludes with a summary of seven communitarian themes brought to light by the discussion of these five theorists, which will inform the discussion in subsequent chapters. They are, in brief: an appreciation of the different labels under which the ideal of community has traded in the socialist tradition; the prevalence of the requirement for individual, as opposed to just governmental, responsibility; the importance of reciprocity; the divergence between writers on the size of the industrial or political groupings that communitarian principles

recommend; the different foundations of communitarian belief; the disagreement about whether community is of instrumental value, non-instrumental value or both; and the broad agreement that community is antipathetic towards the market.

2. The utopian socialists

The utopian socialists are a mixed bag politically and philosophically. However they are united by a commitment to a future society in which harmonious relationships prevail. In this section, I will provide a sketch of the relevant work of each theorist which suggests that utopian socialism was host to a pervasive communitarian sentiment, and in doing so outline some of its more important features.⁷

The heart of Robert Owen's socialist prescription was an ambition to recreate something like the 'happy community' of mill workers in New Lanark in southern Scotland many times over. In stark contrast to the contemporary tendency for larger workplaces Owen advocated smaller communities. In his most useful political work, the 'Report to the County of Lanark', he recommends that in general people should form productive associations of more than 300 men, women and children and not more than 2,000.⁸ Each association would be more or less self-sufficient and capable of organising its own production and trading with others.

Owen's theory of why his brand of socialism was preferable evolved over time but from an early stage he maintained a belief that purely *self-interested* production was the major affliction of his time. Owen is clear from his earliest works about the increase in happiness that redounds to the individual, and efficiency to the group, when people are educated to act in a co-operative spirit, mindful of others. In this phase of his writings he is most directly concerned with charting his methods learned in New Lanark where workers were content and the mill profitable. Community-serving conduct was at the heart of this description, not least because Owen thought it was a sure route to personal happiness. Thus, he argues that the wider application of the principles adopted at New Lanark will mean: "All the

⁷ Following Marx, I group them together under the label 'utopian socialists' despite the fact that to a man they would have rejected such a label. For evidence of this, see Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark', in Claeys (ed.) *A New View of Society and Other Writings*, p. 277 and Saint-Simon 'On the Reorganisation of European Society' in Ionescu (ed.) *The Political Thought of Saint-Simon*, p. 87. All further references to Owen and Saint-Simon are to these collections, unless otherwise indicated.

⁸ Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark', p. 271.

complicated and counteracting motives for good conduct, which have multiplied almost to infinity, will be reduced to one single principle of action... the happiness of self, clearly understood and uniformly practiced; which can only be attained by conduct that must promote the happiness of the community”.⁹ It is this community-serving conduct that he sought to inculcate in his workers at New Lanark.

The chief insight which Owen professed to have discovered, and which he believed gave these normative beliefs scientific credibility was “the Evil Genius” of the modern world, that “each individual man forms his own character”.¹⁰ To the contrary, Owen argued he had shown that “members of any community may by degrees trained to live without idleness, without poverty, without crime, and without punishment; for each of these is the effect of error... they are all necessary consequences of ignorance.”.¹¹ The ultimate malleability of human character underlay his optimism that workers *could* be moulded to work in the service of one another. In a telling passage, Owen says, “man... is directed by true knowledge... every individual will necessarily endeavour to promote the happiness of every other individual in in his sphere of action; because he must clearly, and without any doubt, comprehend such conduct to be the... true cause of self-happiness.”¹² Education then was paramount for narrow self-interest to be overcome.

Owen’s conception of what he calls ‘self-happiness’ is clearly contingent on the interests of others being met. That he means to distinguish between self-happiness in this broad sense, and narrow selfish satisfaction is clear from some of his most forceful passages, for example in the ‘Report to the County of Lanark’ where he states that: “From this principle of *individual interest* have arisen all the divisions of mankind, the endless errors and mischiefs of class, sect, party, and of national antipathies... in short if there be one closet doctrine more contrary to truth than another, it is the notion that individual interests, as that term is now understood, is a more advantageous principle on which to found the social system,

⁹ Owen, ‘A New View of Society’, p. 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 110.

for the benefit of all, or of any, than the principle of union and mutual co-operation".¹³

Elsewhere, in his notorious comments on the family, Owen's main criticism of that institution is that "family divisions of society, not only tend to engender and maintain ignorant individual selfishness throughout society, to create innumerable little family circles of competition, contest, and discord, but also to form the whole of society into a chaotic mass of petty individual, or family contending interest, to the incalculable detriment and injury of the victors and vanquished in the contest".¹⁴ Again, it is self-interested and antagonistic relationships that are the standard by which existing social institutions are judged. There are numerous other examples of him using this sort of apparently communitarian standard to criticise contemporary practices.¹⁵

He also appears to attack self-interest, and in particular self-interested market competition, more directly. He thus says of market exchange that while "It has stimulated invention... given industry and talent to the human character; and... secured the future exertion of those energies which otherwise might have remained dormant... it has made man ignorantly, individually selfish [and] placed him in opposition to his fellows."¹⁶ One implication of such passages is that the fact that market competition has produced this result ('placed [man] in opposition to his fellows') is sufficient reason to condemn it – irrespective, perhaps of its effects on the happiness of those involved.

So Owen does invoke what appears to be a communitarian standard, and appears to justify his criticism at least on the deleterious effects of non-community, but also perhaps to be exercised by its deficiency apart from those effects. His scattered suggestions as to why such relationships might be bad are far from systematic. Clearly as we have seen, Owen seems to think that non-harmonious relationships cause people to work less well together, and to generally feel less fulfilled. Beyond that, at times he seems to suggest that there is something natural

¹³ Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark', p. 276; emphasis original.

¹⁴ Owen, 'Lectures on an Entire New State of Society', p. 330.

¹⁵ See e.g. 'Address Delivered at the City of London Tavern 1817', p. 196; and 'An Address to the Working Classes', p. 246.

¹⁶ Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark', p. 269.

and distinctively human about production for others, for example saying that: “the change sought for must be preceded by the clear development of a great universal principle which shall unite in one all of the petty jarring interests, by which, till now, human nature has been made a most inveterate enemy to itself”.¹⁷ The invocation of ‘human nature’ jars somewhat with what we know Owen’s views were on how human character could be shaped by education and circumstance. A reading consistent with his views on the malleability of human nature might suggest that Owen’s point here is that it is contemporary capitalism *in particular* that has moulded human nature into its present, antagonistic form. But this leaves it unclear as to whether he believed there was some natural tendency or drive in human beings to be social which is frustrated under capitalism, or whether people are simply ‘blank pages’, ready to be written on, but in the absence of enlightened employers like Owen have been led astray.

Elsewhere, in a charge that we shall see repeated by other communitarian socialists, Owen is keen to point out the disconnect between what might be called established Christian or natural morality and the actual conduct that is celebrated under capitalism. He writes: “peace, goodwill, charity and benevolence, have been preached for centuries past – nay, for thousands of years, yet they nowhere exist; on the contrary, qualities the reverse of these have at all times constituted the character and influence the conduct of individuals and of nations, and must continue to do so while the system of individual rewards, punishments, and competition, is permitted to constitute the basis of human society”.¹⁸ Owen, of course, was emphatically not a Christian, but, as Tawney after him, this seems to suggest a recognition that societal norms of the sort he valued were often expressed as religious or spiritual commitments, and that this included the need for community.

The basis of Owen’s communitarian judgements are thus somewhat unclear. However, there remains clear evidence of condemnation of the selfishness inculcated by contemporary way of organising society in general, and the workplace in particular which justify describing him as a communitarian.

¹⁷Owen, ‘Report to the County of Lanark’, p. 278.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 304.

Next we come to Charles Fourier. Fourier's writings are less systematic than Owen's but occasionally minutely – and somewhat eccentrically - detailed. His main 'practical' (in the sense that it is tangible, rather than that it was ever do-able) proposal is to divide the population into a series of 'phalanxes', which he envisaged would be formed of, in his term, a 'full harmony' of 1600 people, and which each group would construct according to a plan of Fourier's imagining, with the main feature a grand communal building at their centre where all would meet to socialise with one another.¹⁹ For some major projects, Fourier imagined that several phalanxes could join together to form a task force, capable of carrying out major construction projects or cultivation of areas of land.

In addition to planning in detail for these productive groupings, Fourier also spent some time developing a metaphysics to support his proposals, which is relevant to our inquiry here. The over-riding aim of his political project, he is clear is "The transition from social chaos to universal harmony".²⁰ The prime evil which Fourier pits himself against is commercial activity, which he calls "the source of all sorts of crimes and misdeeds"²¹ and characterises as "a mode of exchange in which the seller has the right to defraud the buyer with impunity and to determine by himself without arbitration the profit which he ought to receive".²² In the design of the phalanxes he is thus keen to secure the maximum possible co-operation for the mutual interest of the members, and even minute details of their organisation are set out at length with this end in mind: the layout of the community, the architecture of its communal buildings and the time for the founding of the phalanx are all considered. Each is considered with a view to the good of the community, for example Fourier stresses the importance of "...the formation of transcendent ties or collective bonds among the series before the end of the warm season. Before winter comes a passionate union must be established between the members; they must be made to feel a sense of collective and individual devotion to the phalanx".²³

¹⁹ 'The Phalanstery' in Beecher and Bienvenu (eds.), *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love and Passionate Attraction*, p. 284. All further references to Fourier are to this collection, unless otherwise indicated.

²⁰ Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements*, p. 4

²¹ Fourier, 'The Vice of Commerce' in *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*.

²² *Ibid.* p. 114.

²³ Fourier, 'The Establishment of a Trial Phalanx', p. 140.

As with Owen, Fourier is certain that this type of intimate productive association will yield productivity gains, but he is more explicit than Owen that the advantages of this new form of organisation are not limited to this end. Instead, the alternative association that he outlined would not only be more efficient but would also be one in which personal relationships would be typified by fervent feelings of sympathy and care.²⁴ Thus Fourier prefaces his setting out of the key achievements of the phalanxes with a distinctly communitarian flourish: "...societies will attain their goal, and man his dignity, only when universal fraternity has become an established fact".

What does he have in mind by using this phrase? Fourier goes on to clarify that "By universal fraternity we mean a degree of general intimacy..." and goes on to list a set of more practical policies that he thinks will work towards meeting this standard: "Comfort for the people and the assurance of a splendid minimum; the education and instruction of the lower classes; general truthfulness in work relations; the rendering of reciprocal services by unequal classes."²⁵

He elaborates on what he means by 'intimacy' in a parable of three men sharing some soup. While, he explains, "general friendship" is necessary for such relationships to be formed, it is not sufficient. For if "three men have dinner together [and] they are served a soup which pleases two of them and displeases the third...[then] they do not make up a group because they are in discord about the function that occupies them".²⁶ For the group to form a cohesive whole, they must go beyond "agreement about the main purpose of the get-together which is friendship" to also share in what Fourier calls a "sensual bond", which in this circumstance means to pick "a soup liked by all three members of the group".²⁷ The more general lesson for Fourier's politics which he seeks to exemplify with this tale is that a group needs a shared, substantive interest if it is to function harmoniously. It cannot be enough for the phalanx to be bound together on a more abstract basis as a result merely of some mutual regard or fellow-feeling if there is not this tangible shared interest. Ever meticulous in his attention to detail, Fourier followed through

²⁴ For further elaboration of this point, see Taylor, *The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists*, p. 116.

²⁵ Fourier, 'Critique of the Revolutionary Ideals', p. 179.

²⁶ Fourier, 'The Study of Groups', p. 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

on this belief in his blueprint for the phalanxes, going as far as to rank the kinds of day-to-day tasks which could best lend themselves to mutual commitment on the part of the workers allotted to do them.

Underlying these prescriptions was Fourier's theory of the passions – he describes fourteen in all. In an echo of Rousseau, he writes of man's natural morality being stifled by current social arrangements, but able to be liberated by a new way of living.²⁸ Fourier's justification for his communitarian plans is thus radically different to Owen's. Where the former saw the members of his associations as blank pieces of paper, upon which rules which benefited the community could be stamped, Fourier thought the only way to the good life was to honour and reflect the fundamental aspects of human nature that were currently ignored.²⁹ Importantly for our purposes, among the passions that Fourier wanted to see realised are distinctively communitarian standards of flourishing. 'Harmonism', is the name Fourier gave to the basic inclination for people to find satisfaction in concord with others, and was the most important of Fourier's passions, described by one commentator as "the trunk of the tree of passion, from which all the other individual passions stemmed like branches".³⁰ The relevant group of 'branches' for our purposes are the so-called affective passions which included friendship, love, family and ambition. These achieved fruition in the Fourierean phalanx through communal work and living arrangements, including a grand communal building in the centre of each community. More sensationally, Fourier advocated organising means to ensure that the members of the community were sexually satisfied, partly as an important part of the good life in itself, but also so that sexual urges did not detract from other types of important relationships.³¹ It was ensuring that such congruous relationships flourished that was at the heart of Fourier's socialism.

Finally, we turn to Saint-Simon, a marginal figure in his own lifetime, but someone who gained a substantial following after his death. Of all three utopian socialists, it is Saint-Simon who probably had the biggest influence on Marx and Engels, for example in his critique of the modern distinction between the state and

²⁸ See Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* for a discussion of the similarity with Rousseau.

²⁹ See *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*, pp. 215-24.

³⁰ Taylor, *The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists*, p. 107.

³¹ *Ibid.*

civil society. In contrast to Owen and Fourier, Saint-Simon was less concerned with dramatic organisational upheaval, just so long as his principles for the new focus for private and public initiative were adopted: where usefulness and functionality – what he called ‘industry’ – were adopted as the common goal of all. He even went so far as to write to the King of France to assure the monarchy that they could maintain their positions at the head of the state.³² Rather than a revolutionary upheaval of the economic structure, Saint-Simon’s vision was rather of a system whereby the ‘industrialists’ – primarily but not exclusively the skilled and unskilled working classes – rose from being concentrated in the lowliest classes to direct the organisation of industry.³³

Saint-Simon’s use of the term ‘industry’ is meant in a particular and nonconventional sense to characterise someone “who works to produce, or who puts within the reach of different members of society, one or more means of satisfying their needs or their physical tastes”.³⁴ To be an industrialist was not just to be a productive member of society, but to produce for others, a group which Saint-Simon used to describe scientists, engineers and artists as well as labourers. The function of this group was compared, in a way that was to be taken up by future socialists to the idleness and unproductive existence of property owners. It was Saint-Simon’s goal to replace this class of bourgeois idlers with dynamic producers, though in a gradual fashion and without violence or revolt.³⁵

Although the project might appear a narrowly technocratic one, Saint-Simon’s argument is shot through with communitarian rhetoric. His starting point, in his own terms was “...what is moral? What is immoral?”, for, he said “this question must be answered before we compare the morality of the industrialists with that of the anti-industrialists.”³⁶ The answer, given in spite of Saint-Simon’s shunning of religion was to look at Christian teaching, for: “In politics as in religion, upright men, those who are devout and those who are not, recognise that all morality derives from the great principles which was proclaimed by Jesus Christ: Love your neighbour

³² *The Political Thought of Saint-Simon*, p. 7.

³³ For a clear overview, see ‘The Catechism of the Industrialists’, pp. 182-3.

³⁴ Saint-Simon, ‘The Catechism of the Industrialists’ in Ionescu (ed.) *The Political Thought of Saint-Simon*, p. 182.

³⁵ See *ibid.* p. 183.

³⁶ Saint-Simon, ‘Politics’, p. 130.

as yourself: do unto others as you would they do to you.”³⁷ Indeed, in an echo of a theme I touched on in Owen’s work, Saint-Simon writes approvingly of the communitarian effect of religion in feudal Europe as “the bond in European society” bringing people together. He laments the neglect of universal religious principles in terms that are explicitly communitarian, saying that “This neglect gave rise to the egoism which became dominant in all classes and individuals...” and furthermore, and more strongly, that “It is to this egoism that we must attribute the malady of our own age, a malady which affects all workers who serve the community”.³⁸

Saint-Simon saw his project of industry and productive responsibility for others as the common mission that could overcome this egoism by uniting the disparate but overwhelming majority of people who were producers. Industry had the ability to spur the vast mass of people to work for a common end. This was essential because, “It cannot be too often repeated that society needs an active goal, for without this there would be no political system”.³⁹ Only certain types of common project can be genuinely unifying, and Saint-Simon clearly thought that his industrialist proposal was almost uniquely this sort of blueprint, saying that “...every association of men which has a well-defined character... must be either military or industrial, because true association cannot exist without a common purpose”.⁴⁰ Rather than being brought together by what, in a play on Adam Smith’s famous phrase, Saint-Simon referred to as ‘the hand of greed’, each would be brought together by the goal of producing for others. This would be, Saint-Simon suggested in places, an all-consuming project: “The whole life of the industrialists is spent in a way which is useful to their neighbours since they devote their time and their means to the production of things which can satisfy the primary needs of society and provide pleasures for it.”⁴¹ Community, for Saint-Simon’s industrialists was to be not just a narrowly political project but a way of life.

³⁷ Saint-Simon, ‘Politics’, p. 130.

³⁸ Saint-Simon, ‘The New Christianity’, p. 56.

³⁹ Saint-Simon, ‘On the Industrial System’, p. 158.

⁴⁰ ‘On the Industrial System’, p. 164. Saint-Simon’s industrial blueprint is thus the only *peacetime* way of forging such an association

⁴¹ Saint-Simon, ‘Politics’, p. 130.

3. Marx

With this sketch of the main communitarian themes in the work of the early utopian socialists, we can move in more detail to the work of Karl Marx. Was Marx a communitarian, in the sense given in section one? I think that he was. However, his communitarianism was not consistent, nor clearly set out and so piecing together the extent of his commitment to community requires some work. One central exegetical problem in analysing Marx is the way the focus and content of his writings changed over time. It is not necessary to believe in a complete 'break' between the early and the later Marx to agree that his work evolved over the thirty or so years in which he was intellectually active, and that this means that some parts of his work which were prominent in the earlier period fell away later on. There is a good case to be made that just such a fate befell Marx's communitarian commitment.⁴² In the final analysis I want to argue that, at least as far as community is concerned, this view is not wholly accurate, but the divide between an 'early' and a 'later' Marx is still a useful rubric for dividing up our discussion, given what are - at least - different emphases during the two periods.

When the early Marx became the later one is open to interpretation. Everyone agrees that by the time he was writing of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1847-8 (aged 29) Marx had reached this later stage.⁴³ I will take the period of the early Marx to be until the end of 1845, when he began working on *The German Ideology*.⁴⁴ This puts in frame key texts such as Marx's work on Hegel (the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and the 'Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction'); his article 'On the Jewish Question' which was a response to the sometime left-Hegelian Bruno Bauer; and the fragmentary but important *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* where Marx commented on several contemporary intellectuals. The later period then covers the rest of Marx's work from *The German Ideology* to the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' through *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*.

⁴² Althusser is sometimes taken to be advocating such a view in *For Marx*, though he is clear the 'break' in Marx's should not be thought of as a point in time, but the difference between two different perspectives which are apparent throughout Marx's writings.

⁴³ O'Malley (ed.) *Marx: Early Political Writings* p. xxvii.

⁴⁴ Here I follow David Leopold in *The Young Marx*, p. 10.

The structure of this section is as follows. First I will outline the evidence of a communitarian commitment in Marx's early work, with particular emphasis on Marx's article 'On the Jewish Question' and what are referred to as the 'Notes on James Mill', often grouped as part of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. The discussion is formed of two parts: first I adduce evidence for the *content* of the early Marx's communitarianism – the way in which contemporary capitalism was deficient according to community – second, I outline the answer a further, important question that was stressed by Marx in his early writings: the *scope* of community, which sets out to whom the communitarian criticism should apply. I argue that there is ample textual evidence to support the thesis that Marx's idea of community is one that condemns an atomistic view of society where men are egoists; his positive view one where workers produce to satisfy the needs of others, and expect this productive ethos to be reciprocated. The scope of this vision, crucially applies beyond the state, but to the every-day activities of what Marx terms 'civil society' too.

We then move to look more briefly at the later Marx. I argue that there are various passages in key works that the clear commitment to community is still apparent. While it is true that the later Marx's support for new communitarian relationships is not as full-blooded as it is in his earlier writings, it is nevertheless the case that such a commitment still shines through in his work. It is beyond the scope of this section to explain *why* Marx's support for community becomes more covert, but I would suggest that just as it has been said, in my view rightly, that the mature Marx was deeply mistaken about the extent to which he relied upon justice or other normative standards, so it also is with community.⁴⁵

3.1 Early Marx

Central to Marx's early work is a criticism of the atomised nature of society under capitalism. This idea first appears in Marx's notes on Hegel in the early 1840s in his description of civil society – a catch-all term covering the commercial and private life

⁴⁵ As Jon Elster writes: "One is left with the answer, although it is difficult to accept when interpreting a writer of Marx's stature, that he did not really understand what he was doing." *An Introduction to Karl Marx*, p. 92. See also Geras, 'The Controversy About Marx and Justice', and Cohen, *Self-ownership, Freedom and Equality*, p. 139.

of citizens, and which was contrasted with the political and legislative work of ‘the state’. In contrast to earlier periods of history, contemporary civil society is distinguished, Marx tells us, by the separation and detachment of people from one another: “Present civil society is the accomplished principle of individualism... the manner of his [an individual’s] life, his activity etc. is his privilege and instead of making him a member and function of society, it makes him an exception from society.”⁴⁶ This description of contemporary society stands in clear contrast with civil society historically “by the fact that it does not, as was earlier the case regard the individual as a communal individual rather it is partly chance, partly labour etc. which determines whether he remains in his estate or not...”⁴⁷

These and other similar fragments of Marx’s thought from his early work on Hegel are somewhat opaque – it is difficult to glean, for example, whether Marx is referring to the absence of co-operation in modern civil society or a lack of fellow feeling, nor the extent to which these are essential as opposed to merely contingent features of contemporary capitalism. However, we do get some sense of *why* it is that Marx thinks it is problematic that civil society relationships are of this sort. He writes that the contemporary situation is one where it is only in virtue of his “vocation as a member of the state, as *social being*” does he “acquire significance as *man*”.⁴⁸ He writes elsewhere in the notes on Hegel that civil society “does not sustain the individual as a member of a community, as a communal being [Gemeinwesen]”.⁴⁹ Thus it appears, and to anticipate language used later, that the non-communal nature of civil society under capitalism is regrettable because it mars and inhibits human flourishing; specifically the flourishing achieved as a result of communal relationships with others.

These suggestive passages are given more definitive and polished elaboration in Marx’s article ‘On the Jewish Question’, published in 1844.⁵⁰ One important argument that Marx is prosecuting here is – contra Hegel and the ‘young Hegelian’

⁴⁶ O’Malley (ed.), *Marx: Early Political Writings*, p. 19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*. p. 19.

⁴⁹ ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right’, quoted in Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, p. 69.

⁵⁰ To be fair to Marx, we should remember that much of his now published work was not written for publication at the time, and some of it was never meant to be published. His notes on Hegel are just such an example.

Bruno Bauer - is about the *scope* of social norms, which I come on to shortly, but Marx also paints a picture of the content of these norms in as vivid a way as anywhere else in the early writings. Echoing his earlier work on Hegel, Marx criticises the illusory basis of the thought that modern civil society is appropriately regulated by norms of freedom, equality and security given that each at best does nothing to prevent a society of selfish individuals, and at worst promotes it. Thus “The practical right of the human right to freedom is the right of private property... [and] is thus the right to enjoy and dispose of one’s wealth arbitrarily as one pleases, without relation to other men, independently of society, the right of personal use”; “equality... is nothing but the parity of the *liberté* described above: namely, that every human as such is equally considered to be a self-based monad”; “security... the highest concept of civil society... exists only to guarantee each of its members the preservation of his person, of his rights and of his property... Civil society does not by the concept of security transcend egoism, much more so is security the insuring of its egoism”.⁵¹ The charge of egoistic relations is thus *the* central standard invoked in the critique of the norms that regulate life under capitalism given that “none of the so-called human rights then goes beyond the egoistic man, beyond man as a member of civil society, namely withdrawn into his private interests... separated from the community”.⁵²

Two questions immediately arise from this preliminary evidence. The first is whether the criticism that Marx makes is purely one related to life under capitalism, whether that is community is a standard that applies across history, or just at this juncture. In his later writings, Marx certainly steps back from any pretence to making trans-historical criticism of capitalism, independent of the prevailing mode of production.⁵³ However, this does not seem to be the case in his early writings. Take the passage in ‘A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction’ where he describes the newly forming industrial proletariat as having ‘no historical title but only a human title’⁵⁴, or in the same text where he calls for revolution in Germany “that will raise it not only to the official level of modern

⁵¹ Marx: *Early Political Writings*, pp. 45-6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵³ See Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx*, pp. 92-3 for relevant comment.

⁵⁴ O’Malley (ed.), *Early Political Writings*, p. 69.

nations, but the *human* level which be the immediate future of these nations...”.⁵⁵ These passages suggest Marx’s social criticism is not linked to contemporary historical circumstance.

Another, related, question we might ask of the evidence presented thus far is whether or not the norm of community that Marx employs is an *objective* one, that is, whether or not it is of value independently of whether or not people actually value it. Certainly Marx talks about the degrading of the worker under capitalism in a way that stresses the subjective disvalue to the worker, for example in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.⁵⁶ But he also seems to assert that that community is an objectively valuable good. At one point, he invokes a parallel with Kant – “the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is debased, enslaved, neglected contemptible being”.⁵⁷ Such a move makes sense and is consistent when we consider the anthropological basis of Marx’s idea of human flourishing. This idea posits human sociability as part of man’s essential nature, a necessary attribute of those who are able to develop in a ‘natural way’ – and realised only when they enter a certain kind of relationships with others. Thus, in a typical passage Marx writes: “The individual is the social being” and even “my own existence is social activity; and so what I make of myself I make of myself for society and with consciousness of myself as a social being”.⁵⁸ People, Marx asserts, are social animals – beings for whom sociability is a good - and it is this universal empirical fact that grounds the good of communal relationships.

One rival account to that adduced here, which must be answered, is that Marx’s idea of community is a purely instrumental conception. Such a view claims not that there is no evaluative standard by which Marx judged existing capitalist society, and saw realised under communism, but rather the relevant standard is one that we have not touched on so far in our discussion: that of creative individual fulfilment.⁵⁹ On this view, the central good that communism realises is that of varied and fulfilling labour, and community becomes merely an important means to that

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 64.

⁵⁶ See e.g. O’Malley (ed.) *Early Political Writings*, p. 71 and p. 78.

⁵⁷ ‘Contribution...’, *Ibid.* p. 64.

⁵⁸ *Manuscripts*, in O’Malley (ed.), *Early Political Writings*, p. 81.

⁵⁹ This view is evident in e.g. Cohen, *Self-Ownership*, pp. 127-133.

end. The metaphor of choice here is a band, for whether we are a violinist or drummer, each of us needs to work in concert with the others to achieve a mutually satisfying result, but this can be done on an essentially contractual basis, without any sense of fraternity or fellow-feeling.

This answer is, however, unsatisfactory. While it is true that Marx's work is replete with references to this type of human flourishing, this merely shows that Marx is a pluralist about the standards by which modes of production are to be judged. More importantly, and in addition to the material referred to above, we can here bring in additional evidence of Marx's non-instrumental critique of egoistic relations in his early work, drawing in particular on the 'Notes on James Mill', which are part of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, and in particular a passage which it is worth reproducing at length:

"Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have in two ways affirmed himself and the other person. (1) In my production I would have objectified my individuality, its specific character, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual manifestation of my life during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be objective, visible to the senses ... (2) In your enjoyment or use of my project I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a human need by my work, that is of having objectified man's essential nature, and of having thus created an object corresponding to man's essential nature..."⁶⁰

This passage is important because it appears to enlist both the types of human good that have just been mentioned. The first is the fulfilment achieved in the creative process of producing, which results in a product that shows the individuality of its producer. The second is the realisation of a relationship between the producer and the consumer of the product. Each type of good is a specifically *human* type of flourishing – it is the state that people attain when they carry out 'production as human beings'. Given that Marx does not fold one into the other here, we should be

⁶⁰ 'Comment on James Mill', O'Malley (ed.) *Early Political Writings*, pp. 95-6.

wary of any rival, instrumental account of community which seeks to do just that, at least as far as the early Marx is concerned.

For further support for the non-instrumental reading of community we can consider further the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, and particularly those parts which concern alienation. In that text, Marx covers various ways in which labour is alienated under capitalism, but one central way is that it fails to see that “the human essence of nature is there only for social man, because only for him is nature a bond with man, his existence for the other and the other’s for him, and the foundation of his own *human* existence, the life-element of actuality”.⁶¹ Producing in accordance with your human essence, means using the materials provided by the nature to produce for others, and to have others produce for you. We see here Marx’s invocation of *reciprocal* production in particular, a phrase used explicitly in the ‘Notes on James Mill’, where when I have “affirmed and objective my human, my communal, being... [the] relationship would be reciprocal: what occurs on my side would occur on yours.”⁶²

With these comments on the content of the early Marx’s idea of community, I now turn briefly to the second element mentioned above: its scope. The question of scope is front and centre in Marx’s early work, particularly in his critique of Hegel and is the major point of disagreement between Marx and Bruno Bauer in ‘On the Jewish Question’. Marx’s communitarian critique is thus premised on a radical rejection of the restriction of political critique to just the state, it must extend to everyday business and personal conduct as well.

Marx’s apparent quarrel with Bauer is over the correct response to the discriminatory legal restrictions imposed on Jews in Germany at the time (‘the Jewish question’). Marx charges Bauer with responding merely with a critique of religion, and a call for the exorcism of religious doctrine and influence from the state.⁶³ The nature of Marx’s response to Bauer is revealing. He attacks Bauer’s presumption that the ‘perfection of the state’ can lead to the emancipation of the Jews, for even if Jewish people are emancipated in the eyes of the state, this does

⁶¹ O’Malley (ed.) *Early Political Writings*, p. 80, emphasis original.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶³ In *The Young Marx*, Leopold shows that Bauer’s position is more complex than Marx makes out. See pp. 120-9.

not change the fact that their position in *civil society* might still be far from free. Here Marx adduces empirical evidence from America to argue that the separation of church and state is quite compatible with religion flourishing in wider society.⁶⁴ The key polemical point is this: “the contradiction in which the adherent of a particular religion finds himself with his state citizenship is only part of the universal secular contradiction between the political state and civil society”, bluntly: “political emancipation is not human emancipation”.⁶⁵ Hence the critique which was quoted above on the secular human rights standards – such legal standards can leave in place, or even re-enforce, defective and oppressive human relationships in civil society.

At various points, Marx seeks to strengthen this critique of Bauer by emphasising that what happens in civil society is *more* important than what happens at the level of the state. The state is merely an ‘abstract’ influence on people’s lives; civil society by contrast is the home of “the genuine man, as the *homme* in contrast to the *citoyen* because he is man in his sensuous, individual and immediate existence...”.⁶⁶ This further emphasises Marx’s insistence that any political criticism must be brought to bear beyond the narrow confines of the state.

To conclude this first part: we have seen that the early Marx is committed to a distinctively communitarian critique of society under capitalism, which decries the atomism and egoism which characterises it. This conviction is widespread in his earlier writings, and it is not plausible to suggest that such statements express merely a proposal for instrumental co-operation for self-development. An important part of this critique is Marx’s rejection of the restriction of political criticism to the state – if human emancipation to be complete, the focus of socialists must be on wider society too.

3.2 *Later Marx*

If we have established that the ‘young Marx’ writing in the early to mid 1840s was committed to the use of an evaluative standard of community, though in a

⁶⁴ O’Malley (ed.) *Early Political Writings*, pp. 32-3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 49.

somewhat fragmented form, the question now becomes whether this commitment was lost in his ensuing, 'mature' works. Louis Althusser famously wrote of a rupture in Marx's work and in particular that "In 1845 Marx broke radically with every theory that based history and politics on the essence of man".⁶⁷ As far as community goes I shall seek to show that in its most obvious interpretation that statement is overblown, and that Marx does continue to show a communitarian commitment even in his later work. Where those who point to a change in Marx's work from the late 1840s may be right is that Marx does seem for the most part to renounce what might be called the 'humanist' or 'perfectionist' basis for his critique of interpersonal relationships under capitalism – that they violate a distinctive communal type of human flourishing. However, it is not evident that the critique itself thereby falls out of his work, and this short sub-section will be devoted to bringing together examples that reject that further claim.

Such an effort unfortunately requires us to ignore the later Marx on one important point. For, in various passages Marx explicitly *rejects* his reliance on evaluative 'moral' standards such as community. Famously, in *The German Ideology* Marx states: "The communists do not preach morality... they do not put to people the moral demand: love one another, do not be egoists...".⁶⁸ We are forced then to present the evidence that Marx was doing exactly this, in spite of his insistence to the contrary.⁶⁹

Let us turn first to *The Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848. Speaking of the spread of the market for produced goods – 'commodity exchange' – Marx also relates how this development commodified the intimate relationships between people. Talking about close family relationships Marx says: "The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation into a mere money relation".⁷⁰ And more generally:

⁶⁷ For Marx, p. 227. For another view, relevant to our discussion see Meikle, in Chitty and McIvor (ed.) *Marx and Contemporary Philosophy*, pp. 57-59.

⁶⁸ McLellan, *Selected Writings*, p. 199.

⁶⁹ This is cursory comment on a complicated and contentious topic. Within the literature distinctions are made on whether Marx's political advocacy had a basis in justice, or morality, or emancipation, or some other more general evaluative standard. I don't find such distinctions useful so do not propose to use them here. My view is that Marx often professed not to use normative, evaluative standards, including communitarian ones, but did in fact do so.

⁷⁰ *The Communist Manifesto* in O'Malley (ed.), *Selected Writings*, p. 248.

“The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has... left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”. It has drowned out the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom - Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.”⁷¹

I submit that it is impossible to read this passage – the egotistical calculation undergirding brutal exploitation - as expressing anything other than condemnation for these types of relationship under capitalism. This is not made less true by the fact that such exploitation also occurred in a different form a previous mode of production, nor by the further facts which Marx goes on to explain, that this aspect of the bourgeoisie is part of their ‘revolutionary’ nature by which they increased productive power, and disrupted conservative and inefficient practices.⁷²

In *Capital*, there is further example of such condemnation. In a often quoted passage at the end of chapter six, Marx is in full, sarcastic flow and gives an indictment reminiscent of that in ‘On the Jewish Question’, writing: “The sphere of circulation or commodity exchange, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. It is the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham”.⁷³ ‘Bentham’ Marx explains, “because each looks only to his own advantage. The only force bringing them together, and putting them into relation with each other, is the selfishness, the gain and the private interest of each. Each pays heed to himself only, and no one worries about the others.”⁷⁴ Again, and contra the passage from *The German*

⁷¹ O’Malley (ed.), *Selected Writings*, pp. 247-8.

⁷² *Ibid*, pp. 248-9. (To explain this point by way of further example: if I drink a glass of wine, it’s pleasant intoxicating effect does not mean that it is not bad that I wake up with a hangover the following morning. And even if I do not regret drinking the glass of wine, thinking that it is all-things-considered better to have drunk it than not, still it does not mean that the hangover is not bad).

⁷³ *Capital*, pp. 281-2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

Ideology quoted above, it is hard to read this passage as anything else than a condemnation of this feature of exchange relationships under capitalism.

Or further, in Marx's powerful contemporary description of the workings of Victorian capitalism in the later chapters of *Capital*, passages describe variously "The exploitation of cheap and immature labour-power... [where]... "women and excessively young children are subjected quite unscrupulously to the influence of poisonous substances";⁷⁵ the examples of chronic overwork that come from the mill-owner adopting the attitude that "The worker is here nothing more than personified labour-time" driven by the capitalist's "werewolf-like hunger for surplus-labour";⁷⁶ and the fact that the position of workers is akin to slaves: "We declaim against the Virginian and Carolinian cotton-planters. Is their black-market, their lash, and their barter of human flesh more detestable than this slow sacrifice of humanity which takes place in order that veils and collars may be fabricated for the benefit of capitalists?".⁷⁷ We know that Marx held that there was no straightforward political or legislative fix to these brutal relationships, and that he saw such relationships in general as necessary features of this phase of human development, but it is hard to deny that he nevertheless saw such relationships as deeply troubling, and used them as a way to exemplify the horrible ways that one class of people treat another under capitalism.

Finally we can turn to a revealing passage in the unpublished but important text *The Grundrisse*, written in 1857-8.⁷⁸ Discussing the nature of the exchange relationship, Marx picks up on a theme we saw in 'On the Jewish Question' and *Capital*: whereby the formal equality of parties to exchange under capitalism hides a contradiction. Here Marx frames this contradiction in a way that is very relevant to our investigation. In the one sense, it appears to be the case that "each of them reaches beyond his own particular need" and becomes, in language that we saw in Marx's earlier writings "a *human being* and they relate to one another as human

⁷⁵ *Capital*, p. 599.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 534. Marx quotes this passage favourably from a Daily Telegraph article of 1860.

⁷⁸ See e.g. Terrell Carver, 'Marx's Conception of Alienation in the Grundrisse' in Musto (ed.) *Karl Marx's Grundrisse*.

beings; that their common species-being is acknowledged by all.⁷⁹ But this motive is illusory for “each arrives at his end only in so far as he serves the other as means [and] each becomes a means for the other only as an end in himself” therefore “each posits himself as a being for another... but that... is irrelevant to each of the two subjects in exchange [because] this reciprocity interests him only in so far as it satisfies his interest to the exclusion of, without reference to, that of the other”.⁸⁰ Marx thus concludes, that “the common interest which appears as the motive of the act as a whole is recognised as a fact by both sides; but, as such, it is not the motive...”.⁸¹ The humanity and genuine reciprocity that appears to underlie exchange relationships in capitalist society is in fact illusory. If Marx did not object to such a deception, and feel that his readers should object to it too, it is difficult to see why it is worth pointing it out. This is not some incidental fact about the mechanics of exchange, but an example of how, in Marx’s words, capitalism purports to embody a higher human purpose – production for others - but in fact relies on base motives.

We have thus seen how, despite Marx’s sometime insistence to the contrary, he indeed held capitalism at fault for the avaricious and exploitative relationships that existed between people – based on greed, rather than the better and more human purpose of service in the interests of others. This is most clearly evident in his early work. However, despite Marx’s apparent efforts to forswear these sort of normative, communitarian judgements in later texts, it is not clear that he managed to do so. This appears to be evidence of some lingering commitment to a belief that capitalism should be overthrown because it precipitated a model of society where each was pitted against the other; and that only a post-capitalist society offered some hope that this situation would come to an end.

4. Tawney and ethical socialism

While the Marxist tradition of socialism is not always recognised as communitarian in the way described above, there is another more recent socialist sub-tradition that

⁷⁹ *Grundrisse* p. 243.

⁸⁰ *Grundrisse*, pp. 244-5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

more self-consciously invokes a norm of community or, what we shall see is a closely related idea, of 'fellowship'. That sub-tradition is ethical socialism. It is a broad ideological grouping, and unlike the schools of thought discussed in the previous two parts of this chapter, there have continued to be a critical mass of adherents in the British political mainstream over the last century. Politicians as diverse as Hugh Gaitskell, Roy Hattersley, Tony Benn and Frank Field have all described themselves as ethical socialists.⁸² The pre-eminent academic exponent of ethical socialism however, remains R.H. Tawney and it is his work that will be the focus of this section.⁸³

Ethical socialism, in the words of its foremost chroniclers – and themselves former students of Tawney - Norman Dennis and A.H. Halsey, “abhors idleness and is suspicious of intellectuals”.⁸⁴ Perhaps it is these traits that have meant while much has been written about ethical socialism, there remains no concise, authoritative definition of what it is. Dennis and Halsey’s own list of features of ethical socialism range from the non-committal (a “bias towards autonomy”) to the downright vague (“a sense of the enormous contribution that society’s ideas and material conditions from the past make to its present morality and institutions”).⁸⁵ However, Dennis and Halsey are clear that amongst these objectives “fellowship takes precedence and, as Tawney insisted, is the ethical socialist’s sine qua non, ‘without which nothing’”.⁸⁶ It is the focus on this value that provokes the interest here in the Tawney’s work.

That community was at the forefront of his political criticism is evident from the terms in which he often levelled the critique, writing in one memorable passage in a later essay: “The revolt of ordinary men against capitalism has had its source neither in its obvious deficiencies as an economic engine, nor in the conviction that it represents a stage of social evolution now outgrown, but in the straightforward

⁸² As the inclusion of Benn attests, it is inaccurate to say ‘ethical socialism’ applies only to the right-wing of the British Labour Party. Evidence of Benn’s own ethical and Christian socialism is found in his wide-ranging Tawney lecture ‘The moral basis of the radical left’ in Ormrod (ed.) *Fellowship, Freedom and Equality: Lectures in memory of R.H. Tawney*.

⁸³ While I don’t discuss him here it is worth noting that the pre-eminent socialist theorist of the immediate post-WWII period, Anthony Crosland also discusses community at some length (in part four of chapter four of *The Future of Socialism*), under the heading of ‘the co-operative aspiration’, though he is circumspect about its practical use.

⁸⁴ *English Ethical Socialism*, p. 4

⁸⁵ *Democracy in Crisis?*, pp. 14-15.

⁸⁶ *English Ethical Socialism*, p. 5; *Democracy in Crisis?*, p.19.

hatred of a system which stunts personality and corrupts human relationships by permitting the use of man by man as an instrument of pecuniary gain".⁸⁷

For further evidence of this type of commitment, the chief work of Tawney's that will be discussed is *The Acquisitive Society* as it is here that his philosophy of fellowship gets its most complete airing. That book was published a decade before his other major work, a series of lectures grouped under the title *Equality*. There have been a variety of theses put forward about the extent to which Tawney's thought changed between these two pivotal works, and the reasons for such change.⁸⁸ While there are certainly differences, my take is that of continuity rather than change for two reasons. First, because the target of each work is different. In *The Acquisitive Society* Tawney criticises the thesis that individuals have normative rights over the natural and material assets that they own, such that they have no responsibility to others in the way that they exercise them. *Equality* addresses the separate, and then influential, Conservative criticism that the very ideal of equality is perverse, because people differ in their productive capacity. This means that the overlap between the two works is limited. Second, and more importantly, the works are pitched at a different level and to a different audience. *Equality's* focus is political strategy and policy; *The Acquisitive Society* was written before Tawney's fulsome engagement in Labour Party politics and is a more comprehensively theoretical work. Considerations of political tactics and policy applicability that are brought to bear in *Equality* are just not relevant in *The Acquisitive Society*.

These two grounds, of topic and audience explain how the ideas in each of Tawney's major 'political' books can be different, but still broadly consistent with one another - and thus why our focus on *The Acquisitive Society* need not be not unrepresentative of Tawney's thought as a whole. With this preliminary point in place, we can turn now to the substantive discussion.

The idea of community or fellowship contained in *The Acquisitive Society* is not one relative to particular cultures, or countries. Instead Tawney is adamant that it is a timeless political end. As he explains at one point: "the conditions of a right

⁸⁷ 'British Socialism Today', *The Radical Tradition*, p. 139.

⁸⁸ See e.g. Lawrence Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney*, ch. 7, and Ross Terrill *R.H. Tawney and His Times*, pp. 4-7.

organisation of industry are... permanent, unchanging... and they are the same, in all essentials for a society which is poor as for a society which is rich.”⁸⁹ He continues “...differences of economic endowment decide what industry will yield; they do not alter the ends at which it should aim, or the moral standard by which its organisation should be tried. As long as men are men, a poor society cannot be too poor to find a right order of life, nor a rich society too rich to have need to seek it.”⁹⁰ This passage explains that which subsequent readers might find overly theoretical, or demanding, in Tawney’s earlier works. His concern is with the normative standards by which we should evaluate our economy and society, and these ends remain even in very different societies.

Tawney is absolutely clear about what these standards should be. “The first” he tells us “is that industry should be sub-ordinated to the community in such a way as to render the best service technically possible.”⁹¹ Part of this idea of service is a tough line on the responsibility of each to fulfil it, for what we might think are essentially communitarian reasons. As Tawney continues: “...those who render that service faithfully should be honourably paid, and that those who render no service should not be paid at all, because it is of the essence of a function that it should find its meaning in the satisfaction, not of itself, but of the end which it serves.”⁹²

What does Tawney mean by the idea of function for service? He explains in another passage that “A function may be defined as an activity which embodies and expresses the idea of social purpose. The essence of it is that the agent does not perform it merely for personal gain or to gratify himself, but recognises that he is responsible for its discharge to some higher authority”.⁹³ The direction of this higher authority, Tawney maintains is ‘obvious’: “It is to supply man with things which are necessary, useful, or beautiful, and thus to bring life to body or spirit”.⁹⁴ This is the essence of Tawney’s ‘functional society’, which bears a resemblance to the notion of ‘industry’ that we saw in the work of Saint-Simon. It is the responsibility of each to

⁸⁹ *The Acquisitive Society*, pp. 6-7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁹¹ *Ibid*.

⁹² *Ibid*. This is complemented by a second democratic principle, which dictates that society’s “direction and government should be in the hands of persons who are responsible to those who are directed and governed”.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*.

render service to the community of their fellows by meeting their needs and wants. 'Needs and wants' because the latter half of this passage suggests that like Marx, Tawney envisages an expansive definition the legitimate objects to be served by society, beyond mere necessities.

The idea that the functional society is one where service is reciprocal is also emphasised strongly by Tawney. He envisages that a socialist society would be one "which aimed at making the acquisition of wealth *contingent* upon the discharge of social obligations".⁹⁵ As a result, what each got would be proportionate to what he provided by way of service, whereby society would "proportion remuneration to service and den[y] it to those by whom no service was performed."⁹⁶ Tawney is not clear on the politically crucial question of the extent to which accommodation would be made for those who were able to produce less purely because of lesser ability. However, he does at certain points suggest that the value of service in the functional society is not purely that it meets the needs of others, but that people act in such a way not just to end up meeting the needs of others, but to consciously enter into relationships of service too. Consider Tawney's criticism of the workings of Adam Smith's 'invisible hand': "True, the service of society will, in fact, it is assumed, result from [its] exercise. But it is not the primary motive and criterion of industry, but a secondary consequence, which emerges incidentally through the exercise of rights, a consequence which is attained, indeed, in practice, but which is attained without being sought."⁹⁷ The clear implication is that it *matters* that service *is* sought, not just delivered. Even if the market delivers the goods, Tawney does not think that it does so in a justifiable way.

How does Tawney think that the functional society can be delivered? He appears at times to endorse the familiar idea that we have seen with some of the utopian socialists, that community requires an unmediated connection between members. Tawney says for example, that if a service to be achieved then "the producers shall stand in a direct relation to the community for whom production is carried on, so that their responsibility to it may be obvious and unmistakeable, not

⁹⁵ *The Acquisitive Society*, p. 48.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

lost as at present through their immediate subordination to shareholders whose interest is not service but gain.”⁹⁸ Elsewhere, what is striking about Tawney’s stance on the mechanism needed to deliver the functional society is that, in a genuine contrast with his later work, he plays down the involvement of the state, preferring to emphasise the role of voluntary and private organisations. Thus: “the obligation for the maintenance of the service shall rest upon the professional organisations of those who perform it, and that, subject to the supervision and criticism of the consumer, those organisations shall exercise so much voice in the government of industry as may be needed to secure that the obligation is discharged.”⁹⁹ Trade unions or other industry bodies, it appears, will bear direct responsibility within sectors of the economy for ensuring that the needs of wider society are attended to.

Although the discussion of how we get from here to there is only brief, it is clear that Tawney does not think his broad and demanding conception of service is entirely utopian. He recognises that “It is obvious indeed, that no change of system or machinery can avert those causes of social malaise which consist in the egotism, greed, or quarrelsomeness of human nature.” However, he doesn’t think that it follows from this that the principle of the functional society is without practical use, for while we cannot legislate against selfish behaviour, we can “create an environment in which those are not the qualities which are encouraged.”¹⁰⁰ Politics cannot secure that men live up to their principles that Tawney espoused. What it can do is to “establish [the] social order upon principles to which, if they please, they can live up and not live down...”¹⁰¹ It is not until his later work that a more experienced Tawney makes more detailed reference to the various state levers that socialists can pull to realise their ends.

Finally, we need to ask why Tawney sees value in his functional society and its ethic of service. This is sometimes expressed in a similar way to that which we saw in Marx. Acting in a functional way expresses something distinctively human, and so is particularly worthwhile for that reason. Actions that are not carried out with the purposes of serving others may be worthy of praise or disdain for other

⁹⁸ *The Acquisitive Society*, p. 222.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22-3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

reasons, but are truly human actions: “In so far as [man’s purpose] is diverted from this end [of serving others] it may be harmless, amusing or even exhilarating to those who carry it on; but it possesses no more social significance than the orderly business of ants and bees, the strutting of peacocks, or the struggles of carnivorous animals over carrion.”¹⁰²

In addition to thinking that acting so as to carry out a social function helps us to relate with one another in a genuinely human way, Tawney is keen to argue for the instrumental benefits of this motivation, and in particular that a functional society is also a more efficient society. “The esprit de corps” he even says “is the foundation of efficiency”.¹⁰³ Tawney posits an interesting mechanism for why this might be, more sophisticated than the assertions we saw from the utopian socialists. Self-interest hinders the development of efficiency, he claims, because “As long as a minority has so large an income that part of it, if spent at all, must be spent on trivialities, so long will part of the human energy and mechanical equipment of the nation be diverted from the serious work, which enriches it, to making trivialities, which impoverishes it, since they can only be made at the cost of not making other things.”¹⁰⁴ And further: “At the very moment when everybody is talking about the importance of increasing the output of wealth, the last question, apparently, which it occurs to any statesman to ask is why wealth should be squandered on futile activities, and in expenditure which is either disproportionate to service or made for no service at all”.¹⁰⁵ Thus the conservative doctrine of respect for property rights, does not even guarantee efficiency, despite its claims. The broader critique that Tawney levels however, is focused clearly on the assertion of a domain of property rights that are unperturbed by the needs of others – this *may* generate the efficient service of needs, but something important is lost if that is the means by which people’s needs are met, namely fellowship or community.

¹⁰² *The Acquisitive Society*, p. 9.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27

5. Conclusion

At the start of this chapter I set out two objectives – first, to explore the different ways in which writers in the socialist tradition have used the idea of community, in the broad sense defined in section one, and second, to substantiate the claim that socialists across the three major sub-traditions since the French Revolution could all be described as communitarian, whatever their other differences.

The case for the latter claim has been set out in the detail of the sections above, which has shown that all five of those writers discussed drew upon the value of community in their criticism of the status quo, and in their proposals for a socialist alternative. But in order to bring together some of the strands which are required to satisfy the first objective it is worth concluding by summarising the main features of the communitarianism in the discussion above. There are seven main themes.

First, it is worth recognising that the value which I have called community has traded under many *different names* within the socialist literature. This changing nomenclature will partly reflect the changing usage of different terms over time. But it also perhaps signals the need that successive theorists have felt to attach some distinctive and relevant content on what is an elusive ideal. Among the various descriptions which the concept of community has traded under include harmony, fellowship, industry, and fraternity, amongst which there are interesting differences of emphasis and application. Each though has sought to describe a set of good social relations in which the needs of others are given some greater weight than contemporary norms prescribed. We have also seen that it is at least as common to invoke community by the criticism of its absence – typically self-interest. This is probably a symptom of the fact that none of our writers, save perhaps Tawney, can be described as self-consciously professional practitioners of normative theory, and are typically occupied with more immediate political tasks. The task of elucidating the ‘positive’ normative ideal that underpins their ‘negative’ or critical analysis, is thus typically given only fleeting attention, which in itself suggests there is more work to be done in this area.

Second, a recurring theme in the discussion of community has been the idea of *individual responsibility*: that individuals and not just the state should work with a mind to satisfying the needs of others. The language of personal responsibility and

similar features in the work of most of the writers, and particularly evident in Saint-Simon's creed of industrialism; but also in Tawney's discussion of a functional society which picks up the Christian duty of each individual to attain fellowship with others; and also famously in Marx's criticism of the way that contemporary social critics did not fully apply their criticism to the individuals of 'civil society' as well as to the state.

Third, closely linked to the idea of responsibility was that of *reciprocity*: the notion that the responsibility for others which was to be a feature of socialist society should not be unilateral, but be met with - and perhaps be a condition of - recognition or reward. This idea is clear in the work of Marx who criticises the nature of capitalist exchange relationships which appear to ensure that each party's wishes are met in kind, when in fact this feature is purely superficial, given that the capitalist is able to use his greater bargaining power to exact better terms for himself to the detriment of the worker.

Fourth, it was notable that there is a diversity of views on the *size* of the associations that respect for community recommended. It is sometimes assumed that all communitarians must favour small-scale associations but this is not the case amongst the communitarian socialists. On the one hand we saw that Owen and Fourier were clear that there should be strict limits on the size of any group amongst which communitarian relationships flourished. But on the other, neither Marx, Saint-Simon and Tawney imposed any such restrictions, with each imagining that their proposals could apply at nationally, or internationally.

Fifth, there was also a diversity of views on the *foundations* on which the communitarian thought of each writer rested, which provides an intriguing basis on which to conduct further investigation. One strand of thought which founded their advocacy of community on a perfectionist idea of human nature. This was clear in Fourier, who developed a metaphysics of distinctively human passions to ground his communitarian proposals; and in the early Marx who invoked the need for man to achieve his communal 'species-being' – the ideal state which reflected his true nature. Another communitarian foundation was Christian, particularly apparent in the work of Tawney and of Saint-Simon who drew upon Christian imagery and doctrine to tie their contemporary political proposals to timeless moral constants..

Sixth, there was some divergence on the extent to which each theorist thought community was of *non-instrumental rather than, or as well as, instrumental value*. Most of Owen's criticism of the selfishness of men under early capitalism seems to stem from his belief that industry is less efficient and that men are less happy because of it, rather than it is bad in and of itself. Other accounts are more mixed, such as Fourier and Marx, and can plausibly be interpreted as holding that community has non-instrumental value too – as an immutable human 'passion' in Fourier's case, or an element of species-being in Marx. Finally, for socialist theorists such as Tawney, the fact of fraternity is clearly an end in itself, and at least in his early work, perhaps the end towards which all other efforts should aim.

Seventh and finally there is a clear *antipathy to the market* in the work of most of those theorists discussed above. It might be thought that this view follows merely from our selection of *socialist* writers in particular. But what is interesting from the point of view of the rest of this project is not just that the writers discussed and criticised the market, but how often it was a value of community in particular that was invoked to do this. Thus, we have Owen saying it is that market that has made man 'ignorantly selfish', Marx speaking of how the spread of market had commodified human relationships; and Tawney who argued that whatever the efficiency benefits of the invisible hand of the market, its function was to relegate the meeting of needs to a secondary, and incidental feature of human productive activity rather than its primary purpose.

In the chapters that follow I will pick up on all of these themes. First though we turn to the work of the G.A. Cohen – the most influential recent advocate of communitarian socialism.

2

G.A. Cohen on community and socialism

The last chapter established the prevalence of community in the writings of three major socialist sub-traditions, and drew out some of the main themes. This chapter brings the discussion up to date, replacing historical sweep with theoretical depth by reconstructing G.A. Cohen's idea of community. It critically describes the three main instances of community which Cohen invokes in his work and separates them from other ends which Cohen conflated them with. In doing so, I apply the mature Cohen's rigorous value pluralist framework to his earlier work. Doing so presents Cohen's corpus of work in, I think, something of a new light and places community at the heart of his socialism. Ultimately, this enables us to enrich our understanding of a radical interpretation of the value of community, which is then built upon in chapter three.

1. Introduction

G.A. Cohen became engaged in political philosophy because he wanted to defend socialism, against both libertarian and liberal defenders of capitalism, and to ground an account of the desirability of socialism more successfully than other socialists had managed to do. The last book he published - *Why Not Socialism?* - was thus a fitting culmination to his life's work in political philosophy: a lucid, polemical piece which used the example of a camping trip to attempt to show how this everyday practice positively reflects distinctively socialist values.

Cohen elaborated two such socialist values in *Why not Socialism?* : equality and community.¹ While there is a significant secondary literature on Cohen's ground-breaking work on equality, there has been far less written – both by Cohen and others – on the second value of community, despite the pivotal role it plays in his thought.² One reason for this may simply be the seemingly different ways in which Cohen (mis-)presented that concept: the fluid nature of its use preventing it from receiving sustained scrutiny. Another reason might be that Cohen's work was primarily as a theorist of (distributive) justice, and his ambivalence about how a value of community fitted into this picture meant it received less attention in his published work, and so might appear to be of only peripheral concern in understanding Cohen's thought. A third reason might be that the debate around community and justice was seen by many political philosophers to have gone on, and been settled, elsewhere: in the so-called liberal-communitarian debate, which Cohen's work appears substantially independent of.³ A fourth, methodological candidate is that it may be unclear to some how Cohen's mature, self-conscious discussion of community relates to the political theory that they do, as it is not an ideal that seeks to directly guide the actions of individuals or institutions.

Whatever the reason, and I think all four have played a role, there are clear signs in Cohen's work of the important role that he thought community played. In an interview for the journal *Imprints*, Cohen suggests that the defect with liberal political philosophy is that "in its usual articulations, egalitarian liberalism lacks the value of community" and, furthermore, that community "is the only value that distinguishes our [socialist] tradition".⁴ In his Tanner Lectures, which became the first chapter of *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, Cohen declares that the Rawlsian difference principle is flawed (at least) because "it generates an argument for

¹ I say something in section 5 below on why I think this typology is unhelpful.

² The deficit of critical responses to Cohen's work on community has begun to be rectified more recently. See, for example, the essays in *Socialist Studies*, vol. 8 published in 2012 particularly Nicholas Vrousalis's paper 'Jazz Bands, Camping Trips and Decommodification'; and separately Richard Miller's 'Relationships of Equality' and Miriam Ronzoni's 'Life is not a Camping Trip'.

³ For an overview of the debate, see Adam Swift and Stephen Mulhall. *Liberals and Communitarians*. Of course, some of the communitarian interlocutors in the liberal-communitarian debate were, or had been, socialists notably Alasdair Macintyre.

⁴ Although he later came to think that a certain radical interpretation of equality was also distinctively socialist. See Cohen, 'Self-ownership, History and Socialism: An Interview with G.A. Cohen'.

inequality that requires a model of society in breach of an elementary condition of community”.⁵ In ‘Back to Socialist Basics’, Cohen recommends that politicians in the socialist tradition in general – and the British Labour Party in particular – should craft their policies with a view not only to equality, but to community too.⁶ In *Why Not Socialism?* Cohen posits the value of community as *the* key value separating him from other traditions of political thought more permissive of market forces since “the immediate motive to productive activity in a market society is (not always but) typically some mixture of greed and fear... [and] these are horrible ways of seeing other people...”.⁷

Given the lack of scrutiny which the idea of community has played in Cohen’s work, the aim of this chapter is mainly critical. The central conclusion is this: a commitment to community defined below in Cohen’s own terms but consistent with the definition posited in the introduction and first chapter, runs through his major works. This is true to an extent that has not been appreciated by Cohen’s critics, and nor perhaps Cohen himself. This result is produced in part through application of Cohen’s own value pluralist methodology to his own work, a method which he developed fully only towards the end of his career. No direct defence of that methodology is offered here but rather the chapter seeks to expose the contours of Cohen’s communitarian socialism by applying standards that he himself set. Applying this framework allows us to identify instances of community where Cohen does not and, conversely, to reject instances where Cohen purports to identify a value of community but in fact offers another end masquerading as community. This allows us to develop a more complete account of Cohen’s communitarian commitments, as well as some important theoretical insights that will aid us in the next chapter, where my own account of community is explained and defended.

The chapter unfolds as follows. Section two sets out Cohen’s methodology and the role of community in his argument for socialism: presenting the development of his pluralist method of political argument and describing the pivotal role that community plays in Cohen’s socialism. The following three sections

⁵ Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, p. 32.

⁶ Reprinted as chapter 10 of Otsuka (ed.) *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice*.

⁷ Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, p. 40. Chapter six discusses this contention at length.

gradually expand on the content of that value. Section three explores Cohen's invocation of community in *Self-ownership, Freedom and Equality* where it is shown that Cohen's rejection of Marx's vision of communism in favour of a system of 'voluntary equality' in fact relies on an ideal of community. Indeed, community perhaps provides a better ground of opposition to self-ownership than equality. Section four disentangles Cohen's ground-breaking Tanner Lectures. Justificatory community is found to be a standard of legitimacy, not community and the egalitarian ethos not an articulation of equality but of community. Cohen's heroic attempts to hold *Rescuing Justice and Equality* – a compendium of work spanning almost two decades - together are called into question by these departures from what Cohen latterly claimed was an argument purely about 'justice'. Section five tackles Cohen's discussion of community in *Why Not Socialism?*. This brief but most developed of Cohen's writings on community has at its heart a notion of reciprocity that is not explicit in Cohen's other work on community. I show how the idea of community itself motivates the move from simple altruism to reciprocity and highlight some areas where Cohen's perfunctory exposition leaves some unanswered questions. Section six concludes.

2. Arguing for a communitarian socialism

"The relationship between theory and political practice is much more complex than some... suppose"

'Back to Socialist Basics'⁸

Cohen's method of doing political philosophy is amongst the most distinctive parts of his work and in the final analysis arguably more important in explaining the differences between him and many of his academic interlocutors, such as Rawls and Dworkin, than any particular substantive position he held. This view is not widely held by those who have studied and interpreted Cohen and as such the full implications this method has for his substantive arguments are under-appreciated.

⁸ Reprinted in Otsuka (ed.) *On the Currency*, p. 212.

Too many critics take Cohen to be answering the kinds of theoretical questions that they would like him to be asking – principally, the kind of question John Rawls posed, which is roughly ‘what does justice require that we do?’.⁹ It is however a pervasive mistake to see the answers that Cohen gives as responding to a question of this sort. Cohen’s project is a different one, and his arguments – including his communitarian ones – thus take a different form. Our first task then, is to understand this method and so *the way* in which Cohen thought an appreciation of the value of community supported his socialism.¹⁰ As well as contextualising Cohen’s communitarianism this will also serve to give us the tools to mount an analysis of Cohen’s substantive political arguments.

In doing so we must provide a little biographical context, for Cohen’s approach to political argument changed over the course of his life. In short, the path he travelled was from a certainty that socialism was the best way of organising society, to a much more cautious approach. That early certainty is evident in Cohen’s recollection that, as a young academic at University College London in the 1960s, he thought that there was no need to engage in argument for socialism at all. For, the young Cohen thought, *whatever* the grounds on which an argument might be conducted – democracy, efficiency, personal fulfilment – socialism was *obviously* the most appropriate form of social organisation.¹¹ He says of his political views in that phase “I had never heard an argument against socialism for which I did not (so I thought) already have an answer in my pocket”.¹²

This confidence was shaken by the revival of the new right, and he would later speak of the intellectual weight and impact that the trio of Hayek, Friedman

⁹ Or alternatively, a question-type which is much the same ‘what can the state properly enforce?’. I focus here on Cohen’s opposition to the stated question, an opposition which follows from what I referred to in the introduction as his radical value pluralism. The actual question type which Cohen opposes is more like ‘what does justice demand that we do, *given the way the world is*?’. Opposition to the italicised phrase is provided in Cohen’s famous argument against the fact-sensitivity of justice principles.

¹⁰ Because Cohen’s work was primarily concerned with equality and justice, as distinct from community, which is the main focus of this chapter, most of this section refers to the former values rather than the latter. For the purposes of the present section however, equality can be read as interchangeable with community.

¹¹ *Self-ownership, Freedom, and Equality*, p. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

and Nozick had on political debate in the UK and elsewhere.¹³ In Cohen's own field, the bracing libertarian arguments of Robert Nozick in particular roused him from his "dogmatic socialist slumber".¹⁴ The result of this was a thirty-year engagement with normative theory – principally with Nozick, Ronald Dworkin and John Rawls. This research project was born of an admission by Cohen - disavowed by his younger self – that there were important principled arguments against socialism which demanded a response if that political project was to survive.

However, although Cohen had embraced the need for sustained normative argument in favour of socialism, this was only the first phase of his methodological development. The second, no less profound, affected the kind of conclusions that he thought such theoretical arguments could sustain. Having thought in roughly the first half of his career that political theory could, to some significant extent, *settle* the argument between capitalism and socialism, against the former and in favour of the latter, by adjudicating more or less decisively on which was just and which was not, he later recanted of that belief. Such a view was not made explicit until Cohen's work in the early 2000s, notably in his lecture on conservatism.¹⁵

This development was however implicit in Cohen's work from at least 1989, when he published his most widely read paper, 'On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice'. The principal contention of that paper was that the value of distributive justice was best understood as a type of equality of opportunity. Opportunities were to be understood in an expansive sense, in terms of both welfare and resources, and with the former including both subjective and objective understandings of welfare, and the latter including both personal capacities and external means.¹⁶ But alongside that substantive contention there was also a parallel methodological claim, that this principle of equality was what Cohen termed a 'weak equalisandum claim'. He defines that as follows: "a qualified or weak equalisandum claim says that they [people] should be as equal as possible in some dimension, but subject to whatever

¹³ 'Back to Socialist Basics' in Otsuka (ed.) *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice*, pp. 211-12.

¹⁴ *Self-ownership*, p. 4.

¹⁵ Printed as chapter eight in Otsuka (ed.) *Finding Oneself in the Other*.

¹⁶ This formulation is fully explored in a duo of papers, contained as the first two chapters of Otsuka (ed.) *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice*, including an important afterword to the initial paper in which Cohen expresses some reservations about the conclusion he has reached. In addition to 'On the Currency...', the other paper which first appeared in a volume edited by Nussbaum and Sen is called 'Equality of What? On Welfare, Goods and Capabilities'.

limitations need to be imposed by deference to other values...”.¹⁷ Equality, then is just one among many *competing* ends which should determine social and political arrangements. This is in contrast to the Dworkinian approach in the same ‘equality of what?’ debate which starts from the presumption that “we should hope for a plausible theory of all the central political values – of democracy, liberty and civil society as well as of equality – that shows each of these growing out of and reflected in all the others, an account that conceives equality, for example, not only as compatible with liberty, but as a value that someone who prized liberty would therefore also prize.”¹⁸ This difference of method between Dworkin and Cohen betrays a fundamental background disagreement about what their arguments achieve. For Dworkin, a theory of equality will be successful in part because it is concordant with a range of values *other* than equality. Cohen’s contrary assumption is that the proper articulation of egalitarian justice will be subject to trade-offs with other ends, with which it is not commensurable.

This methodological approach evident in the debate with Dworkin over equality is glossed over in Cohen’s next major contribution, his Tanner Lectures, ‘Incentives, Inequality and Community’, which were delivered just two years later in 1991. Indeed, in those lectures, which later became chapter one of *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, Cohen appears to endorse a Dworkin type view – if only tacitly - by offering a revised version of Rawls’s difference principle as the proper criterion of distributive justice.¹⁹ Cohen’s socialist opposition to the Thatcher government’s cut in the top rate of income tax results in the claim that the self-seeking motivations of high earners which form part of the justification for the tax cut be assessable at the bar of justice. In making this point, Cohen offers a different answer to the Rawlsian justice question – viz. how can we “provide a way of assigning rights and duties... [and]... define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social

¹⁷ *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, p. 4. This thesis receives a fuller defence in his more recent *Justice for Hedgehogs*.

¹⁹ See *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, pp. 68-9 for definitions of the ‘strict’ as opposed to the ‘lax’ reading of the difference principle.

cooperation”?²⁰ But in providing a different answer to the question he appears to *accept* the form that it takes, one that is relevantly similar to the Dworkin position, and thus *different* to the position suggested by Cohen in ‘On the Currency’.

Cohen’s other work in the 1990s similarly fails to develop the methodological apparatus employed fleetingly in ‘On the Currency’. In the two further pieces which continued the critique of the Tanner Lectures, and which were published in 1995 and 1997 – respectively ‘The Pareto Argument for Inequality’ and ‘Where the Action is’ – there was no further methodological discussion. Neither is there any such discussion in Cohen’s book published during this period – *Self-ownership, Freedom and Equality* – save for one important passage in chapter eight, where Cohen defends the injustice of exploitation as a different *kind* of injustice to that which he is concerned with in the rest of the book. This move however, as with the move made in ‘On the Currency’ from a ‘strong’ to a ‘weak’ equalisandum claim, is made without wider defence of the departure from the methodological views of the principal interlocutor of that book, Robert Nozick.

It is not until 2004, in a paper on conservatism that was only published posthumously in 2012, that we get an insight into what we can call Cohen’s mature methodological view, and the full articulation of the second stage of his methodological development. In the paper Cohen states that: “Philosophers like me are not primarily, as philosophers, interested in what should be done in practice, all things considered. We are interested, instead, in what distinct things are worth considering.”²¹ He distinguishes his approach from that of the “partisans of political theory” who by contrast are “people who characteristically care more than their philosophical cousins do about the all-things-considered answer which tells you what to *do*”.²²

²⁰ *Theory*, p. 2. The full quote is: “[P]rinciples of social justice ... provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and they define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation.”

²¹ In the posthumous published version of this paper, Cohen rephrases this passage to suggest not that he is not *interested* in all things considered, but that such judgments can’t be reached, even if philosophers were to be interested in them. *Finding Oneself in the Other*, p. 145.

²² Contained in the original 2004 paper, emphasis Cohen’s. This distinction between political philosophy and political theory is (wisely in my view) dropped in the posthumous, published version of this lecture.

This view gets its substantive elaboration in the introduction to *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, where Cohen explicitly enlists himself as a partisan of what Rawls terms ‘intuitionism’.²³ He says that, in political philosophy, “We should expect to find... that the normative requirements that we recognize present themselves in a competitive array: they cannot be satisfied all of the time, nor do we have a method for systematically combining them.” Cohen sympathetically quotes Rawls’s description of the two features of this ‘radical pluralist’ view: first that such theories “consist of a plurality of first principles which may conflict to give contrary directives in particular types of cases; and second they include no explicit method, no priority rules, for weighing those principles against one another: we are simply to strike a balance by intuition, by what seems to us to be nearly right”.²⁴ Cohen is aware of why Rawls felt such a way of thinking must be overcome, but suggests that there is no alternative: “I do not” he says “think that such an intellectual predicament is satisfactory. But I do say that it is the predicament we are in”.²⁵

The implications of this, the mature Cohen’s methodological view, for his advocacy of socialism are profound.²⁶ Not only is the early certainty that socialism is the best way of organising society gone, but the intellectual apparatus for making *any* conclusive theoretical argument for socialism is dead. Bluntly, the first methodological turn means that normative battle must be joined, but the second means it can never be decisively won, at least from the theorist’s armchair. Unlike justice-theorists such as Rawls who can settle the question of the right political arrangements to some great extent, Cohen-type theorists never can. And while this is partly because of the contingent reality that theorists lack detailed empirical knowledge about what kinds of prescriptions actually achieve the requisite political ends, it is also because all-things-considered ‘ought’ statements can’t be rationally derived from the array of worthwhile but competing political ends.

²³ See *Theory*, pp. 30-40 for discussion.

²⁴ *RJE*, pp. 4-5, quoting *Theory*, p. 30.

²⁵ *RJE*, p. 4.

²⁶ Though not always recognised. Nicholas Vrousalis’s central criticism of Cohen’s communitarianism on pp. 152-155 of ‘Jazz Bands, Camping Trips and Decommodification’ - that it conflicts with Cohen’s account of justice and so undermines it - misses the point that the methodologically mature Cohen could never attack Rawls’s conception of *justice*, on the basis of *community*. Cohen’s eventual realisation of this fact should be apparent from his thoroughly revisionist treatment of chapters one to three of *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, in the summary on p. 19 of that book.

Nevertheless, Cohen does not think that the theoretical argument for socialism is completely lost. While he is much more pessimistic than Rawls about the possibility of rational argument for social and political arrangements, he is more optimistic about the extent to which persuasive political argument can still be constructed on the back of a radical value pluralism. His doubts about the possibility of rational argument for socialism is tempered by an optimism about the possibility of making value trade-offs that while ‘intuitive’ (i.e. not discursive) can still command widespread support.²⁷ We can see this from an analogy in his paper on conservatism, about a group of people choosing somewhere to have dinner. Cohen relates it as follows: “A bunch of us are trying to decide which restaurant to choose. Suppose everybody talks a lot about how good the food is in various restaurants, how much it costs, and how long it takes to get there. Someone, hitherto silent, is uneasy. She feels that we are leaving something out of account. Then she realises what it is: ‘Like, nobody’, she says, ‘is considering the décor!’ This person has made a significant contribution to our practical discussion. But we shouldn’t expect her now also to say exactly how important a restaurant’s décor is compared to the other things that matter when we’re choosing a restaurant”.²⁸

The point that the story somewhat obliquely seeks to make is that merely intuitive trade offs are not a problem in a whole host of non-political scenarios, so there is no reason to think they would be in political debate either. The rest of the group don’t turn to the décor lover and demand that she tell them with any precision what good décor would *mean* in the terms of the other considerations, such as better food - or what weight décor should have in the decision about which restaurant to choose.²⁹ They accept that her exclamation is a legitimate addition to the decision making process *despite* the fact that décor embodies the two features which Rawls invoked to motivate his move away from radical value pluralism – incommensurability with the other considerations such as quality of food, and a lack of system for weighting it compared to such competing considerations.

²⁷ Brian Barry’s *Political Argument*, a work that shares much with Cohen’s approach, defends the thesis that this kind of intuitive reasoning can satisfy a weaker understanding of rationality, as consistency, pp. 3-5.

²⁸ Reprinted in *Finding Oneself in the Other*, p. 146.

²⁹ Cohen reprises this point at slightly greater length on pp. 5-6 of *Rescuing Justice and Equality*.

In taking this line, Cohen rejects a pessimistic interpretation of what value pluralism means for political argument. To pursue the analogy, a pessimistic interpretation would mean that the person who raises the décor worry brings the process to an impasse, for precisely because restaurant décor cannot obviously be assessed in a way that is comparable with the other considerations, it brings the process of deliberation to a halt. Nothing that the others can say about the cost and quality of food can remove the concern that décor is not being (sufficiently) valued, and the décor lover can say nothing to reason with the others if they were to eventually say 'But we just don't think décor is (that) important'.³⁰ Cohen's view seems to be that such an impasse is rarely reached, and that this gives us reason to be optimistic about political deliberation under conditions of value pluralism.

How does this all relate to Cohen's argument for socialism in general, and the value of community in particular? The socialist value of community is a constituent goal realised in the good society, as quality food is realised in good restaurants. And as with quality food and good restaurants, community is not the only feature of the best social and political arrangements, there are also other values – for Cohen, chiefly fairness, freedom and efficiency. But community is special in that not only is it a widely valued goal but that, jointly with the best understanding of the ideal of fairness, it is an end, Cohen thinks, that can *only* be achieved under socialism. Along with equality, community is definitive of socialism, and it follows, albeit trivially, from this that a capitalist society can *never* realise community along with equality, and so will always be deficient in these important respects.

None of this is to say that capitalism has nothing going for it, but it does mean that even at its best, it is flawed in these intuitively important ways. To pursue the restaurant metaphor once more, even if we think capitalism puts the food on the table, Cohen thinks it falls of a short of a place we'd like to have dinner at.

We can tie together the strands of the mature Cohen's communitarian argument for socialism in a slightly more formal way as follows:

³⁰ That response is also available to those faced with an argument from Rawlsian or Dworkinian justice as well, but it is much less likely to be used, for who would want to dismiss the apparently mutually re-enforcing values of equality *and* efficiency *and* legitimacy *and* freedom?

- (1) Community, understood in the right way, is an important social and political value.
- (2) Any social and political arrangement that satisfies an important social and political value is of value in that significant respect (and any that does not is of disvalue in that significant respect).
- (3) Socialism does (and capitalism never does) satisfy community, alongside equality.³¹
- (4) Therefore, socialism is of value in a significant respect – it achieves community, alongside equality - in which capitalism is not, and can never be.

Note that one result of pursuing political argument within this sort of value pluralist framework is that showing that community, and its sister value equality supports socialism over capitalism is likely to be politically insufficient. For while, if successful, it makes a powerful point about the merits and demerits of socialism and capitalism respectively it doesn't preclude the capitalist adopting exactly the same form of argument as above in response, but using a *different* value and with capitalism rather than socialism the winner. Cohen's optimism in the restaurant analogy is an optimism about political decisions being able to be made, not about socialism being the favoured outcome.

It is for this reason, that when Cohen makes his case for the desirability of socialism in his final book *Why Not Socialism?* he implicitly augments his communitarian argument with arguments from other values, not just the socialist value of radical equality of opportunity, but *non*-socialist values too. The camping trip that Cohen depicts as an evocative instance of small-scale socialist society meets the non-socialist values of personal choice and efficiency as well as community and equality. In short, the argument from community is not sufficient for successfully making the case for socialism. But it is a crucial respect in which, Cohen thinks, socialism *necessarily* enjoys an advantage over capitalism, and so it plays an important role in the ideological struggle between the two.

³¹ This *could* be an empirical premise. Cohen does not defend it in any detail, but any comprehensive Cohen-type argument for real-world socialism must surely do so.

3. Marxist community

In what follows, I will cover Cohen's thoughts on community and socialism in roughly chronological order and so we come first to an idea of community from the period of Cohen's career up until the early 1990s when he was most pre-occupied with seeing what could be rescued from Marx's political thought. Despite Cohen's grounding in the Marxist tradition, his work is actually less explicitly indebted to Marx's thought on community than might be supposed. The only real discussion of community from an avowedly Marxist perspective comes in Cohen's 1996 work *Self-ownership, Freedom and Equality*, where he discusses the Marxist idea of communism, although he does also refer to Marx's slogan from the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs', in later works.³²

The key passage in *Self-ownership* does however, explain why Cohen thought Marx – though not the Marxist tradition - has little to offer in this regard. The passage comes in the course of a chapter which seeks to describe why it is that Marx and Marxists have not succeeded in casting aside the libertarian principle of self-ownership which, it should be recalled, says "that each person enjoys over herself and her powers, full and exclusive rights of control and use, and therefore owes no service to anyone else that she has not contracted to supply".³³ As we shall see, Cohen's discussion of Marxism and self-ownership is important because it allows us to see, in opposition to Marx's account, Cohen's own positive contribution. That contribution, I shall claim, is substantially a *communitarian* one, a conclusion which has implications for how Cohen's work in *Self-ownership, Freedom and Equality* should be interpreted.³⁴

Cohen's interpretation of Marx's account of how communal relations will operate under communism, is novelly and succinctly put by analogy with a jazz band.

"One way of picturing life under communism, as Marx conceived it, is to imagine a jazz band each player in which seeks his own fulfilment as a musician. Though basically interested in his own fulfilment, and not in that of the band as a whole, or of his fellow musicians taken severally, he

³² *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice*, p. 219.

³³ *Self-ownership*, p.12.

³⁴ Including his chapter eight, on exploitation, which is the focus of my chapter five, below.

nevertheless fulfils himself to the extent that each of the others also does so, and the same holds for each of them.”³⁵

As this description suggests, for Cohen, the mechanism by which Marx saw the achievement of human concord was through the increase of human productive power, leading to the ‘springs of abundance’ flowing freely. It was material plenty rather than any change in human motivation that explained co-operative behaviour under communism.³⁶ What is important for our purposes here is the alternative path, different to that of Marx, that Cohen sets out in order to realise the communist good society that Marx envisages in the *Gotha Programme* passage.

That society, Cohen states, can be characterised by what he terms ‘voluntary equality’, which is “an egalitarian distribution which is not achieved by (threat of) force”.³⁷ He thinks that the ‘jazz band’ communism which Marx endorsed satisfies this description. However, Cohen also thinks that Marx’s method of getting there – via material abundance – is empirically deficient, for the transparent reason that hoping for a conflict-dissolving abundance is hopelessly utopian.³⁸ Cohen’s alternative route to the situation of ‘voluntary equality’, is by a mixture of *both* some significant increase in productivity, short of abundance and *also* some change in human motivation away from the selfish individualism which, he agrees with Marx, broadly describes economic activity under capitalism, towards the establishment of equality.³⁹

At this stage, note that Cohen *appears* to make no intrinsic criticism of the principle of self-ownership itself. To be sure, the limited change in human motivation that Cohen posits seems inconsistent with that principle, in a way that Marx’s route to communism is not. But Cohen’s criticism of self-ownership seems to be wholly empirical and instrumental: it is only because of the contingent fact that abundance can never be achieved, and only because it helps achieve a state of voluntary

³⁵ *Self-ownership*, p. 122.

³⁶ For an alternative view see e.g. Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*.

³⁷ *Self-ownership*, p. 127.

³⁸ Attentive readers will notice that the very use of this line of argument by Cohen indicates that he is doing a different kind of political philosophy here compared to what I described in the second section as his ‘methodologically mature’ later phase. This is suggestive of the argument that follows.

³⁹ *Self-ownership*, pp. 134-5.

equality, that the principle of self-ownership is to be rejected in favour of the prescription that “people act from a belief in egalitarian justice”.⁴⁰

However, I want to now question whether, on an appropriate understanding of what ‘egalitarian justice’ means (for Cohen) this story hangs together. That is I want to ask whether Cohen is right that a belief in egalitarian justice can achieve the state of voluntary equality that he, following Marx, seeks to establish. I suggest, in fact, that it cannot. In making the case it is helpful to use income equality as an exemplar of the egalitarian ideal but the point can equally be made on Cohen’s own professed egalitarian principle of equal access to advantage.

To start, let’s take the case that Cohen himself gives as the example of his own alter-Marxian society of voluntary equality, when he says “let us suppose for vividness, that equality is secured by a swingeingly redistributive egalitarian tax law, with non-payment of the required tax generating no penalty except, perforce, disapproval. But even that penalty is never applied, since everyone believes in paying, and willingly pays, the required tax”.⁴¹ Such a description immediately suggests a problem, namely, why should a commitment to *equality* induce this behaviour? The tax, we are told, is ‘redistributive’ – it re-allocates pre-tax income from those with high earnings to raise the income of those at the lower end of the pre-tax inequality. But as is well known, a commitment to equality by itself does not require *any* degree of ‘levelling up’, but is quite consistent and in some cases may require, levelling *down*. If a wealthy hedge-fund manager earning above the average income chooses to shred some of his pay cheques each year to reduce his salary to the pre-tax average then there is no cause for complaint on egalitarian grounds, even though some of the liquidated earnings could have been redistributed and everyone been better off. In short, while a ‘redistributive egalitarian tax law’ may create the communist state of voluntary equality, that kind of tax cannot be justified on solely egalitarian grounds.

What principle could replace that of egalitarian justice, to justify the society of ‘voluntary equality’ that Cohen seeks to defend? It is possible that Cohen could conjoin the idea of voluntary equality with one of utility or efficiency and posit that

Self-ownership, p. 128.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-9.

the denizens of the good society act from a belief in these norms together, such that they want to secure not just equality, but equality at a high level of income for each person. On this account, the beliefs of such people in these goals would have *no* value in their own right, but purely be valuable because of the efficient, egalitarian society that they are able to achieve.

However, Cohen provides no argument for such a claim in *Self-ownership, Freedom and Equality* and nor, we might think, would he. For only a year prior to the publication to that work, Cohen was already referring to a different sort of motivation as one of the two cornerstones of socialism, in his 1994 paper 'Back to Socialist Basics'.⁴² The value he was referring to there is of course that of community, by which I will mean for the time being, as previously, the condition that is attained when good interpersonal relationships flourish, characterised at least by the mutual desire of each to serve the interests her fellows. *This* principle, it should be apparent, unlike its egalitarian cousin, *could* provide the justification that Cohen needs for the redistributive egalitarian tax – as it is sensitive to the absolute level of income that each has, rather than just the comparison between incomes. Given that those with lower incomes will, other things equal, have more, and more pressing, needs and wants, this provides a reason for our hedge-fund manager to redistribute rather than destroy his monthly pay cheque.

This leads us to suppose that it is indeed community that is doing the uncredited work in Cohen's description of a society of voluntary equality. It is possible to further buttress the case by showing that certain arguments in *Self-ownership, Freedom and Equality* itself provide evidence that community is operating as a crucial background premise in Cohen's work.

The truth of this further claim turns firstly on the fact that community and self-ownership are opposing ideas. To affirm community is to discard self-ownership, on pain of inconsistency. Likewise, adherence to self-ownership compels the adherent to reject community. The explanation for this will be apparent from the definitions given above: the self-ownership principle counsels that no person owes a service to anyone else other than those she has contracted to supply to, while the

⁴² *On the Currency*, pp. 218-219.

principle of community demands that each serves the other, even in the absence of such a contract.⁴³ Importantly for our expositional purposes, Cohen himself writes in chapter 10 of *Self-ownership* that “the central form of rejection of the thesis of self-ownership is in the affirmation of non-contractual obligations to serve other people.”⁴⁴

The second point of note is that Cohen *does* indicate that he rejects the self-ownership principle, in its own right. This claim runs counter to the main content of *Self-ownership*, in which Cohen ends up rejecting the principle of self-ownership but ostensibly on instrumental, and indirect grounds – namely that it is incompatible with equality, and that the main reasons for adopting it in the first place are groundless.⁴⁵ However, in the introduction to *Self-ownership* he makes clear that he only pursues these grounds because he “could not then find a neutral standpoint from which to challenge it [the principle of self-ownership]”.⁴⁶ As we have seen, the standpoint with which Cohen rightly saw that self-ownership directly conflicts is that of community.

This strongly suggests that Cohen was in fact illicitly relying upon a principle of community in his description of socialism. The fact that we know he affirmed such a principle, even it is suggested in *Self-ownership*, bolsters the plausibility that community was indeed playing a background role in Cohen’s work, though was not appreciated by a writer who had yet to get to grips with his later pluralist methodology. Trading blows with Marx about the shape of the good society is, as the methodologically mature Cohen would recognise, an exercise which will

⁴³ David Miller has pressed me to justify the stated inconsistency further. Isn’t it, Miller queries, consistent to endorse self-ownership but then choose to use the resources that are rightfully at one’s disposal to serve others? This reasoning would be at least odd, and probably inconsistent. In the first stage the advocate would endorse the claim that she enjoys exclusive rights of control over her powers and resources, and therefore owes no service to anyone. Then, in the second stage, she would desire to serve her fellows, and believe it is good to do so. But her second stage conviction would contravene the ambivalence about service displayed in the first – the communitarian principle is inconsistent with the libertarian idea that she owes nothing to the other, and to the extent that A acts from *that* idea, her motivation will be inconsistent with community. A conviction that I owe my fellows nothing is simply inconsistent with a conviction that my powers should be enlisted in their service. If we believe this is a problem of a justice value vs. a non-justice value, this does not dissolve the problem – it then becomes a conflict between inconsistent values.

⁴⁴ *Self-ownership*, p. 230.

⁴⁵ See chapter four of *Self-ownership* on incompatibility with equality, and chapter 10 on various arguments against the reasons for adopting the principle of self-ownership in the first place.

⁴⁶ *Self-ownership*, p. 13.

necessarily involve more than one value, so it is unsurprising that analysis of such a discussion dissents from Cohen's view that mere egalitarianism can get us to the socialist good society.

To summarise: in this section I have argued for the following claims. First, that Cohen's description of the good society as one characterised merely by equality is at odds with the activity of that society, as set out by Cohen. Second, that the most plausible candidate to augment Cohen's egalitarianism is a principle of community. The upshot of the discussion is that community becomes central to Cohen's proposals for socialist society in *Self-ownership, Freedom and Equality*, and emerges as an additional, important dividing line with the libertarianism of Robert Nozick.

4. Justificatory community and the egalitarian ethos

The second of the ideas of community to be discussed is justificatory community and the related idea of the egalitarian ethos which was first aired in Cohen's Tanner Lectures, and later in *Rescuing Justice and Equality*. Let us look at each in turn. 'Justificatory community' is, Cohen admits, "something of a concocted notion", which should be seen as separate from but which "contributes to" community proper.⁴⁷ The use of the term seems to suggest that it is *at least* a necessary condition for community, though as we shall see Cohen is not clear on this.⁴⁸ According to Cohen "[a] justificatory community is a set of people among whom there prevails a norm (which need not always be satisfied) of comprehensive justification".⁴⁹ The idea of comprehensive justification is articulated through a hypothetical procedure that Cohen calls 'the interpersonal test'. The interpersonal test is so called because it:

"...tests how robust a policy argument is by subjecting it to variation with respect to who is speaking and/or listening when the argument is presented.... To carry out the test we hypothesize an utterance of the argument by a specified individual, or more commonly, by a member of a specified group, to another individual, or to a member of another, or indeed,

⁴⁷ *RJE*, p. 43.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Cohen's examples on pp. 45-6.

⁴⁹ *RJE*, p. 44.

the same, group. If *because* of who is presenting it, and/or to whom it is presented, the argument cannot service as a justification of the policy, then whether or not it passes as such under the dialogical conditions, it fails (*tout court*) to provide a comprehensive justification of the policy.”⁵⁰

The kind of cases that Cohen has in mind here, and which the interpersonal test is supposed to expose as lacking in justificatory community, are those where an individual or group present an argument, but feature as an immutable premise of that argument a fact which she or they in reality have the power to change. The immediate example that Cohen gives is of a kidnapper, demanding a ransom from the parents of the child he has kidnapped. The demand for the ransom appears justified if it is uttered by the kidnapper in the third-person, for example as an argument composed of the following two premises and conclusion: the kidnapped child should be with her parents; paying the ransom is the only way for the child to be returned to her parents; therefore, the ransom should be paid. However, it is not *comprehensively* justified, for if the kidnapper were to make that same argument in the first-person, then this immediately reveals what was partially obscured before – that it the deliberate action of kidnapper that *makes* the foregoing argument sound. Absent his actions, the argument does not run because the second premise falls. For this reason, the kidnapper’s argument fails the interpersonal test and, Cohen asserts, generates the intuitive result that the kidnapper has violated a norm of (justificatory) community with the family of the kidnapped child.

This reasoning, Cohen thinks also applies to the talented rich in a capitalist market economy, who justify support for tax cuts for those on high incomes on the basis that without the incentive effect that those tax cuts create there would be various negative consequences including the withdrawal or relocation of their labour, which would result in less of a social surplus to spend on those who need it.⁵¹ To make explicit the comparison with the kidnapper analogy, in the tax cut scenario the talented rich are like the kidnapper, the rest of society including the needy are like the family, and the social surplus is like the kidnapped child. Cohen also

⁵⁰ *RJE*, Ibid., p. 42.

⁵¹ The stipulation that this group are ‘talented’ is because it is assumed that their threat to withdraw labour actually has some force: that it would have the negative effects stated.

maintains, separately, that cases such as this expose a flaw in Rawls's difference principle, for that principle on its standard⁵² interpretation seems to *defend* arguments for measures such as tax cuts which rely on the kidnapper-like attitude of the talented rich, just so long as the social surplus is thereby larger than it would be if taxes remained at a higher level.

Against Rawls, Cohen asserts that the talented rich should adhere to (and this is our second idea) an 'egalitarian ethos'. Individuals act in conformity with the egalitarian ethos when, subject to a personal prerogative,⁵³ they make decisions about the use of their labour power (i.e. how hard, how much and what type of work they do) based on a desire to make other members of society better off. The operation of the ethos is illustrated by an example that Cohen gives in one of the more recently written chapters of *Rescuing Justice and Equality*:

"...think of a talented person, the doctor-gardener, who is capable of each pursuit and prefers gardening at £20,000 a year to doctoring at £20,000 a year. She comes to prefer doctoring to gardening (at £20,000 a year) only when the reward for doctoring rises to £50,000. Now her doctoring at £20,000 would, unlike her gardening at £20,000 greatly benefit badly off people, and if she doctored at £20,000 she would have a much better life than most people have... then, on the egalitarian view, she conforms with the proper principle only if she forswears gardening for doctoring, at the modest £20,000 salary, and therefore takes less pay than what would induce her actually to prefer doctoring..."⁵⁴

Thus, kidnapper-like conduct is ruled out by "the egalitarian view" of the egalitarian ethos which demands that, since she is able, the doctor-gardener do the job that would benefit others the most, not for the greater salary that this position affords but because of the fact that it would "greatly benefit badly off people". Notice the twin features of the egalitarian ethos, which are its focus on making others - and particularly the badly off - better off, but also it's allowance for the (in)ability of the person in question to perform that task. It follows from this latter feature, that it is

⁵² The 'lax' definition of the difference principle which Cohen attributes to Rawls takes individual preferences such as those that underlie the demand for monetary incentives for labour as given.

⁵³ Which allows individuals agent-relative reasons to act self-interestedly.

⁵⁴ *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, p. 185.

the motivation of the doctor-gardener to achieve the desired outcome (benefitting badly off people), rather than the achievement of the outcome which the egalitarian tracks.

With the twin ideas of justificatory community and the egalitarian ethos outlined, there are two important questions of interpretation that must be answered if we are to get a better understanding of how, if at all, they contribute to Cohen's communitarianism. Firstly, precisely why and in what way does Cohen think each of these ideas is important? Secondly what is relationship between them? In what follows, I will argue that the most plausible account of the value of justificatory community for Cohen, is that it is a value of *legitimacy*, which is distinct from community proper. Cohen hints at this conclusion, but does not make it clear. His attempt to defend the importance of community in terms of legitimacy weakens his argument by muddying its proper basis. The egalitarian ethos meanwhile is valuable, not because it tracks a commitment to justice or equality, but because it embodies a commitment to community.

To begin, it will be helpful to look at the reasons that Cohen suggests in the text for why justificatory community is important. For while, as we saw above, Cohen explicitly links justificatory community to 'community proper' from the outset, what he means by this is far from clear.

Cohen's primary and often missed suggestion is that lack of justificatory community is bad because it "diminishes the democratic character of a society... since we do not make policy *together* if we make it in the light of what some of us do that cannot be justified to others".⁵⁵ No further detail is given but the quoted passage is illuminating in that it suggests that justificatory community is valuable because it signals when policy is made in an appropriately democratic sort of way. More broadly, it suggests that justificatory community is a necessary, or at least an enabling, condition for a given policy to enjoy *legitimacy*. While this concept is not one that Cohen employs here it nevertheless seems to follow naturally from his

⁵⁵ *RJE*, p. 45, emphasis original.

invocation of democracy.⁵⁶ On this interpretation of the grounding of justificatory community, Cohen's anti-incentive argument condemns the (lax) difference principle for allowing inequalities that are illegitimate, in the sense that those who enjoy the advantage of those inequalities cannot justify their actions to those that do not.⁵⁷

The indication that justificatory community is a legitimacy-based value is further supported by a separate passage in which Cohen suggests that the 'incentives argument' violates justificatory community in a slightly different sense when he says that "...my claim about the incentive justification is that, to appropriate a phrase of Rawls [sic], it does not supply 'a public basis in the light of which citizens can justify to one another their common institutions' and the justification is therefore incompatible with what Rawls calls 'ties of civic friendship.'"⁵⁸ The structure of the way this comparison is set out suggests that it is the latter clause (the breach of the ties of civic friendship) that motivates the concern for the former (the lack of public basis for justification), and that the latter idea is the same as, or in some way analogous to, the lack of justificatory community displayed in the incentives argument.

What Rawls - and so Cohen - means by these terms is not entirely clear, but we can glean something of his intention from passages such as the following, from a discussion of reciprocity in *Political Liberalism*, where Rawls says: "To make more explicit the role of the criterion of reciprocity as expressed in public reason, I note that its role is to specify the nature of the political relation in a constitutional democratic regime as one of civic friendship."⁵⁹ In another passage in *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls remarks merely that "The public will to consult and to take everyone's interests and beliefs into account lays the foundations for civic friendship..."⁶⁰

For Rawls then, it appears that civic friendship is secured by (perhaps among other things) citizens engaging with each other in line with public reason, which in its

⁵⁶ See 'Fairness and Legitimacy in Justice, And: Does Option Luck ever Preserve Justice?' In Otsuka (ed.) *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, pp. 124-146 for Cohen's later thoughts on legitimacy and its connection with justice.

⁵⁷ In making this argument, I thereby part ways with Cohen commentators such as Nicholas Vrousalis who claims that for Cohen community and justificatory community are roughly equivalent on p. 152 of his 'Jazz Bands, Camping Trips and De-commodification'.

⁵⁸ *RJE*, p. 45

⁵⁹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. xlix.

⁶⁰ *Theory*, p. 234.

broadest form demands that political rules be justifiable to those persons over whom they claim authority.⁶¹ It would then seem to follow from the Rawls quote that Cohen appropriates above, that Cohen saw justificatory community as something like a standard of public reason, and consequently that the incentives argument is to be condemned because this means a wider failure of justification of the resulting shape of economic and social life. Without suggesting that Cohen is signing up to the entire paraphernalia of Rawlsian political liberalism, the invocation of this part of Rawls suggests that a concern for *legitimacy* rather than community is at the heart of Cohen's invocation of justificatory community.

What then is the relationship between justificatory community and community proper? It was mentioned earlier that the relationship between the two ideas is not made fully clear in Cohen's work. For the present purposes, let us tighten our placeholder definition of community used above to match Cohen's suggested definition in the Tanner Lectures that "it is analogous not only in form, but in content to friendship",⁶² and a suitably broad definition of legitimacy as "the property something has when no one has the right to complain about it".⁶³

We can show first that it is implausible that justificatory community is *sufficient* for community. We could easily slip into believing this is the case from Cohen's exposition. The core example of the talented rich in the incentives case does seem to be an instance where those with great economic power refuse to be accountable to others for their use of it, and it is that refusal which is enough to explain their non-communal response to higher taxes. Cohen's use of the interpersonal test clearly suggests that the fact that the lax difference principle fails the test, but the strict principle passes it, is *sufficient* to show that the former is inconsistent with community and the latter consistent. But this relation cannot hold generally. Consider the legend of the 'sword in the stone', where it is agreed by all that whoever pulls the sword from the stone will become King. When Arthur succeeds in doing so and then becomes King, he thereby stops being a peasant and

⁶¹ See Rawls's 1980 'Dewey Lectures', and *Political Liberalism* generally.

⁶² *RJE*, p. 43. This is clearly not an acceptable definition in the usual sense, but will suffice for the present.

⁶³ To simplify, I use Cohen's definition here too, taken from his 'Fairness and Legitimacy in Justice', *On the Currency*, p. 129.

becomes royalty, henceforth concerning exclusively himself with activities (the stories say) befitting someone of his new status - slaying dark knights and rescuing princesses. Can it still be said that Arthur's relationship with his former, less fortunate peers is still one 'analogous to friendship' despite them not featuring in his new life, even though we can assume everyone agreed to the rules of the 'sword in the stone' competition which gave him the throne? It looks unlikely. Or to put the matter more dramatically, consider the case of two people who flip a coin with the prior agreement that whoever loses will become a slave to the other. If we take the widely held view that unanimous consent is sufficient for legitimacy, it would be perverse to say that the post- coin flip relationship between the two people is one in any way analogous to friendship.

Is legitimacy nevertheless necessary for community, such that an instance of community must always also be legitimate? There are reasons to think not, though this is not as clear cut as the sufficiency claim. Consider a case where two strangers sit down at a cafe and have their tea spiked by a third party with pills which make them become friendly with whoever is in proximity to them. After drinking their tea, the two succumb to the pills' effects and behave exactly as friends would with one another, thus in fact *becoming* friends, a relationship which lasts even after the effect of the pills wears off because of the friendship formed while medicated. Is this situation legitimate? Without the consent of either, it might be thought that either could have a right to complain about the situation that they had been put in, and so that the situation can be properly described as consistent with community, but inconsistent with legitimacy.⁶⁴

Whether or not this second claim that legitimacy is not necessary for community is true, it is surely not sufficient and this means that characterising the ideal of justificatory community as one of legitimacy is problematic for Cohen. Legitimacy and community are not the same value, and may be merely contingent. The muddled nature of Cohen's exposition here becomes even more clear when we consider, as we shall do now, that the prescription which the idea of justificatory

⁶⁴ The obvious counter-point is that the pharmaceutically-induced friendship is not genuine. But friendships are very often brought about by factors beyond our control – being put in the same class at school or university for example.

community is supposed to provide support for - the egalitarian ethos - *is* properly a communitarian goal.⁶⁵

In *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, Cohen frequently asserts that the egalitarian ethos is a requirement of justice. This is not just the case in the early chapters based on his work in the 1980s and 1990s, but also in the most recent sections published in 2008, including the 'Replies to Critics' section, and the introduction. He talks for example, of "the egalitarian ethos that *I* say *justice* mandates"⁶⁶ and talks repeatedly in the recent chapters four, five and seven of the egalitarian ethos as an egalitarian position and as a requirement of justice.⁶⁷

Even on the merits of the text, this position looks odd, for we can recall from Cohen's discussion on justificatory community which was referred to earlier, and which purported to provide the rationale for the egalitarian ethos, that Cohen thought that this idea, and the related mechanism of the interpersonal test, were an embodiment of a value of a *community*. Invoking community in his critique of Rawls seems to be the line of criticism that Cohen is taking when he says in the 1996 Imprints interview, the relevant part of which was reproduced in the introduction to this chapter, that "egalitarian liberalism lacks the value of community".⁶⁸ Now it *might* be that these statements are consistent, and that the egalitarian ethos is an instantiation of both community and justice, perhaps with the latter being a part of the former. However, this looks unlikely, as I will now show, knowing what we do about Cohen's thoughts on justice, and on the egalitarian ethos.

Cohen's 'luck egalitarian' conception of justice says, to recall that: "an unequal distribution whose inequality cannot be vindicated by some choice or fault or desert on the part of (some of) the relevant affected agents is unfair, and therefore, *pro tanto*, unjust, and *nothing can remove that particular injustice*."⁶⁹ The

⁶⁵ Of course, the problem remains, even if the egalitarian ethos is, as Cohen believed, a dictate of justice. As Cohen says elsewhere "what's legitimate... 'ain't necessarily fair'", *On the Currency*, p. 125. That separate argument is not vindicated here, but Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen has persuasively shown that the interpersonal test is not a good test of sorting just from unjust incentive payments. See Lippert-Rasmussen, 'Inequality, Incentives and the Interpersonal Test' in Feltham (ed.) *Justice, Equality and Constructivism* for criticism on related points.

⁶⁶ *RJE*, p. 18.

⁶⁷ E.g. *ibid.*, p. 344.

⁶⁸ 'Self-ownership, History and Socialism: An Interview with G.A. Cohen'. *Imprints* vol. 1, no. 1 (1996).

⁶⁹ *RJE*, p. 7, italics added.

last, italicised clause in this sentence is of importance here for ‘nothing’ excludes, among other things, *all* personal preferences, including the preferences of talented, rich individuals which make the incentive argument true and which *are* in fact involuntary, in that they are fixed by nature or nurture. We can call this the motivation-insensitive feature of Cohen’s conception of justice. The definition, supported by Cohen’s other writings on equality, also reveals that what matters fundamentally to this conception of justice it is not how well or badly off people are but how much better or worse off they are than others: it is the *inequality* between persons that demands assessment according to choice or fault or desert.⁷⁰ We can call this the comparative feature.

But it should be apparent that neither of these features, characteristic of Cohen’s justice ideal, are to be found in the egalitarian ethos and as such that ethos cannot be an articulation of justice. First: the tension between the comparative ideal of justice, and the non-comparative ideal of the egalitarian ethos. To see this, we can revisit a scenario involving the hedge fund manager mentioned in the previous section. In this model economy, we have one person who is a hedge fund manager and who, while generally happy to work hard in order to do his bit for the good of the economy as a whole, refuses to commit himself in the same way if he is made to pay a higher amount of income tax than he is at the moment. If such a tax were to be introduced, he would declare himself over-taxed, and his work-rate would decline and output shrink. For simplicity, we can suppose that while the Exchequer’s tax take would remain the same in such a higher tax scenario - perhaps because it is a fixed-sum increase - the hedge fund manager’s lower output would have a range of negative effects, for example lower demand for domestically manufactured goods. This would negatively impact the other party in the economy, who we shall stipulate is a manual worker on a much lower income. A scenario with a higher and lower tax levels is represented in the following table.

⁷⁰ This feature comes out particularly strongly in Cohen’s 2006 ‘Luck and Equality: A Reply to Susan Hurley’.

	Distribution A (lower tax)	Distribution B (higher tax)
Hedge fund manager	Y	$0.8Y - 1$
Manual worker	$0.5Y$	$0.1Y + 1$
<i>Inequality</i>	$0.5Y$	$0.7Y - 2$

Output is represented as Y and it is assumed that each gets 100% of the value of what he produces, so that output equals income, except where a tax is levied. In the first, lower tax scenario (distribution A), the hedge fund manager has an income twice that of the manual worker. This inequality holds whatever the size of the economy, indicated by Y . Under the second, higher tax scenario (distribution B), a tax of one unit is levelled on the hedge fund manager and redistributed to the manual worker. But this has the effect of reducing the hedge-fund manager's output by a fifth due to his loss of goodwill. Among other consequences, this results in lower demand for the particular product which the manual worker makes, which severely negatively affects his income. The size of the overall economy is now smaller, and the inequality between the two is now a result both of their smaller outputs and the new tax. In both distribution A and distribution B, the inequality between the hedge fund manager and the manual worker is calculated simply by working out the difference between their respective incomes. The inequality is not, we assume, and to use Cohen's words, vindicated by 'any fault, or choice or desert' so the smaller the inequality, the more just the distribution.

But now it should be clear that there is a range of values of Y for which the prescriptions based on Cohen's conception of justice, and his prescriptions based on the egalitarian ethos come apart. Specifically, for any value of Y less than 10, the egalitarian ethos will recommend distribution A, where the hedge fund manager is keeping his back to the wheel, but inequality will be *greater* in distribution A than B, and so justice will recommend the latter.

The picture is similar if we explore the second tension, between the motivation-insensitive ideal of justice, and the motivation-sensitive ideal of the egalitarian ethos. Imagine, rather than there being a *conscious* change of heart from the hedge fund manager in reaction to the higher tax scenario, that the same motivational change occurs but because of factors he cannot control. After years in the industry under the low tax scenario, say, he finds he's developed a psychological incapacity to get out of bed and into work for 9am every morning once the new tax is introduced. He enlists the services of a psychologist to help him overcome his new mentality, but no avail. In this scenario, we can presume the egalitarian ethos is unable to choose between the two scenarios. This is because, as we saw above, the egalitarian ethos is *motivation-sensitive* – it matters fundamentally what goals people are genuinely motivated to achieve, not whether or not they actually achieve them. Because there is no change in motivation between distribution A and B, we are to be indifferent between them. This is not the case for Cohen's conception of justice. For Y-values greater than 10 or less than 10, one distribution becomes more unequal, and so we can assume more unjust than the other. Again, the prescriptions of the egalitarian ethos, which Cohen claims is an articulation of justice, differs from the, luck egalitarian conception of justice that Cohen offers elsewhere.

The non-comparative and motivation-sensitive features of the egalitarian ethos distinguish it from Cohen's conception of justice and suggest that we should ignore the later Cohen who insists that the former is an embodiment of justice. Instead, we should follow the Cohen of 1991 who began his discussion of justificatory community, and its putative corollary the egalitarian ethos with an assertion that these concepts were important because they articulated the end of community, a distinctively socialist value which is more or less alien to liberals such as Rawls. It is community, not merely justice, that drives the disagreement between Cohen and Rawls in Cohen's Tanner Lectures.

As an addendum to this analysis, and as a means to elaborate further on this conclusion it is worth noting that it is not shared by Patrick Tomlin who in an otherwise illuminating 2010 article makes the case well that the egalitarian ethos is not a prescription of Cohenite justice but goes astray when he concludes thereby that "Ultimately I believe that the incompatibility shows a flaw in Cohen's *concept* of

justice—distributive justice (contra Cohen) is more than simply equality or fairness”.⁷¹ If Tomlin is right, then this removes the need for any consideration of community from the picture. Thus it is important to show briefly that his conclusion is unpersuasive.

Tomlin comes to the stated judgment because he believes that “precisely what is at stake between Cohen and Rawlsians is what we can or should call justice” and that “surely we want to (and do) say... about justice”, that we should prefer it from the point of view of justice “if a society can easily be moved by its talented members from (4,4) to (8,8)”.⁷² If, Tomlin’s argument runs, we agree that the disagreement between Cohen and Rawls is one about justice, and if we accept that we want to (and typically do) include egalitarian ethos type commitments in our conception of justice, then Cohen must be wrong about *his* conception of justice, since he seems to be forced to outlaw such commitments.

However, such a conclusion is, I think, unjustified - notwithstanding my agreement with Tomlin on the incompatibility of the egalitarian ethos and Cohen’s conception of justice. The argument is unsound as a criticism of Cohen firstly because it should be evident that it is not true that justice is the only thing at stake in the disagreement between Cohen and Rawls, as Tomlin contends. To be sure, that value is the main subject of his criticism of Rawls in *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, but Cohen’s socialism does not only differ from Rawls at the bar of justice. Pertinently for our purposes, a Rawlsian society is also deficient because it pre-supposes and seeks to legitimate a model of society as a non-community. Given Cohen’s other work, we know this is true in any case but, as I have argued above, this is also the point that Cohen’s criticism of the ‘lax’ difference principle and his consequent espousal of the egalitarian ethos seems to make even though, as we have seen, Cohen incorrectly labels the basis of that criticism as one of justice rather than community. Tomlin is thus wrong to think that Cohen need bring the egalitarian ethos under the ambit of justice to make it relevant to his dispute with Rawls.

⁷¹ Tomlin, ‘Cohen’s Rescue of Justice’, pp. 229-30, emphasis original. Though I do not discuss it here, I believe Tomlin is also wrong to - following Cohen’s example - conclude that the fact that the egalitarian ethos conflicts with justice means that it is not in any respect *egalitarian* (see p. 235). This point is picked up in the next section.

⁷² ‘Cohen’s Rescue of Justice’, p. 241.

Tomlin's positive argument for a more expansive, Rawlsian view of justice, which could potentially incorporate a value of community, rather than a less expansive Cohen-type view which is properly separate to community is un-compelling. Two variations of this argument for the former are suggested when Tomlin, to expand slightly on the quote offered above, challenges Cohen that "if you say that that's what justice is [i.e. luck egalitarianism], then we couldn't say *x* about justice, and surely we want to (and do) say this about justice", where the specific '*x*' Tomlin has in mind here is that we couldn't say that justice satisfies the egalitarian ethos. The relevant part of the Tomlin challenge can be summarised as follows: Cohen's conception of justice is implausible both because we would *want* to say that an easily attainable distribution (8,8) is better than (4,4) and secondly because we – people, generally – *do* say that. I find both variations of this premise unpersuasive.

We should recall that Cohen's concept and conception of justice is wholly derivative of *fairness*, the meaning of which he thinks we have a good, intuitive handle. As described above, fairness is an interpersonally comparative concept – it just doesn't make sense to employ it in a situation where no such comparison is being made. If you and I are both equally hungry after hard days at work and sit down together, both looking forward to eating a pie that has been served up to us, and I cut myself three-quarters of it, you would justifiably say, looking at your piece which is a third the size of mine – 'that's unfair!'. On the contrary splitting the pie into two halves seems eminently fair.⁷³ But now imagine a variation of this scenario where the pie served up is half the size of the original. It is surely no *less* fair that we split it in half this time, even though both of us might prefer to have bigger slices – it is still the optimal decision from the point of view of *fairness* that each has half. It is a perverse implication of Tomlin's Rawls-type view that our decision to split the smaller pie in half is *less fair* than our decision to split the bigger pie in half.

But irrespective of whether it is agreed that fairness has the content just stated, the only way Tomlin would have grounds for saying that we would want, or do, say that (8,8) is more *fair* than (4,4), is if *he has already presupposed a Rawlsian rather than Cohenite concept of justice*. This suggests that the central problem with

⁷³ This is presumably be true whatever you think the correct account of fairness is.

Tomlin's critique of Cohen may be that he ends up begging the question on the *concept* of justice, by not taking seriously Cohen's broader methodology as set out in the second section of this chapter.⁷⁴ In doing so he removes any space for a separate non-justice value of community to flourish. Cohen's critique of Rawls is only merely about justice if you take a Rawlsian concept of justice as read. And the challenge that Tomlin poses to Cohen about what we would want to (and do) say about justice likewise only has the polemical force Tomlin wants if you are *already* pre-supposing an idea of justice that is not Cohen's. In fact, as we have seen, Cohen's political philosophy includes a real and substantive concern for community as well as for justice, which is central to his critique of Rawls.

5. Communal reciprocity

Finally we come to the most developed of Cohen's discussions of community: his espousal of an idea of 'communal reciprocity'.⁷⁵ That particular name is given in the brief discussion *Why Not Socialism?* but the main idea, branded then simply as 'community' is also discussed in 1994's 'Back to Socialist Basics'.⁷⁶ The name 'communal reciprocity' itself suggests this articulation is more complicated than its close cousins voluntary equality discussed in section three and the egalitarian ethos discussed in section four because of the introduction of the idea of reciprocity, which is absent in the discussion of those ideas. However, it is clearly the offspring of the same basic conviction which we have seen in Cohen's previous work: that any socialist society truly worthy of that name will be composed of people who, to some significant extent, want to see each other's lives go well. But unlike prior incarnations, we now get a working definition. The fact that Cohen's engagement with community is explicit here, means that we can concern ourselves with exposition and explanation here rather than interrogation and reconstruction as in

⁷⁴ This provides support for the contention that Cohen relinquish use of the word 'justice' and instead talk about 'fairness', thereby avoiding much confusion.

⁷⁵ As will become clear this is quite different from the idea of 'reciprocal altruism' as used in the social-scientific literature – the 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours' mentality which is better called 'enlightened self-interest'. See Bowles and Gintis, *A Cooperative Species: Human Reciprocity and its Evolution*, p.3.

⁷⁶ Esp. *Why Not Socialism?* pp. 34-45. 'Back to Socialist Basics' was originally published in the *New Left Review*, in the September-October edition of 1994.

the last two sections of this chapter. The central passage from *Why Not Socialism?* is this one:

“...within communal reciprocity, I produce in a spirit of commitment to my fellow human beings. I desire to serve them while being served by them, and I get satisfaction from each side of that equation. In such motivation, there is indeed an expectation of reciprocation, but it differs critically from the reciprocation expected in market motivation. If I am a marketeer, then I am willing to serve but only in order to be served: I would not serve if doing so were not a means to get service.”⁷⁷

The motif of ‘service’ as commitment to others is familiar to us from Tawney in particular in the previous chapter but also from sections three and four of this chapter, as is the focus on motivation or, as Cohen terms it here, ‘spirit’ rather than outcome. But, the incorporation of reciprocity means that Cohen’s socialist conception of community is not, as we might have been inclined to think in previous incarnations, mere altruism or charity. One way to understand the difference between these ideas and the more complex ideal of communal reciprocity is with the following story, which seeks to explain how an ideal of reciprocity might be incorporated into the ideal of community for reasons *internal* to that value. While Cohen himself offers little explanation or justification of the ideal of socialist community he advocates, I believe such a dramatisation is in keeping with his account.

The story unfolds as follows: presented with a model of society where people – perhaps because of capitalist exchange relations, or for some other reason - see each other in a purely strategic way, as a means to their own ends, the communitarian recoils. The ‘what’s in it for me?’ mentality, quite apart from seeming to result in vast efficiency losses due to extensive non-cooperation, seems abhorrent in itself. Wouldn’t it be so much better, the communitarian thinks, if we were to treat others’ welfare as important in its own right and seek to organise our own conduct so that their ends are satisfied as well as our own? This seems a far more satisfactory of organising human conduct, and the desirability of this mode of

⁷⁷ *Why Not Socialism*, p. 43.

organisation, which we might call the altruistic conception of community, seems settled.

But then, a fellow communitarian raises a point in contention. Surely, she says, it is not enough that one person seeks to serve a second, and that the second also seeks to serve the first. It is also important that each *recognises* the service that the other is providing. A communal relationship isn't like petting a dog; it describes a relationship where the other-motivated action of one person is appreciated as such by the other, and part of appreciating the first action involves responding in the same spirit, which needn't of course mean just reflecting the original action back.⁷⁸ Community isn't repeated gift-giving as if the gifts were ships passing in the night – community obtains when communal sentiment, and expectation of communal sentiment, begets further communal sentiment precisely because each recognises the other as producers as well as recipients of that sentiment.

Persuaded by this point, the communitarian modifies her original argument from one of merely widespread altruism to include an ideal of *reciprocity* and thus arrives at a more sophisticated and accurate understanding of community - as communal reciprocity. The combination of these separate ideas of altruism and reciprocity is not a retreat from a more 'pure' communitarianism but rather an appreciation of pressures *within* the value of community that drives it from community as mere altruism to one sensitive to reciprocity.

This, I believe, is a way of conveying the rationale behind Cohen's incorporation of reciprocity into his account of community in *Why Not Socialism?*. One interesting consequence of this more complex view of community, is that it follows that no one of its component parts (altruism and reciprocity) has value, *qua* community. It is, for example, no improvement *at all* as far as community is concerned if one person gives selflessly of his time or assets, if that giving is not appreciated by others because they remain wedded to individualism. For that kind of response is non-reciprocal, and as we have seen the developed, socialist conception of community is specified by altruism *and* reciprocity. Each is necessary and they are

⁷⁸ Or even responding as such to the same person. The model of reciprocity under scrutiny here is 'generalised reciprocity', as per my comments in the introduction, above. See also *Why Not Socialism?*, p.44.

jointly sufficient for socialist community - so a merely altruistic response to selfish behaviour does not recognise that behaviour in the appropriate way, and so is not consistent with or demanded by community. Likewise, against a background of community, selfish actions such as free-riding or rent-seeking economic behaviour generate no continuing duty of community among others towards such people: there is no advantage as far as community is concerned with non-reciprocated service being met with further service. If the communal relationship has broken down then there can be no unilateral solution, from one party alone, to fix it.

However, while such behaviour generates no duty to act, it does not follow from this that community *requires* one person's anti-social behaviour to be reflected back at them, in 'an eye for an eye' type prescription. If Cohen's socialist conception of community was *merely* one of reciprocity then this would be the case, but it is not and the incorporation of the idea of altruistic service means community is only interested in the kind of other-promoting reciprocity described above, not in the perpetuation of selfish behaviour. This makes intuitive sense. If one person, Jill, responds to a situation where her labour or time is required by another, with a refusal to help, saying merely 'I'm alright Jack', then her fellow and him are no *more* a community if Jack also adopts this attitude towards Jill.⁷⁹ Neither we might think are they *less* a community if he acts in that way, for their mutual fellowship has already broken down, and is not resurrected if Jack continues to slavishly serve Jill while she treats him indifference. Perhaps there is *some* way in which such a response counts as better, but it is not, it follows from Cohen's view, community.

With the idea of reciprocity that is at the heart of Cohen's mature idea of community clearer, it is worth finally discussing the extent to which Cohen's socialist conception of community is an egalitarian ideal, and so the relationship between Cohen's two distinctively socialist ideals of equality and community. Although it is not much discussed by Cohen, further scrutiny of the idea of community suggests that it *is* in fact strongly egalitarian.⁸⁰ We might think Cohen is aware of the egalitarian implications for while he does not readily recognise the idea of communal

⁷⁹ In reality of course, there might be some kind of duty of community to try to persuade the first man to re-engage in fraternal relations.

⁸⁰ The next chapter picks up the argument that it is this feature that distinguishes socialist community from other conceptions.

reciprocity in this way, he does distinguish 'egalitarian community' as a separate sense of community to its reciprocity-based counterpart. That former sense of community, he says, is what is offended when one person has an income, and associated standard of living, so much higher than another that she cannot empathise with the other - has no knowledge of the way the other lives and so cannot enjoy community with the second person.⁸¹ However, it is odd to call this a *different* sense of community because it is not proposed that it draws on an entirely different conception. Rather, I suggest, a better way to understand it is as a necessary condition for the idea of communal reciprocity to be realised, just as other features of interpersonal relations - such as the faculty for empathy - would be necessary. It says nothing however directly about Cohen's core socialist conception of community, merely poses a contingent scenario that needs to occur in order for it to be realised.⁸²

In what way is the socialist conception of community as outlined above itself egalitarian? The most plausible way seems to be that there needs to be some background equality in the needs which are to be served by others for the ideal of communal reciprocity to be a socialist idea of the sort that Cohen intends. To see this, consider the following scenario which is superficially compatible with Cohen's ideal of community as outlined above, and which I touched on earlier. In the court of Louis XIV, each could aim to serve the other, and reciprocate service received but have very different needs and wants which need serving. The King and the courtiers might each serve the others' preferences but the royal desires of the King – for fine food, wine and entertainment - would be quite different from that of his courtiers who had more lowly aspirations, including perhaps the desire to be subservient to the King. This aristocratic, hierarchical conception of community can't be what Cohen has in mind – it is certainly far removed from the egalitarian community described in his camping trip parable. For our present exegetical purposes this sort of example does enough to suggest that the idea of equality does play an important

⁸¹ We might presume that this inequality is not just income but also of other aspects of a person's life too – their culture, linguistic abilities etc. which provide impediments in this way, and further think that is selective of Cohen to not mention these. I discuss such features in the next chapter.

⁸² This detour is explained by Cohen's polemical need in *Why Not Socialism?* to head off those who claim that his luck egalitarianism is not egalitarian enough. Without that impetus it seems doubtful whether this slightly confusing other sense of community would have been introduced.

background role in specifying a *socialist* type of community.⁸³ However, it also suggests that there needs to be further specification of the kinds of preferences that are being served. I pursue this line of enquiry in the next chapter.

6. Conclusion: community and socialism

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that a rich vein of communitarianism runs through G.A. Cohen's work on political philosophy and his arguments for socialism. While such a value might be thought to be a peripheral value for all that it is mentioned by name by Cohen, a more considered reading of his work suggests that is in fact it is integral.

The discovery of a latent strand of communitarianism throughout Cohen's work is not without its problems for the coherence of Cohen's corpus. Much of his work attempts to answer his interlocutors in their own terms and few of them abide by a norm of community. As we have seen, this has sometimes led to the idea of community being wrongly refused explicit mention for the role it is playing in Cohen's argument. However, we have also seen that, in Cohen's most sophisticated articulation of it, community yields a rich conception of the value of human interaction, and provides a tantalising glimpse of the post-capitalist future that Cohen so doggedly advocated.

⁸³ It also suggests that Cohen may be unwise to distinguish between community and equality in the way he does – for that categorisation disguises the fact that community in the relevant, socialist, sense is itself an egalitarian ideal.

3

Communal reciprocity: concept and value

“Of all the concepts in terms of which we characterize, organize, and constitute our social and political experience, the concept of community seems to be the one most neglected by social and political philosophers.”

Raymond Plant ¹

1. Introduction

Drawing upon the insights of the last two chapters, in what follows I construct and elaborate on the socialist ideal of community that I, following Cohen, will call communal reciprocity. The purpose of the chapter is mainly expository rather than critical - I show that it is possible to delineate a determinate, attractive conception of community which is recognisably radical or socialist in nature. We have seen the glimmers of such an ideal in the work of socialists over the last two centuries, and in contemporary political theory in the work of G.A. Cohen. The task now is to set out that political ideal in full and explain its main features. This will require us to delve into the proper definition of community in some detail, so the task of assessing its implications, and answering criticisms is left to subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, politics is not entirely left at the door. It is perhaps not possible - nor desirable - to write about political values in such a way as to remove *all* trace of political argument and there are two ways in which I will move beyond mere description and seek to

¹ ‘Community: Concept, Conception and Ideology’, p. 79.

motivate the idea of communal reciprocity below. First by comparing it to what I identify as rival conservative and liberal conceptions of community, and second by dwelling in the final section of the chapter upon the reasons, both non-instrumental and instrumental, for thinking that communal reciprocity is of value.

The chapter unfolds as follow. The remainder of this introductory section will clarify the nature of the inquiry, and answer a foundational question, an affirmative answer to which might explain the neglect identified by Raymond Plant in the quote at the top of this chapter – is the notion of community inherently vague or ambiguous?² I argue that it is not and go on to argue that we should understand the ideal discussed here as *evaluative* rather than *descriptive*. Furthermore I will describe what, following the terminology popularised by Rawls, we can call the *concept* of community: the criteria that rival *conceptions* of community must satisfy in order to be disagreeing about community at all.³ These two steps, of bracketing off some legitimate uses of community that are nevertheless outside the scope of our normative project, and of giving a working definition of the broad family of normative ideas that are properly called ideals of community, serves to delineate the scope of the inquiry.

Section one fleshes out the two constituent parts of the socialist ideal of communal reciprocity. The first is concern for others. This answer begets the need for two further ones – concern in what way, and for who? In response, I sketch out an account of needs which is expansive in three ways: first it goes beyond what are sometimes called basic needs, or, slightly differently, capabilities; second it encompasses both (the absence of) resources *and* of welfare, rather than merely one or the other; and, third it includes both subjective and objective needs. I then address the scope of the ideal of communal reciprocity, arguing against the domain of community being artificially restricted in certain ways. The second part of this section looks at the reciprocal nature of the socialist ideal of community, drawing out two sorts of ‘in-kind’ responses that community demands of its participants, which I term ‘producer’ and ‘consumer’ reciprocity.

² I use the words ‘vague’, ‘indeterminate’, and ‘ambiguous’ to mean the same thing – namely, lacking sufficient precision to be properly understood or used.

³ *Theory*, p. 5.

The conceptual criteria outlined in section two might be termed the logical prerequisites of the socialist ideal of community – they are the criteria that must always be satisfied for communal reciprocity to obtain. Section three then discusses the *empirical* prerequisites of communal reciprocity - what, as a matter of contingent fact we have reason to think affects the extent to which communal reciprocity can be realised. I discuss three potential constraints – material or economic inequality; distance; and ‘cultural’ differences in race, religion and ethnicity. The empirical evidence is clear that all can, and typically do, make it more difficult to realise community as I have described it. I advocate steering a middle course between ignoring some or all of these factors (as G.A. Cohen does when he considers only the fact that economic inequality frustrates community) and overplaying their significance (as those who jump straight from empirical fact to normative conclusion tend to do).

Section four distinguishes the socialist conception of community from conservative and liberal rivals. I outline two ways in which we can instructively differentiate communal reciprocity from each. It is set apart from conservative conceptions of community first in that conservative communal norms are *inegalitarian*: they preserve and re-enforce hierarchical relationships between members of the community, while the socialist conception looks to dissolve them; secondly, the conservative view seeks *preservation* of certain specific economic and cultural standards about what is valuable in the life of the community, while the socialist conception gives such standards no special privilege. In the case of the liberal conception, it is distinguished from communal reciprocity first by its *limited scope* applying as it does to only the major structures and institutions in society; and second, by the fact that it is *less demanding* of citizens than the socialist conception.

Finally, section five reviews the reasons for thinking that the ideal of communal reciprocity is worth writing about, talking about and championing. I suggest that it is non-instrumentally valuable to care about quality of the relationships we have with other people because of the importance of recognition: we are beings whose lives are important, and having that status accepted and in some sense validated by others thus expresses something deeply valuable. More prosaically, community is instrumentally valuable mainly because it allows efficiency-

inducing acts of co-operation. In particular good relationships are essential for mitigating risk, and solving collective action problems. Some conclusions from the empirical literature to that effect are briefly presented. A final section concludes.

Before we move on to the substantive analysis just outlined, we first need to clarify the terms of the inquiry. The word 'community', as has been noted above, is ubiquitous and rarely well defined. This vagueness has led some theorists to despair of community ever being usefully employed. Thus Adam Swift pithily remarks "community is very much in fashion. It is warm, caring, and nobody knows what it means".⁴ As we saw in the introduction above, Andrew Mason worries that "the notion of community is fundamentally ambiguous"⁵ and suggests that partly as a result of this "community... may serve the ideological purpose of diverting attention away from the relationships of exploitation that exist within a way of life".⁶ The sociologist A.H. Halsey has said that community "has so many meanings as to be meaningless".⁷

The first necessary step of reaching a more focused ideal of community begins with stripping away those definitions of community which are purely descriptive rather than evaluative. So, common invocations of groups based on their shared location, skin colour, national heritage and so on are outside the scope of an inquiry into community as a political ideal. To be sure, such phrases are often given normative content, but such phrases are also commonly used in a way such that there is nothing valuable in being a member of 'the south London community' the 'black community', or the 'French community' *as such*; they merely describe a group of people who are from south London, or who are black or French, without saying anything about the quality of the relationships that exist between them. In such circumstances, any valuable communal relationships that *do* obtain in the 'French community' do so only contingently. It is not paradoxical to utter statements of the sort 'the French community has been at war with itself for 10 years' in a way that it surely would be if 'French community' necessarily invoked community in any value-laden sense. The fact that a group is described as 'the French community' rather

⁴ Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy: A Beginner's Guide for Students and Politicians*. p. 133

⁵ Andrew Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging*, p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷ A. H. Halsey, 'Government Against Poverty in School and Community', p. 140.

than ‘the British’, ‘the Kenyan’ or ‘the Chinese’ community is not the source of its value. Rather it is simply and commonsensically a descriptive moniker to describe an attribute of the group – that they are French – without necessarily making any judgment about the value of that fact.

It should not then come as a surprise that our study of community is a normative or evaluative inquiry rather than descriptive one, but what should we understand by that normative term?⁸ Even with many uses bracketed off as merely descriptive there are still clearly a large and diverse number of potential definitions. As we shall see in section four, this includes both conservative uses, characterised by hierarchy and traditionalism; and liberal uses which seeks to stress the need for tolerance of members of the group.

It is helpful here to distinguish between the concept of community and its various conceptions.⁹ The conceptions of community are the more specific instances of community, such as the liberal and conservative variants just mentioned. The concept of community is the umbrella term under which it is appropriate to group such conceptions – it is in virtue of their being accurately described by the *concept* of community that they count as conceptions of *community* at all rather than some other value such as fairness, or efficiency.

One question, posed by W.B. Gallie, and more recently by Alasdair Macintyre, is whether a concept such as community can ever be given proper specification, or whether it is in Gallie’s phrase ‘essentially contested’.¹⁰ Gallie lists seven criteria which a concept must fulfil in order to be properly labelled essentially contested. The criteria are somewhat idiosyncratic, and need not detain us in any detail.¹¹ The important Gallie-type claim is simply that for a number of social and political concepts – he lists social justice and democracy but might just as easily have invoked community - there is no rational way of settling contrary claims about the nature of that value. Competing definitions are “not resolvable by argument of any kind, [and]

⁸ I use these terms ‘normative’ and ‘evaluative’ as synonymous and so do not make use of Brian Barry’s influential distinction between ‘evaluations’ and ‘justifications’ (or arguments) – evaluation using political ideals *is* a form of political argument. See Barry, *Political Argument*, pp. 2-3.

⁹ *Theory*, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Plant seeks to match the concept of community up against Gallie’s list in ‘Community: Concept, Conception and Ideology’, pp. 83-4.

are nevertheless [each] sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence".¹² If Gallie is right then it is indeed a problem for any conceptual analysis of community, for it, more than any political idea, seems certain to be classed as 'essentially contested' on his analysis. However, while I have embraced the distinction between concept and conception, which allows for rival usages of terms such as community, I want to counsel against adopting this sort of sceptical claim about community for, as I hope to show, in the face of such scepticism, we can both define a reasonably uncontroversial *concept* of community, and make progress in our arguments between rival *conceptions*.¹³

In the case of community I suggest we can identify three iterative features of rightful invocations of the evaluative ideal of community, as might describe disparate instances of community as varied as that found in the Athenian polis, a medieval *gemeinschaft*, an Israeli kibbutz, or a modern neighbourhood watch scheme. The first and most obvious is that community must describe a situation with least two people – there is no community of just one. The second is that it must say something about the quality of the relationship between those people – community is interested in not just any relationships, but good relationships. The third is that part of the content of that relationship must be some non-instrumental regard from each for the other people with which the relationship obtains, not purely for oneself; an interpersonal relationship which is purely contractual is surely not of good quality in the way required to be communal (though it may be good in other ways). A pithier encapsulation of these features might run as follows: community consists in good relationships between people, where each holds the interests of the others to have at least some non-instrumental value.¹⁴

¹² 'Essentially contested Concepts', p. 169.

¹³ Though it would take us too far afield to fully interrogate community by Gallie's standards; in brief, my contention would be the accommodating one that community is, unlike democracy or social justice, a fundamental concept. Whereas democracy, for example, derives its force from the number of different concepts which support it, community is a standard that is relevantly *non*-derivative. This means when we make political argument on behalf of community we are appealing to our intuitions *about community*, rather than about one or more ideals which make up that value. We should therefore hold out hope of being able to describe community in a more or less definitive way.

¹⁴ Isn't it also a feature of the evaluative conception of community that it must be durable, so that a fleeting relationship between people such as in a one-off meeting cannot be properly called community? I don't believe so – in practice there may well be a some period of time which is

We have then the barest definition of the concept of community. Some will protest that this is too formal and abstract a definition of community to be of any use. I do think, as I suggested in the introduction to chapter one, that even this minimal definition is able to distinguish community from other fundamental values. But in practical terms, they would be right. However, the purpose of the concept of community is not to generate political prescriptions but merely to set the limits for intuitive judgment about its use. When we elaborate the socialist ideal of community, and look at the various conceptions of community as we will presently do, the test that each must be set is how well it captures the intuitive value of community, and it is in this way that the definition here provides the necessary basis for that further analysis.

Articulating the concept of community in this way does highlight the difficulty involved in good conceptual analysis – if we were able to provide a conceptual definition that was both uncontroversial and specific then the task of finding the best conception to fit our intuitive judgments about political ideals such as community would become that much more straightforward – indeed might do away with the need for the distinction between ‘concept’ and ‘conception’ altogether. Alas, that is not our situation, but progress can nevertheless be made and this minimal definition of community is our starting point.

2. The socialist conception of community

The socialist conception of community’s claim is to be the best understanding of community in general; the specification which best fits with the intuitive value of that political ideal. It obtains in a very general form when *people are motivated by mutual commitment to one another*. In a simple, two person world, as we saw in the introduction, communal reciprocity is satisfied when person *j*’s preferences about the outcomes for a second person *i* are a function of the needs of *i* (*j*’s concern is higher the greater *i*’s need) and of the reciprocal intention of *i* towards *j* (*j*’s concern is higher the more reciprocal *i*’s intention). Communal reciprocity is thus formed of two related ideas – concern for others, and reciprocity. It is emphatically

necessary to secure the quality of relationship that community demands, but there is no conceptual reason why community could not be established and then lost instantaneously.

not merely altruism; to obtain there must be reciprocal concern from the second person i to the first person j 's concern. Unreciprocated concern isn't just a weak form of community, it's no kind of community at all. But likewise, communal reciprocity is not just what is referred to in the social preference literature as 'reciprocal altruism', which is in fact merely enlightened self-interest (I'll happily give to you only if I think that at some stage I'll get something back in return) – the reciprocal concern that i has for j is genuine and not merely tactical.

In order to deepen our understanding of this ideal, we need to now look at these two core components of communal reciprocity in more detail, starting with the idea of concern for others.

2.1 Concern for others

Communal reciprocity requires among its adherents a preference for the needs of the relevant others to be satisfied (I shall explain what I mean by 'needs' and 'relevant others' shortly). A preference in the sense that I use it is a desire, or state of mind, such that an agent wishes to bring about some action, namely the satisfaction of the needs of the relevant others.¹⁵ Often the language of preferences and desires is used in the decision theory literature to say something quite specific about the *reasons* why an agent wishes some outcome, which is that she does so because she expects to gain utility from it. My use of the term 'preference' shouldn't be thought of as necessitating that view. Rather, for communal reciprocity to be fulfilled, the reason for the stated preference must be precisely because the agent genuinely thinks it important that those who are the object of her preference have their needs satisfied. She desires that because meeting those needs is of moment to her. Slightly more formally we might say that, whatever her other reason for holding that preference, the value placed in her desire to see the needs of others met is a sufficient reason for holding it.

While communal reciprocity requires that the proper communal preference be justified in the way just stated, it need not be the only reason why that

¹⁵ This view about preferences/desires has been called the 'action theory' of desire. See e.g. Elisabeth Anscombe, *Intention*, pp. 7-12. See also Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior*, pp. 164-175 for illuminating discussion on the relationship between desires, opportunities and outcomes.

preference is held. It may be the case that the community-minded agent also has the communal desire she does because she would derive pleasure from the action which is its object. All that is required by communal reciprocity is that the communal preference would be held even in the absence of the agent deriving such pleasure from that preference and/or its result. It would be foolish to try to deny that it will quite often be the case that in attending to the needs of other the agent will bear costs, including opportunity costs, and this will mean that she suffers as a result, relative to the counterfactual scenario in which she did not act in accordance with community. Nor do I want to deny that it may be preferable for the communal agent to not suffer in this way, but instead to enjoy the fulfilment of her communal desire. But the point here is that such a state of mind is not necessary from the point of view of community. As long as the desire is genuine, and made for the right reason – a non-instrumental interest in the needs of the relevant others – communal reciprocity is satisfied.

Preferences can be of varying strengths – at any one time an individual might have a number of preferences from a desire to fulfil household chores, to the deeper aims and projects for his life or the lives of others. Concern for others need not be the only preference an individual has, but it is satisfied only when the communal preference just stated is strong enough such that absent any impediment to its being acted upon, it is acted upon. Inability here can mean both a physical barrier – I can't help you if you are drowning if I can't swim myself; if I have no money then I have none to give you – or a psychological barrier – an incapacitating fear of water, or intense gambling addiction which means that all my money goes to the bookies at the greyhound track.

One important question that might occur at this juncture is why the focus of the socialist conception of community is on the *desire, or intention* to achieve an action rather than the action itself. We saw this briefly in the introduction. Surely, a critic might press, it would be better if community meant that the needs of others were actually met, rather than merely there be a desire that this happen? I don't want to deny that it will very often be better that someone's needs be met rather than not met, but to repeat, the task here is not to describe what is *better*, all-things-considered, but to seek to best encapsulate the value of community, and there is

good reason to think that, contrary to what we might think all-things-considered, community is concerned solely with intentions rather than actions. Imagine for example, to use a trivial example, you and I have a rough convention whereby we make each other cups of tea – you in the morning and I in the afternoon. If one afternoon when I go to make you a cup of tea and bring it to you the handle unforeseeably falls off the mug, the fact that I haven't succeeded in bringing about the situation where you have a cup of tea seems no reason for our communal bonds, such as they are, to be weakened. If by contrast, I had gone to make tea and deliberately only brought back a cup for myself, then absent any mitigating factors we *would* think that this detracted from the relationship between us.¹⁶ A less trivial example: a doctor has a target (which could be formal or notional) for the number of patients she sees, which ensures that all patients who need care are given it. If one day she is struck down with a bout of infirmity which means that, while working to the best of her ability, she can only see half the number of patient mandated by the target, then it would be churlish for the patients to see their relationship with her as sullied by this fact. There's no getting away from the fact that the doctor's infirmity is bad – most saliently because the medical needs of half of the patients are not being met, but I submit that these examples show that *community* remains unperturbed as long as her preferences remain unchanged.¹⁷

So, to recap: the component of communal reciprocity which I have labelled 'concern for others' is properly understood as a preference rather than an action, which must be justified by the right reasons, viz. a non-instrumental concern for the needs of others. We must now say something more about the aim of that preference. The primary question here is analogous to that considered in the 'equality of what?' debate which sought to clarify the type of good, or 'currency',

¹⁶ See the next subsection for a fuller formulation of this example.

¹⁷ David Leopold objects that these examples may show merely that any *one* failure of action does not undermine community. Against this, consider a modified 'tea case' such that I am (physically) disabled and this means that I can't physically make you a cup of tea (which I know you desire most of all, as I do), but only bring you a glass of water (which you and I both want to consume somewhat less). But if I repeatedly bring you a glass of water while all the while you bring me tea surely it is not the case that our communal ties are weakened.

that should be equalised when the ideal of equality is properly defined.¹⁸ The counterpart question for our analysis of community is ‘what aspects of a person’s condition count as needs for the purposes of community?’.

I use an account of needs that is expansive in three senses: first in that it goes beyond what are sometimes called ‘basic needs’, or for that matter ‘basic capabilities,’ understood as the “cut-off point for the purpose of assessing poverty and deprivation”.¹⁹ It covers what are sometimes referred to as ‘wants’ too.²⁰ Second, I propose a heterogeneous understanding, encompassing both (the absence of) resources *and* of welfare, rather than merely one or the other. Third, my account includes both subjective and objective needs. To summarise this account with a suitably broad definition that captures these various facets - needs are the absence of those things which would make people’s lives go better, and it is thus to filling such absences that communal reciprocity is directed.

To see that a community must focus on an account of needs that goes beyond basic needs, we can imagine a scenario where an elderly man desires a newspaper but because he is old cannot get it himself. On any distinction between basic and non-basic needs, the desire for a newspaper would almost always fall into the category of lesser importance. To strengthen that judgment, and so the hand of those who would press the worth of such distinctions we might further stipulate that the elderly man wants the newspaper not because of some important news story, or because it will serve any critical social function (for example he would discuss its contents with his grandson the next day) or educational function (for example he would use it to make his mind up about how to vote), but mostly out of habit. We can even stipulate that he knows that later in the day he will have a visitor who would be happy to collect a paper for him. However, despite all of this it seems unquestionably a communal act for his neighbour to buy him a paper – an act that is, which fosters a more communal relationship between the two.

¹⁸ See Sen ‘Equality of What?’; Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, chapters one and two; and Cohen, ‘On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice’ and ‘Expensive Tastes Rides Again’ in Otsuka (ed.) *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice* for the main contributions to the ‘equality of what?’ debate.

¹⁹ Sen, ‘The Standard of Living’, p. 109. In this I follow the early Marx, see Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, pp. 228-9.

²⁰ For useful discussion see Plant and Taylor-Gooby, *Political Philosophy and Social Welfare*, pp. 19-24; and also the collection edited by Gillian Brock entitled *Necessary Goods*.

The fact that examples such as this suggest that we should reject the binary distinction between wants and needs in investigating the ideal of community clearly does not mean that we must deny that some needs are stronger than others. Other things equal, if the community-minded neighbour has the option to either go and buy the elderly man his newspaper, or help out his neighbour on the other side who is having a heart attack, nothing that I have said bars me from saying that it is the latter course of action that he should take. The proposition should rather be that, with an important caveat discussed below, needs be seen as more important the more important they are for the person whose needs they are. Using Derek Parfit's influential terminology we might call the communal desire a prioritarian one.²¹ One salient feature of the prioritarian view is that, other things equal, it sees some value in giving the rich some distributable good, even if that value is much less than if the good were given to the poor. Communal reciprocity thus also allows instances of this general type. Say you were driving from London to Oxford one night and passed a solitary very well-off person waiting at the coach stop, and who you accurately suppose would like to be driven in the comfort of your car rather than take the coach. Rather than speaking in favour of your leaving him at the kerb-side as a fairness-based egalitarian principle *might* do, a principle of communal reciprocity requires that you pick him up. If, to amend the case, there were a choice to be made between the well-off man and a less well-off man who was also waiting for the coach then, other things equal, and supposing for argument that you had just the one space in the car, then community would require that you offer a ride to the less well-off traveller. This position makes intuitive sense, for it seems implausible to say that community has *increased* had we left the well-off man waiting for the coach. Instead I say it would be diminished.

I have so far used ambiguous terms such as 'well off' to refrain from loading the dice ahead of discussion of the second way in which my use of needs is expansive, namely that it make use of a heterogeneous account of needs that includes both 'welfare-needs' and 'resource-needs'. Two popular definitions of

²¹ I don't distinguish here between the various types of prioritarianism that one could adopt, nor strictly, between prioritarianism and utilitarianism which could approximate a 'prioritarian' view under certain conditions. For discussion see: McCarthy 'Utilitarianism and Prioritarianism I'.

welfare in the economics and philosophical literature, which I do not propose to discriminate between and which there is any case likely to be a significant degree of overlap, hold that a person's welfare-needs are satisfied, on the one hand when she experiences enjoyment – a pleasurable state of consciousness – and on the other when her preferences are satisfied. Resource-needs are used in a broad sense in the literature and I will not depart from that inclusive understanding here: they can be satisfied when the holder has access to either external resources (money, land, houses, books) or internal resources (physical abilities and talents).²² The case for having both of these aspects of a person's condition as the object of communal focus can be seen by observing the consequences of excluding either one. If we take the pure welfarist position then we are committed to the position that, to amend a famous example, there is no increase in community if Scrooge were to buy an already entirely cheerful, though disabled, Tiny Tim a wheelchair. If we take the rival resourcist position, we are committed to the position where the community-minded agent with a shilling to give has no grounds on which to choose between cheerful Tiny Tim and his counterpart, 'Tiny Tom', who shares all of Tiny Tim's resource endowments but who is miserable. Neither of these alternatives seems attractive, at least from the perspective of community.²³

The discussion of resources and welfare leads naturally on to the problem of subjective and objective preferences, which is the third way in which the account of needs that communal reciprocity draws upon is expansive. I said above that needs in my expansive sense are the absence of those things which would make people's lives go better and it is an apparent truth that people are sometimes mistaken about the relevant facts when making judgments of this sort. The extent to which this is true will be a matter for fine-grain analysis and is not a matter settled by our conception of community, but there are some clear and well-established examples which illustrate the general point. It is probably not an act of community for example, and may be its antithesis, for me to acquiesce to someone's preference for addictive, class A drugs, or to a child's desire for the keys to my car, or (perhaps) for a student's

²² See e.g. Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, chapter 2.

²³ Parts of the 'equality of what' literature are also illuminating on this point. See in particular, Cohen's reply to Sen in *The Quality of Life*.

request to borrow money to buy the collected works of Jacques Derrida. I take it that that there are many more cases of this kind.

Of course, under conditions of imperfect information about what is actually best for people, it is plausible that these kind of paternalistic judgements can be made consistently with community even in cases that aren't as black and white as those just given. Thus if I tell my friend not to gamble on the horses as she wants to because I'm worried that she might lose, or a mother tells her son not to go to an after-school party because she suspects he might be too tired for his exam the next day as a result, it seems right to say that their respective acts of voicing their opinion, if expressed in the right spirit, are quite consistent with community, even if they are in fact wrong and my gambling friend would have won her bet, and the son would have gotten home early enough to feel no ill-effects the next day.

I have now sketched out the three most important facets of the account of needs which communal reciprocity relies upon. The next section but one will help to further elaborate this account by drawing out some of its implications. Before that, however, we need to consider the question of the scope or the domain of communal reciprocity. *Whose* needs exactly is communal reciprocity sensitive to? The question of scope is familiar from the discussion of whether the proper jurisdiction of normative principles is across rather than just within national borders. Our question can be phrased more generally: are the relational norms that communal reciprocity recommends stronger for those who are immediate to us, or with whom we share an existing relationship than with those who are distant, or less connected? While not immediately intuitive, the answer I believe is 'no'.²⁴

The central contention grounding this conclusion is this: any attempt to restrict the scope of communal reciprocity by national or other geographic boundaries, or to only some forms of collective activity will be unstable. For each and any such restriction will be open to the challenge that, *at least in theory*, removing these restrictions would be community-improving, which is to say it would increase rather than diminish community by increasing either the number of people

²⁴ One variant of this charge is that communal bonds weaken the more distant people are in time rather than in space. Another is that communal bonds diminish when they are not fulfilled collectively through political and economic institutions. I mean to reject both these variants as well, though I discuss neither in detail.

who enjoy communal relations, or the number of activities which are subject to such relations. In common with the other features outlined in this section, I will not provide a full defence of the broad, internationalist scope of communal reciprocity but will seek merely to delineate it and seek to give it some motivation, and so plausibility.

Let us first look at the question of extra-national, or otherwise extra-local, community and the hunch which I take it commonly supports some sort of restriction on the domain of community to within national or local boundaries. We might reasonably suspect that it is more difficult to create and maintain good interpersonal relationships with people on the other side of the world, than in our own country or locality. Communication is hampered not just by the sheer fact of distance but also by factors such as language and culture - and this diminishes community. We might invoke in our defence Michael Taylor's statement that "a group of individuals amongst whom relations are to some extent mediated is to that extent less of a community than a group in which relations are relatively direct".²⁵ Relationships with those beyond our locality are variously mediated, and community suffers as a result.

However, without entering into the detail of such debates, a basic point must still stand: that these matters of fact, which are discussed in the following section, cannot impugn the scope of the *concept* of community, as opposed to its application given various contingent facts about the world. Consider the following examples by way of defence of this claim. The decision of thousands of Brits to join the International Brigades and fight for the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War was surely rightly described by a contemporary Republican leader as "a heroic example of... solidarity".²⁶ This is surely true *even* if you believe going to war was the wrong decision, and even if you think there was no all-things considered 'duty' for Englishmen to fight against Franco. The decision of those men and women to join the International Brigades was evidence of community, irrespective of national

²⁵ Taylor, *Community, Anarchy and Liberty*, p. 28; quoted in Andrew Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging*, p. 38.

²⁶ Quote attributed to the Republican leader Dolores Ibárruri. I take it that the ideal of community being described here might also naturally be described as an interpretation of solidarity.

boundaries, that would not have been there in the absence of that action.²⁷ Here national boundaries do not appear to weaken our judgments about the communal spirit evident in such action.

Or another example: consider a tale of two strikes. One is the historically important 1984-5 miners strike. Persistent, predominantly South Yorkshire, assertion has it that the strike failed in part due to the Nottinghamshire miners who failed to observe the National Union of Mineworkers' (unofficial) strike and crossed picket lines. What's more this action is commonly thought to be because the Nottinghamshire pits were *not*, at that time, under direct threat of closure, unlike many of those in South Yorkshire, and as a result the Nottinghamshire miners were not prepared to support their fellow miners across the county border. Let's suppose for the sake of argument that the South Yorkshire accusation is true. We might then instructively compare it to another instance of industrial action, in 2013, when Hovis workers in Wigan went on strike against so-called 'zero hours' contracts, a form of insecure employment contract which has the central feature of not guaranteeing the contractee any set amount of work from week to week. An important feature of this strike was that an offer from management to end the practice of putting staff on zero hours contracts for all *existing* staff was rejected, on the basis that future employees would still be disadvantaged. So this decision meant current workers sacrificing their wages for the interests of future colleagues who they did not know, who could be black or white, from Wigan town, from Nottinghamshire or from Australia. This strike seems to embody a genuine communitarian sentiment that, it is alleged, was lacking amongst the Nottinghamshire miners, a fact that is not diminished by the clearly mediated nature of the relationships that existed between the striking Hovis workers and their future colleagues who, whatever characteristics they did have, had the central characteristic that they were not known to those who went on strike on their behalf.

²⁷ The topic of war or other conflicts is more knotty in the sense that the communal impulse to join one side might be thought to necessitate an *anti*-communal sentiment against the other side. But my point here holds even if (implausibly, I think) it is true that there was a net loss to community from the formation of the International Brigades (say that the socialists in Republican Spain inculcated a fierce hostility amongst recruits towards the fascists but were unsympathetic individuals themselves so inspired little fellow-feeling within the Republican camp). Even if this is true, it does not defeat the point about scope, which is the one being discussed here: whatever calculation is made, it is done so across international borders.

Consider finally, a song by the British band Dire Straits called 'Brothers in Arms', which, after several stanzas describing the bond between comrades fighting together in a conflict, and the helplessness and horror of war, in a final lyrical flourish illuminates the hitherto obscured truth that these experiences are *also* shared by the opposing side – and that for that reason they are also 'brothers in arms'. An unrealistic sentiment some might say, but whatever the case, the song owes its power and resonance to an assumed recognition that fraternal bonds need not be bound to one country, or people, even when the people in question are at war with one another.

These examples suggest that the universality of communal reciprocity is backed up by common usage of that notion – whatever else may be said about the rights or wrongs of the examples, it is an artificial use of the ideal of community to limit it in the various ways of suggested.

2.2 Reciprocity

As we saw briefly in the last chapter in discussion of G.A Cohen's communitarianism, it would be odd if the ideal of community were merely a series of overlapping acts of concern, each independent of the other. The value of community concerns our proper recognition of and response to others, and that includes our response to their responsible intentions and actions, not merely their needs. This thought motivates the idea that a full understanding of community should not just include concern for others in the way outlined above, but *reciprocal* concern. I outline here two ways in which this idea of reciprocity manifests itself in the socialist ideal of community, which I call 'producer-reciprocity' and 'consumer-reciprocity'.

Producer-reciprocity is the idea that we only have full duties of community to show concern toward those who have, or would have, that motivation towards us. The underlying intuition is made clear by an extreme version of non-reciprocity: one person's act of kindness towards a person who has only contempt for them is not just a poor form of community, it's no kind of community at all. If I bring you a cup of tea only for you to take it and throw it in my face, there is no community between us. I said above that community was about the good quality of *relationships*, and

relationships surely require *mutual* activity and commitment – community cannot be a one-way street.

What is the nature of this first type of reciprocity? The form of words just used to describe the relevant others to whom we have a duty of community - that they have, or would have, that same motivation towards us – is important. For communal reciprocity to be satisfied it need not be the case that each person that you show concern for has proven their communitarian credentials by previously *showing you* such concern. This is not because such a stipulation would in practice dramatically reduce the ability for anything which we could call communitarian relationships to flourish, though it would. Rather, the point is that just because someone has not shown the relevant motivation towards you it might not be because of lack of communal motivation, but rather because they have never had the chance to. There seems no reason to hold that fact against them, and this suggests the normative case for communal reciprocity to make use of the idea of an idea familiar in the empirical social sciences: ‘generalised reciprocity’. This is normally described as the idea that, in political scientist Robert Putnam’s words, “I’ll do this thing for you without expecting anything specific back from you, in the confident expectation that someone else will do something for me down the road”.²⁸

Such a definition is a useful starting point for the type of producer-reciprocity required by the socialist conception of community, but we need to amend it in two related ways. First, in keeping with the what has been said in the last sub-section, in our version of generalised reciprocity it is motivation rather than action that is normatively central, and so becomes the focus of this form of reciprocity, rather than what ‘you are doing’, and what the other will do. Second, this then has important implications when we come to unpack the phrase ‘in the confident expectation that someone else will do something for you down the road’. For while we can accept that this sort of expectation will be in place when the community-minded agent shows concern for a fellow, the expectation of future *gain* is not the reason for her properly-motivated action, precisely because all that is required for communal reciprocity to obtain is that *concern* for her needs is reciprocated, rather

²⁸ *Bowling Alone*, p. 21.

than any particular action she has taken that is beneficial to others. Depending upon her circumstances, and on the circumstances in which others find themselves, she may get more or she may get less than that which she has given as a result of her communal intention. The crucial feature of this type of reciprocity is that when community is being satisfied, the thing she can be sure of is that the recipient of her well-motivated action will reciprocate that intention, which is a necessary condition for her being motivated in the way she is.

This description leads us to another observation about the content of the ideal of community which has so far only been latent. In order for producer-reciprocity to obtain in the way I describe, it must be the case that the person who is the recipient of communal concern *knows* that he is such a recipient. It is trivially true, but nonetheless important, that no show of concern can be reciprocated if the would-be reciprocator is not aware of it. This feature will lead us to describe instances of communal reciprocity such as that evident in the tea case above in a slightly fuller way. We saw in that example that there it was the *intention* to make and deliver a cup of tea that was important, so that even if some unforeseeable event were to occur - such as the handle falling off the mug and the tea falling on the floor – then this would still be consistent with communal reciprocity. However, in light of the observation just made, we can add a further stipulation – in order for the interaction to maintain its full communal character, in addition to the genuine intention of the tea-maker, the tea-receiver must know of that intention - without it there can be no reciprocity of the communal type required.

The effects of the account of generalised reciprocity as outlined are that we can create chains or networks of reciprocal interaction, in a manner which will be familiar from everyday life. We can see this in the norms that govern practices such as holding a door open for someone; an example I recounted in the introduction. To recall: If you arrive each morning at work around the same time as a colleague and she holds the door for you and you her then a reciprocal relationship may be established. But when one morning you meet a different colleague in the same situation, if acting from generalised reciprocity you will still hold the door open for him and he, if acting from the same motivation will hold the door open next time he

sees the first colleague, or any other. In this way, the reciprocal motivation becomes detached from what any one individual has done.

What then of the second type of reciprocity, that I referred to earlier as consumer-reciprocity? We can introduce and motivate this idea by way of an imagined objection to the account of needs given in the previous sub-section. It cannot be in-keeping with community, the critic might object, that communal reciprocity is sensitive to *all* needs of the various categories outlined above, for that would leave it open for someone to *artificially* inflate their needs, and thus have the community-minded person obligated to satisfy them to maintain the bonds of community, whatever those needs were. The popular press in the UK often carry such stories. Think for example, of stories of the single parent who has more children, just so the council will give him a bigger house; or the person who insists that some cosmetic improvement is essential, so that the NHS will fund it for her.²⁹ This is similar to the so-called problem of expensive tastes.³⁰

The criticism has traction with community – it seems inconsistent with that ideal to inflate one’s interests merely because they will be met by others. The idea of producer-reciprocity will not necessarily limit such behaviour either – it says that those who are the object of communal concern must reciprocate that concern. But if there is an inequality in the needs that the concern of each is seeking to satisfy then there will be a corresponding inequality in the weight of the concern showed. As the examples above indicate, we must have ways of distinguishing between needs – between those that are liable to be met by others, consistent with community, and those that are not. To bring this feature out as a form of communal reciprocity we might phrase it another way: moderating one’s needs is one appropriate way of reciprocating the communal concern from others, by respecting the costs that they incur servicing your needs.

Before I say what general rule I propose to deal with these cases, let me first outline a type of answer that I will not take. This answer, which follows naturally from a certain understanding of liberalism, seeks to draw a line between private and

²⁹ By raising these sorts of examples, I don’t mean to accept them uncritically but merely to say, whatever their merit, such concerns exist. I have not shown definitively that they exist based upon an idea of community – but I believe it follows quite naturally from the discussion of that ideal so far.

³⁰ See e.g. Cohen, ‘Expensive Tastes Rides Again’, in Otsuka (ed.) *On the Currency*.

public needs. Thus, the liberal answer might be that as long as a certain set of needs are satisfied by others – say, a constitution with basic liberties and a legal system to uphold them, education and anti-discrimination laws sufficient to ensure equality of opportunity and so on – any further needs I have are not owed rectification by my fellows. There is something to this: I do think that it would be absurd for my preference for blue cushions on my sofa, a back massage, and fish and chips for dinner to fall to my fellows as a whole to fulfil, *in the presence of an acceptable background distribution of resources and opportunities which itself is the result of proper communal action*. This italicised stipulation shows such a reaction to be merely pragmatic, rather than principled. It is absurd because few people would think that such preferences merited a case-by-case attention from others – rather they would say something like ‘it is reasonable that he has some home furnishings, the absence of muscular discomfort and a hot meal, but as long as he has the resources and opportunities to achieve such things, I shall consider my communal responsibilities discharged’.

The type of consumer-reciprocity that communal reciprocity endorses is as follows: a need is within scope for the purposes of community if (and only if) it is genuinely believed to be a need.³¹ The source of that genuine belief might be by the subject, or it might be by someone else. This automatically rules out cases of the sort canvassed above where the putative recipient is looking for some additional good or item merely because she knows others will provide it. It does leave open that either or both of the giver or receiver of communal concern might be wrong that the need in question really is a need, but while such a state of affairs would-be sub-optimal, it would, I suggest, not be deficient from the point of view of community.

Finally, and to tie off this section, the above discussion of reciprocity might well raise the question as to whether the ideal being called upon here is not one of community, but of fairness. For isn’t non-reciprocal action normally seen as a paradigm case of unfairness?³² I do not want to deny that there may be some overlap between these two ideals, but we are now at a stage where we are able to highlight the central differences between them. For expositional purposes I will take

³¹ I continue to use the term ‘need’ here in the special sense elaborated in the previous sub-section.

³² See e.g. Otsuka, ‘Justice as Fairness: Luck Egalitarian, Not Rawlsian’.

the luck egalitarian conception of fairness as the exemplar – there would be different dividing lines with other conceptions of fairness. We can distinguish three main differences between that conception and communal reciprocity as outlined above. First, as has been repeatedly emphasised, communal reciprocity trades in intentions whereas fairness focuses on outcomes. Second, the interpersonal concern at the heart of communal reciprocity belongs in the prioritarian family of principles, fairness is an *egalitarian* principle. Third, the treatment of responsibility differs. For our conception of community, responsibility is necessarily reciprocal, which need not be the case for luck egalitarians. There will be further opportunity to dwell on these differences in chapter five.

3. Empirical prerequisites of communal reciprocity

In *Why Not Socialism?* G.A. Cohen argues that when inequality is too high it corrodes community. This is, he reasons because too large a gulf in the material conditions that people experience means that they will then find it difficult to empathise with the challenges that others face.³³ As I said in chapter two, I do not think Cohen is right to present this idea as a distinct interpretation of community. Rather, it is better seen as an important necessary condition for community to obtain, borne of a contingent truth about the way people treat one another when their material circumstances are very different.

However, what is lacking in his analysis is not so much what Cohen *does* say but what he *doesn't*. It seems right to conclude that material inequality does corrode community – I shall present evidence that indicates the presence of just such an effect presently – but it is implausible that this is the *only* kind of social circumstance that limits communal reciprocity. In this section therefore, I will briefly outline what, we might, following Joseph Carens, call the ‘empirical prerequisites’ of communal reciprocity – those features of the world which the empirical evidence suggests must be present in order for communal reciprocity to be fully satisfied.³⁴

A preliminary remark before that evidence is presented: empirical studies have not, alas, sought to assess communal reciprocity in the precise sense in which I

³³ *Why Not Socialism?*, p. 36.

³⁴ *Equality, Moral Incentives and the Market*.

use it so we must rely on proxies for that value when reviewing the empirical literature. The most useful stand-in in, not least because of its extensive discussion in the sociological and economic literatures is 'trust'. Trust, it's true, isn't always a positive characteristic of relationships – it merely obtains when each can be relied upon to do as they have committed to do, or, perhaps, when they behave as they are expected to.³⁵ In some studies 'social capital' is used instead or alongside trust - a broader term with no settled definition, but which is normally taken to measure social engagement, incorporating trust but also other measures of the size and strength of people's network of relationships with others.³⁶ While it is no perfect conceptual fit, there is then significant overlap between these ideas and communal reciprocity: some considerable degree of trust seems necessary as both a cause and consequence of communal reciprocity, and the existence of a norm of communal reciprocity might be considered evidence of a type of social capital.

Without glossing over the differences then, it is instructive that there is a close connection between these ideas and communal reciprocity is given some support by the data: the nations that we routinely think of as more solidaristic – countries such as Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands - are also those with the highest levels of trust.³⁷ We should thus be comfortable in treating the empirical results reported below as at least *indicative* of the kinds of conditions that must be in place for communal reciprocity to flourish. The alternatives are to ignore the empirical prerequisites of community, or to make essentially empirical claims without any reference to the empirical evidence, as Cohen does. Neither is satisfactory so, mindful that the relevant literature does not precisely match up with

³⁵ See Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; Morrone, Tontoranelli and Ranuzzi, 'How Good is Trust?', p. 6. Some authors do use trust in a more specific and positive way. Jan Delhy and Kenneth Newton describe trust as "the belief that others will not deliberately or knowingly do us harm, if they can avoid, and will look after our interests, if this is possible": 'Predicting Cross-National Levels of Social Trust'.

³⁶ See Robert Putnam, 'The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life', in *Cross Currents*, pp. 249-251; and also Alejandro Portes, 'Social Capital: It's Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology'. A relevant observation from another of Putnam's papers: "Altruism (doing good for other people) is not part of the definition of social capital in my view, but it turns out empirically, at least in the United States and probably elsewhere, that a very strong predictor of altruism is social connectedness." 'Social Capital: Measurement and Consequences', p. 7.

³⁷ Analysis of World Values Survey data – around two-thirds of people show high levels of trust in Sweden and the Netherlands, this falls to below one in ten in Romania, Colombia and Malaysia.

communal reciprocity as specified, I will briefly outline three plausible empirical prerequisites: equality, proximity, and cultural similarity.

Equality first. There is a significant recent literature on the relationship between equality, variously defined, and the quality of interpersonal relationships. The most famous recent discussion comes from epidemiologists Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson in their book *The Spirit Level*. In chapter four, they present evidence of a strong negative relationship between the percentage of people agreeing with the statement ‘most people can be trusted’ and levels of income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient, such that lower levels of trust are associated higher levels of income. This is found to be true both internationally, and intra-nationally in the United States.³⁸ These findings are reinforced by data collected by the OECD, which regress trust on inequality. Their analysis relies on data on trust from the World Values Survey, which asks a sample of people in a number of countries whether they think people can be trusted. The data on inequality are post-transfer Gini coefficients, compiled by the OECD. The authors report that “Inequality is a powerful social divider which corrodes trust and divides people... [it] is not the level of economic well-being of a country that increases trust but, rather, the level of economic equality. Inequality generates a positional negative externality because it is the relative position that counts and the comparison with others much richer than us [which] reduce[s]... trust”.³⁹

The causality of this relationship can also be scrutinised to some extent. In a 2005 paper, Eric Uslaner and Bo Rothstein report that while a number of factors plausibly contribute to higher trust, lower inequality is the most important. The converse relationship between trust and inequality is, on the other hand, only a minor one.⁴⁰ In addition to Cohen’s mooted explanatory mechanism - that economic distance decreases empathy, which in turn washes away the support for reciprocal social concern – Uslaner and Rothstein canvass another explanation of this

³⁸ *The Spirit Level*, pp. 50-53. The Gini coefficient is a measure of inequality between 0 and 1: 0 for a perfectly equal income distribution, and 1 for a situation where all income goes to one person.

³⁹ Morrone, Tontoranelli and Ranuzzi, ‘How Good is Trust?’.

⁴⁰ See also: Jong-sung You, ‘Social Trust: Fairness Matters more than Homogeneity’ for additional quantitative evidence of this phenomenon.

relationship, namely that inequality results in a less optimistic outlook amongst those at the short end of the inequality, which negatively impacts upon trust.

Our second empirical prerequisite is proximity – the physical distance between people. It is more difficult to adduce empirical results on this relationship because it is hard to disentangle mere distance from other characteristics of people who are far away, notably culture and ethnicity. Nevertheless, what data there is does suggest some relationship – we know that people are far less likely to be trusting of people in other countries than in their own immediate communities. International comparative data suggests people are around three times more likely trust those in their own neighbourhood than those from another country.⁴¹ It is in this vein that philosophers such as S.I. Benn have reasoned that what he terms ‘comradeship’ may be formed in “a moderately large kibbutz, an extended family or even a regiment” it cannot reliably be extended further – the wider you draw the boundaries of the putative community, the weaker the communal ties become.⁴² In the last section I rejected the contention that good relationships which are not proximate are any less *valuable* from the point of view of community, but that conceptual claim is entirely distinct from the factual claim endorsed by Benn and others, which I have no reason to dispute and appears entirely plausible.

Third, we can look at cultural similarity, which I will use only somewhat euphemistically to mean not only ethnic or racial similarity but also and more broadly, similarity in the traditions and practices of national or subnational groups. As might be expected given the increasing salience of immigration in political debates in recent decades, this topic has been the subject of significant empirical interest. In an influential study of the impact of, among other things, ethnic (by which the authors actually mean country of origin) and racial heterogeneity on trust in the US, Alesina and Ferrera find a statistically significant, negative correlation between both of these characteristics and trust, with racial heterogeneity seemingly

⁴¹ Analysis of World Values Survey. The raw scores are: those who somewhat or completely trust people in their neighbourhood – 60%; those who somewhat or completely trust people of another nationality – 21%. For a similar result in a more specific circumstance see Diego Gambetta, ‘Mafia: The Price of Distrust’ in *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, pp. 158-175.

⁴² Benn, *A Theory of Freedom*, quoted in Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging*, p. 40.

producing a particularly negative reaction.⁴³ A cross-national study by sociologists Jan Delhy and Kenneth Morgan likewise found that what they call ‘ethnic fractionalisation’ – racial heterogeneity in Alesina and Ferrera’s terminology – is statistically significant and reasonably strong predictor of lower levels of distrust, though not as strong as in the US and difficult to disentangle from good economic and political governance.⁴⁴ The likely mechanism in this case seems fairly transparent – ethnicity, and culture more generally, and some of the most obvious and marked signs of difference and so can generate social cleavages.

What follows from the brief empirical excursion presented in this section? The short answer is: not *necessarily* a lot. The evidence adduced above suggests that, to some extent, groups that are more equal, where people live or work in closer proximity to one another, and where they share cultural similarities, will tend to achieve higher levels of trust, which in turn might be thought to be a good proxy for the kind of relationships of reciprocal concern that we are interested in and which were discussed in the last section.

This suggests first of all, and to come back to the point with which the section opened, Cohen is misleading to single out economic inequality as an impediment to community. Beyond that, we can satisfy ourselves with two observations. First, that while these empirical considerations do not bear on the very nature of communal reciprocity, the practically-minded community builder will undoubtedly have to bear these three empirical factors, and more, into account when designing the socialist community. Second, we should nevertheless appreciate that in this case, data is not destiny, and there are various ways open to the community-builder to mitigate the strength of the putative causal relationships between the three variables reviewed and communal reciprocity. More participation in shared activities would reduce the impact of material inequality, technology makes distance less important, and social policy – housing, education and so on – that avoids segregation can mitigate cultural fracturing. It is important to acknowledge that communal reciprocity exists within

⁴³ ‘Who Trusts Others?’, *Journal of Public Economics*. Neither is it the case that the negative relationship between ethnic and racial heterogeneity is parasitic upon economic inequality, as might be suspected. See David Miller, ‘Social Justice in Multicultural Societies’ in van Parijs (ed.) *Cultural Diversity Versus Economic Solidarity*, pp. 27-28 for some relevant discussion of this paper.

⁴⁴ ‘Predicting Cross-National Levels of Social Trust’.

contingent and empirical constraints, but equally important not to draw simplistic conclusions from the nature of these constraints. With these two observations in place, I return to the conceptual and ideological discussion of communal reciprocity.

4. Conservative, liberal and socialist conceptions of community

It is useful, for expositional as well as polemical purposes, to distinguish between the socialist conception of community that I have called communal reciprocity and other interpretations of the ideal of community. In this section, I compare the socialist conception to two rivals, which I term ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’. Out of necessity, each is somewhat stylised, but I seek to show they have some grounding in the work of theorists who can accurately be described as liberal or conservative. The section is expositional because contrasting the liberal and conceptions of community to communal reciprocity allows us to see aspects of that socialist conception which have only been latent thus far. It is polemical, because the comparison also allows us to see how the socialist conception is a more attractive interpretation of the value of community than its rivals.⁴⁵ For each, I suggest two ways that they deviate from communal reciprocity. In the case of the conservative conception, the differences trace two ways in which we might interpret the idea of ‘conservatism’ as a belief in preservation – in the first, the conservative conception preserves and reinforces the hierarchical nature of relationships between members of the community; in the second it preserves a certain specific economic and cultural view of what is valuable in the life of the community. The liberal conception is distinguished from communal reciprocity first by its *limited scope* which characteristically applies to only the major structures and institutions in society; and second, by the fact that it is *less demanding* of citizens than the socialist conception.

As we saw in chapter one, socialists at least as far back as Marx have had reason to compare their idea of flourishing human relationships with various feudal or conservative relationship-types, which while embodying some community are nevertheless seen to be deficient in various ways. One important Marx-inspired project since Marx has been to try to justify Marx’s claim that socialist relations

⁴⁵ *More* attractive because I do think the conservative and liberal versions of community are also of value, just less so than the socialist conception.

could be both communal and also allow for individual self-development. However, I believe another, perhaps more fundamental, way of describing the difference between feudal or conservative community and socialist community is that the latter is egalitarian while the former is not.

The conservative relationship type is famously described in the nineteenth century social theorist Ferdinand Tönnies' work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, normally translated as 'Community and Civil Society'. In it Tönnies echoes Marx in describing the proto-communist 'old' communal societies as formed of a close bond, like that of a family. But like the (somewhat austere) familial relations that he describes, so such relationships are fundamentally hierarchical in various ways, in particular, "fatherhood" he writes "is the clearest foundation for the concept of authority within the community".⁴⁶ Differences in age and in physical and mental ability such as those between a father and child form the basis for this inequality, tempered by an instinctive benevolence and good will towards those who are their own kin. As Tönnies writes: "The sense of superiority and power to command are in themselves a source of pleasure for the strong, whereas those who are being led and protected, who have to obey, will have a feeling of inferiority...Within these organic kin-based relationships, the stronger party feels an instinctive, spontaneous tenderness towards the weak, a desire to help and protect, which is bound up with pride of possession and the enjoyment of his own power."⁴⁷ The conservative conception thus described is characterised by strong positive feelings of each towards the other, but undergirded by a fundamental and transparent inequality in the standing of each in the community.

This is in stark and obvious contrast to the interpretation of community favoured by socialists. Raymond Plant writes: "The conservative vision of community as a functional hierarchical order is regarded by Marxists as embodying some genuine elements of community, but at the same time these elements play an important ideological role in masking other, equally important, features of hierarchical systems: the lack of autonomy for those in a subordinate position in the

⁴⁶ *Community and Civil Society*, p. 25.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 26-27.

hierarchy and the economic exploitation of the same by those better placed”.⁴⁸ The Marx scholar Eugene Kamenka writes that “The socialist vision of the non-commercial society is distinguished from the Romantic conservative view by the rejection of hierarchy and by that alone”.⁴⁹ I previously used the example of a royal court to provide an example of this kind of conservative communal relations – the King and his courtier each showed concern for the other, but the courtier’s expected sacrifice was expected to be much greater than the King’s.

The conceptual point which separates the socialist conception of community from conservative community thus described is that the socialist conception alone endorses *egalitarianism* of concern and of sacrifice. This is implicit in the description given in section 2.1 –if the need of the other is present and the ability to act is not impeded, then action will be taken. As we saw this does not mean that equality prevails independently of the *urgency* of the need, or of the ability of those who might meet it, but that rather that, other things equal, communal reciprocity demands that needs be given equal priority when they are of equal urgency and that sacrifice be equal when ability to act is equal. This egalitarian feature rules out the limited, patriarchal type of benevolence described by Tönnies just as it rules out the unequal sacrifice in the case of a courtier who waits on a King at the royal court and cultivates some bond as a result of his time in service.⁵⁰ The conservative conception still has each paying some form of communal role, but the roles are set in a hierarchical way. Perhaps the paradigm example of such a system is the Platonic ideal society where Plato famously advocates for a model of a radically class-divided society where citizens are sorted according to their various aptitudes.⁵¹

The second type of way in which the conservative conception of community differs from its socialist counterpart is in its attachment to a particular and specific

⁴⁸ Plant et al, *Political Philosophy and Social Welfare*, p. 160.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Plant, *Politics, Theology and History*, p. 282.

⁵⁰ Lest the references to Tönnies’ family metaphor be confusing, I should make it clear that I follow Tönnies in describing what I take to be a *particular type* of family relationship rather than the general type. It is of course not the case that all families need to be of the sort that Tönnies describes. Nor am I necessarily committed to the fact that there is anything bad from the point of community, in the familial relationships that Tönnies describes. What I do say is that there is something non-communal because inegalitarian in these relations when applied beyond the scope of the family in the way that Tönnies clearly describes.

⁵¹ *Republic*, esp. books 5-7.

idea of the kinds of things that are valuable in the community. This strand of thought can be found in some of the so-called communitarian political writings which were published from the late 1970s.⁵² Doubtless, none of the proponents to whom that label might apply (and the label is itself contested) would wish to see themselves as conservatives. But I believe that the cap demonstrably fits.⁵³

As one exponent, let us first take Alasdair Macintyre, the Marx-inspired Thomist. His political theory is eclectic, and the broad historical sweep can make his positive view sometimes hard to discern. However, he has been called a communitarian thinker because of clear centrality of community to his philosophy in successive works.⁵⁴ Relevantly for our purposes Macintyre believes the good life for any individual is socially specific, a consequence in part of a social identity which they need to fulfil: "I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or that profession, I belong to this tribe, that clan, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be what is good for one that inhabits these roles".⁵⁵ In ascribing such a view to Macintyre we do not need to caricature his thought – it is not the case that he thinks that there are *no* external standards from which to judge the value of actions or roles. But he nevertheless begins with the Aristotelian premise that "[it is] a starting-point for ethical enquiry that the relationship of 'man' to 'living well' is analogous to that of 'harpist' to 'playing the harp well'" and that 'living well' is "rooted in the forms of social life to which the theorists of the classical tradition give expression. For according to that tradition to be a man is to fill a set of roles each of which has its own point and purpose: member of a family, citizen, soldier, philosopher, servant of God...".⁵⁶ Such standards can give rise to considerable critical debate and discussion:

⁵² I put aside the good question of whether community in the way that these theorists conceive of it is a condition for recognising and realising social and political ideals rather than a social or political ideal itself. That is, whether or not their usage of community actually fits under the conceptual umbrella I outlined in section one. I take it that they seek for what they are doing to be normative work, so take it in that spirit without comment on whether they are right to do so.

⁵³ Brian Barry bemoans the fact that, as the political prospects for socialism dwindled, "With some exceptions, the ex-Marxists led the way by embracing various forms of relativism and post-modernism". I would think he has in mind at least one of those who I discuss presently. *Culture and Equality*, p. 4.

⁵⁴ In particular *After Virtue*, and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Muhall and Swift, *Communitariaism and its Critics*, p. 89.

⁵⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 187.

the recognition of these social roles does not pre-ordain knowledge of what the good life is. But it remains the case that the standards for realising a valuable life do have their genesis and justification in an appropriate understanding of the social situation and responsibilities that individuals have.

As a slightly different example, we can also take Michael Sandel, whose work is more focused than Macintyre's but who draws upon some of the same lines of argument. A key theme in Sandel's most famous philosophical work, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, is that we cannot know what the good life is without knowing what is good for *us*, which means knowing who we *are* and that identity claim is crucially conditioned on others: we need the insights and reflections of others to know ourselves.⁵⁷ In this way our finding of our "essential aims and attachments" is a social project – one which we need to be socially encumbered to fully realise.⁵⁸

What is the conceptual point of difference between this second strand of conservative thought and the socialist conception of community? The basic point must be that the conservative account of needs is significantly influenced by the nature and purpose of an individual's existing place in her community. The socialist conception, by contrast is more open-ended; no such constraint is placed upon the scope of the needs which community is liable to fulfil. Indeed, we can recall that the only limit placed on needs-claims is a weak criterion which seeks to adjudicate on whether they actually are needs – viz. that the satisfaction of that need would make people's lives go better. Where the conservative conceptions seeks to preserve ideas and forms of life rooted in the status quo, the socialist conception abandons that limitation.

We come now to the liberal conception of community, and its differences with communal reciprocity, which are twofold. The first is the limited *scope* of the liberal conception, compared to its socialist counterpart – where the socialist conception applies to all people and all actions, the liberal conception is limited to only the major structures and institutions in society. Second, the liberal conception is *less demanding* in the following, specific way – it stops short of advocating that

⁵⁷ *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Though Sandel seems to shift this view somewhat in the revised introduction to the second edition.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 176-7.

citizens show concern that the lives of their fellows go better, in favour of a weaker formulation – that their actions are *justifiable* to their fellows, with the bar of justifiability set somewhat lower than under the socialist conception. We can address each in turn.

John Rawls has influentially argued that normative principles of social justice should not focus upon individual behaviour. Instead, the proper focus should be the ‘basic structure’ of society, a structure which such individual behaviour is within and does not, by and large, determine.⁵⁹ No complete list is given of the institutions that comprise the basic structure, but we know that it includes coercive structures such as the constitution, laws and regulations.⁶⁰ It might be thought that our subject of community releases us from the basic structure constraint. After all, Rawls suggests that it is only social justice – not even all variants of justice – that are covered by that restriction and so community might be thought to be likewise excluded.⁶¹ If that is the case, then Rawls and Rawlsians will have no quarrel with the expansive scope of the socialist conception of community outlined in section two. However, the content of Rawlsian social justice is itself expansive and contains within it appeal to what I have defined as community, amongst other things. I’ll proceed on the assumption therefore that a ‘basic structure objection’ applies to the principle of communal reciprocity.

Such a move puts clear water between the socialist conception and the liberal conception of community – whatever the content of the latter turns out to be. It will be recalled that the motivating feature of the expansive scope of communal reciprocity was a rhetorical device of the sort: given any restriction on the scope of the principle of communal reciprocity, what reason would we have for supposing that a person *a* who violated that scope restriction by performing an ostensibly community-minded action towards *b* would not be improving the quality of relationship between *a* and *b*, thus recommending such an action from the point of view community? We can flesh this out in terms of a Rawls-type scope restriction. Say that amongst equally qualified candidates applying for the job, *b* needs the job

⁵⁹ See e.g. *Political Liberalism*, pp. 282-283.

⁶⁰ The lack of tight definition of the basic structure is in fact the sign that it is undoing. See Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, pp. 132-140.

⁶¹ *Theory*, p. 7.

most (the others all have jobs, *b* is unemployed with young children). On the hiring panel, *a* has the deciding vote on who to take on. If such a decision is being made within the agreed standards of just basic structure, then (at least some) liberals following Rawls would want to say that it is no more just for *a* give *b* the job than to give it to someone else. Communal reciprocity, as we have seen, would instead recommend that *b* is instead given the job. What lies behind this difference of approach? I suggest that, at heart, it is Rawls's moral division of labour which, in A.J. Julius's words, "screen off a space of individual decision from criticism and regulation".⁶² It is this insulation and separation from the potential needs and concerns of others which is anathema to community, irrespective of whether such a restriction is justified on other grounds.⁶³

The second sense in which the liberal conception of community differs from communal reciprocity is more directly related to its content. It might be thought that liberals have *no* conception of community – in *Political Liberalism* Rawls after all does decry the political pursuit of community as hopeless, though he has something quite specific in mind, namely "if by such a community we mean a political society united in affirming the same comprehensive doctrine".⁶⁴ But the rejection of community in this sense is not a rejection of community in general. It is tempting to look for evidence of this in Rawls in his justification of the difference principle. He does after all say that "...the difference principle... provides an interpretation of the principle of fraternity" and further that it embodies the relationships seen within the family as "members of a family commonly do not wish to gain unless they can do so in ways that further the interests of the rest".⁶⁵ However, a better understanding of a distinctive liberal variant of community is not to be found in the argument for the difference principle, but in Rawls's model of how relationships in the just society should be conceived more generally.

This centres on an idea of community only fully developed in Rawls's later work, which is self-consciously based on a 'political conception' of the person as a

⁶² 'The Basic Structure and the Value of Equality', p. 327.

⁶³ For example, it might be thought that such a division allows space for self-development by excusing individuals from onerous duties.

⁶⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 146.

⁶⁵ *Theory*, p. 90.

citizen.⁶⁶ This provides the underpinning for Rawls's mature view which I will briefly describe before comparing it to the socialist conception. In contrast to his argument in *Theory*, Rawls seeks to motivate the idea of what it means to be a citizen in the just society without recourse to controversial normative or metaphysical claims. Instead, he relies heavily upon idea that the relation between citizens is one that is 'reasonable'. In broad strokes, this means that each is willing to moderate the kinds of claims she makes in the face of the legitimate claims of others. Reasonable citizens are thus those who co-operate with others on the basis and understanding that other reasonable people will disagree with them. The practical upshot of the recognition of this fact is that the reasonable citizen wants to live with those reasonable others according to principles that they all can accept despite this disagreement – and, crucially, this means being able to justify a given policy to others. When each interacts with the other by these standards, Rawls thinks their relationships are characterised by mutual respect and reciprocity.⁶⁷ The details of the kind of standards and policies that Rawls thinks this kind of argument can support need not detain us. The important point is that the ability of Rawlsian justice to demand that people attend to the needs of others is restricted by the views of (reasonable) others.⁶⁸ This, then illuminates the contrast with the account of communal reciprocity presented above, which is *not* bound by such views.

Another way to frame the disagreement is that the socialist conception of community has a much more robust idea of what justifiability entails than does Rawls – the actions of each are justifiable to his fellow from the vantage of community only when he can show that he is motivated out of concern for their needs.

Lest we think that the liberal conception is only present in the work of Rawls it is worth highlighting the appearance of these features in the work of another

⁶⁶ See e.g. *Political Liberalism*, p. xlv. Though Brian Barry has commented that in retrospect, *Theory* had in fact "articulated a classical ideal of liberal citizenship" *Culture and Equality*, p. 7.

⁶⁷ See *Political Liberalism*, p. 14.

⁶⁸ Though the line of argument is different, this outlook is consistent with Rawls says in part three of *Theory* about the just society being 'a social union' and here the link between the idea of justice and community is clearer. Rawls says that "the public realization of justice is a value of community" because "the collective activity of justice is the pre-eminent form of human flourishing... it is by maintaining these public arrangements that persons best express their nature and achieve the widest regulative excellence of which each is capable". *Theory*, p. 463.

eminent liberal theorist – Ronald Dworkin. In his 1989 paper ‘Liberal Community’, later reprinted as chapter five of *Sovereign Virtue*, Dworkin fuses the two strands of the liberal conception presented above when he writes: “If the life of a community is limited to formal political decisions, if the critical success of a community therefore depends only on the success or failure of its legislative, executive, and adjudicative decisions, then we can accept the ethical primacy of the community's life without abandoning or compromising liberal tolerance and neutrality about the good life.”⁶⁹ The benefit of this stance, he continues, is that “Then the community will have an important source of stability and legitimacy even though its members disagree greatly about what justice is... That understanding provides a powerful bond underlying even the most heated argument over particular policies and principles.”⁷⁰ This, Dworkin thinks, provides a “more genuine form” of community than other conceptions.⁷¹ Clearly, the idea is not set out at length as it is in Rawls’s successive works. Nevertheless, the core ideas of the liberal conception are present here as they are in Rawls – an ideal of community restricted in its scope to coercive social structures, and limited in its application by the distinctive liberal commitment to toleration.

5. The value of community

In the final substantive section of this chapter, I will consider the value of communal reciprocity. I take it that we can be interested in a political ideal in two ways: non-instrumentally, and instrumentally. An ideal is non-instrumentally valuable when it has value independently of its consequences; instrumentally valuable when it has value purely because of its consequences.⁷² Communal reciprocity, I shall show, is valuable in both ways.

The claim that communal reciprocity is *always* non-instrumentally valuable might meet initial resistance. It would mean for example, and to take a particularly

⁶⁹ ‘Liberal Community’, p. 500.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 501.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 499.

⁷² For classic discussion of the instrumental/non-instrumental distinction and the related distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value see Korsgaard, ‘Two Distinctions in Goodness’. Note that ‘consequence’ need not describe something that is temporally subsequent – it could be that some good is necessary to secure community, and thus community is good because of that good which is its antecedent. Co-operation might be thought to fit that description.

hostile example, that we should praise a group of Nazis planning the holocaust, just so long as they satisfied the criteria of reciprocal concern for others as outlined above.⁷³ However, examples of this sort shouldn't count against the non-instrumental value of communal reciprocity. There are two things to say. First, the fact that the Nazis treat each other with reciprocal concern clearly doesn't mean that they are treating others in the same way, as the nature of the group activity belies – their particular activity is a non-communal act of the most egregious kind. Second, all that the claim about the non-instrumental value of community commits me to with respect to this example is that *it is good in at least one way*, namely that of community. It needn't also be the case that the situation as described is good from the point of view of fairness, or welfare-maximisation or any other standard, and for this reason we have no reason to take an all-things considered positive view of what is going on; rather in this case we should no doubt take a decidedly negative stance *despite* the good of community that is realised. Cases of this sort then, do not disturb the general point that communal reciprocity is the bearer of non-instrumental value.

What is the nature of this non-instrumental value? Such a question yields no straightforward answer. Just as similar questions directed at other foundational values such as fairness or justice are difficult to frame, so it is for community – the value we place seems basic and intuitive. 'Because it would create/reinforce/destroy community' is justifying reason rather than something to be justified: a final answer to a persistent Socrates who asks repeatedly why a particular action has been taken or a particular view held. If I were pressed to describe the value, I think we could do worse than say something along the lines of what was said in section one – that community is valuable when and because it describes good relationships between people. To expand slightly: community suggests a particular type of empathetic connection between people – one that recognises that lives can go well or badly, and accords importance to the other person's life going well. In doing so we recognise

⁷³ Dan McDermott raised this example with me. Robert Putnam raises a similar case of the perpetrator of the Oklahoma City bombing, Timothy McVeigh, who ironically, planned the attack with a co-conspirator at a bowling lane (the reader will recall that Putnam's most famous book *Bowling Alone*, uses as its eponymous image someone going bowling by themselves to exemplify the decline of community in America). See Putnam, 'Social capital: Measurement and Consequences'.

the importance of that person and, perhaps, receive recognition of our own worth too.

Another type of response to this question would be to point to the breadth of those who think share the intuitive reaction that community in general⁷⁴ is important, as noted in the introduction above. Community has been a persistent driving force in political movements, most notably in the socialist tradition but not only there. This widespread in-principle support – which is sometimes disingenuous or confused – suggests that like well-established ends such as fairness or efficiency, community is something that almost *everyone* would want to enlist in support of their political prescriptions. This underlines the importance of community as a subject of academic scrutiny, and as a bearer of distinctive value.

What then of the instrumental value of the particular idea of communal reciprocity outlined above? I suggest three ways in which this is the case: first, as a simple means of pleasure; second as a means of identity; and third as a means to generating broader welfare gains, through stimulating beneficial transfers.

As many have recognised, engaging in acts of community can be a directly pleasurable experience – people can get satisfaction out of being part of a group that treats each other in a communal way.⁷⁵ As was mentioned in section two, we do not need to labour under the illusion that acting in a communal way is *always* pleasurable in this immediate way – acting from concern for others can involve costs, and these might generate quite significant displeasure. Nevertheless, if we allow, as we did above, the use of trust or social capital as proxies for communal reciprocity, we can see clear evidence of the relationship between subjective wellbeing and community. Putnam's pioneering research in *Bowling Alone* found that increased in social capital was strongly correlated with reported subjective wellbeing. For the most powerful, albeit exclusive, example of strong interpersonal relationships – marriage – the effect was found to be equivalent to moving *seven*

⁷⁴ As in the introduction I use 'community' rather than 'communal reciprocity' here because there is not enough detail in the snippets identified here for us to judge which conception its adherents follow.

⁷⁵ Another option, that I don't discuss is that community may be a direct *objectively* good for those party to it – good whether or not they think it is good for them. One idea found in Marx and also in Hegel says that we realise our nature as truly human beings when we treat each other with humanity.

deciles up the income distribution.⁷⁶ Similar positive effects were found with other types of less exclusive social relationships. This relationship has also been tested across countries, notably in a recent pan-European study of almost 50,000 people. The researchers found that while there was some variation in the strength of the relationship, social capital and happiness were highly correlated in all parts of the continent.⁷⁷

Second, community can lead to a deeper a sense of identity. This may or may not be a sub-class of the first way in which community has instrumental value; some might think that identity is only important insofar as it adds or detracts from individual wellbeing. I take no definitive stance on that question, but consider it plausible enough that social identity has value in its own right to be worth considering here. It is certainly often discussed. In the article on community quoted above, Dworkin cites the importance of identification for liberals as well as communitarians and describing the phenomenon in the following way: “Citizens identify with their political community when they recognize that the community has a communal life, and that the success or failure of their own lives is ethically dependent on the success or failure of that communal life.”⁷⁸ The relationship between communal reciprocity and social identification thus described is not entirely clear. Presumably, it might be both a cause and a consequence: both a means of creating the conditions for generalised reciprocity to flourish, and something that is created or reinforced by communal interaction. If identity *is* important, why might that be so? A plausible answer is that it buttresses the sense we have of our own importance, and the value of our lives. As individuals we are startlingly insignificant, not just in cosmic terms but even just in the context of being one person in a country of, say, 60 million people. The kind of social identity that Dworkin talks about gives us an ability to be part of a greater whole and to share in that greater importance.

Third, community can be a way to generate broader wellbeing gains. I have in mind in particular the now extensive literature that exists on the link between higher levels of trust and higher firm-level and country-level income growth, but also on

⁷⁶ See *Bowling Alone*, chapter 20.

⁷⁷ Andrés Rodríguez-Pose and Viola von Berlepsch, ‘Social Capital and Individual Happiness in Europe’.

⁷⁸ ‘Liberal Community’, p. 499.

health and education outcomes, separate to those reported earlier.⁷⁹ These broader effects have been extensively documented. Researchers have found evidence for a link between higher levels of trust and lower mortality rates, better health, fewer traffic accidents, better education test scores, higher economic growth and so on.⁸⁰

Rather than going into any detail on the extent to which these effects attain, it is more helpful instead to look at the causal mechanisms that have been posited as to why good relationships of the sort we are interested in might have these positive externalities. I suggest two key ways. First, as Kenneth Arrow pointed out over forty years ago, “Virtually every commercial transaction has within itself an element of trust, certainly any transaction conducted over a period of time.”⁸¹ Put simply, every transaction with others, and every form of exchange, involves some form of risk. That risk is mitigated, and so the wheels of exchange lubricated, if there exist trusting relationships between the parties to that exchange. Arrow even goes as far as to say “It can be plausibly argued that much of the economic backwardness in the world can be explained by the lack of mutual confidence”.⁸² Whether or not he is right about that, the role of communal relationships in reducing risk is surely important.

Second, the economic development literature in particular has stressed the sheer inefficiency of societies that exist in a low-trust equilibria, where, for example, no-one trusts anyone else not to solicit bribes, or fail to show up for work, or take backhanders and so on, which means that almost everyone does, to the detriment of all.⁸³ To generalise, and to invoke a more standard nomenclature, we can say that societies in this situation are experiencing free-rider problems. One way of solving the free-rider problem is through building good interpersonal relationships: each is more likely to put in some effort to realise a collective good, if they trust others will

⁷⁹ This is because they use multivariate regression methods which control for rival independent variables in the course of analysis.

⁸⁰ See e.g. Berkman and Syme on mortality; Wilkinson on health more generally; and Helliwell and Putnam on education.

⁸¹ Arrow, ‘Gifts and Exchange’, p. 357.

⁸² *Ibid.* this despite the fact that the article is highly critical review of Richard Titmuss’s *The Gift Relationship*, which has been described as “the only socialist classic of the last fifty years” (Iain McLean, ‘The Gift Relationship’).

⁸³ See e.g. Woolcock ‘Social Capital and Economic Development: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis and Policy Framework’.

do so too.⁸⁴ Community thus provides one way to escape the ‘prisoner’s dilemma’ of solutions that are individually rational, are collectively ruinous.

⁸⁴ For relevant comment see: Glaeser et al, ‘An Economic Approach to Social Capital’.

4

Is communitarian socialism illiberal?

“Human nature demands, no doubt, space and elbow room. But... happily, the mass of mankind are not all elbows”.

R.H. Tawney¹

The present chapter is a defence of one interpretation of the Tawney quote above. The personal space, or ‘elbow room’ that we desire can, I argue, be realised without the ‘sharp elbows’ of competition and self-interest. Instead, I make the case that the socialist ideal of communal reciprocity elaborated in the last chapter can be made consistent with a certain kind of freedom. In this sense, communitarian socialists can be liberals too.

The word ‘freedom’ can mean different things. What kind of freedom is at stake here? The type of freedom I am primarily concerned with is the positive freedom for personal development, or self-realisation.² This focus is not because the more common but distinct idea of freedom of choice is not also considered valuable. Rather it is because, as the preceding chapter has made transparent, freedom of choice is built in to the very idea of communitarian socialism. That type of freedom, which obtains in my sense roughly when people can do what they want, is not a threat to communitarian socialism precisely because community is *only* satisfied if

¹ *Equality*, p. 119.

² ‘Primarily’ though not exclusively because the discussion of critics below does touch upon this value.

people do what they want (and what they want is to enter into relations of reciprocal service with others).³

However, while this line of defence provides a response to some liberal critics, it is vulnerable to a further charge: that community trades away freedom in the sense of *individual self-realisation*, for the good of service to others. Self-realisation obtains when a person's life choices are not constraining or repressive, but where her talents and capacities can flourish in a fulsome way. The criticism of the socialist who embraces freedom of choice is that in doing so he nevertheless endorses the communitarian agent freely making the kinds of choices which mean that she foregoes the opportunity to develop her natural powers. Like a nun who has taken a vow of religious service to merely pray and live in a convent, and in doing so shut herself off from the varied and interesting opportunities that a non-religious life would bring, the socialist ideal of community may be freely chosen but the charge remains that it is only consistent with set of choices that unacceptably infringe the opportunity for self-development.

This criticism is levelled against socialists despite the fact that one of the great proponents of the importance of this sort of human self-realisation was Marx, whose argument for public ownership of the means of production was justified in part because it would bring "the conditions for the free development and activity of individuals under their own control".⁴ Despite this, it is not Marx but liberals such as Mill who have established themselves as the chief defenders of freedom as self-realisation. In *On Liberty*, Mill glowingly endorses Wilhelm Von Humboldt's assertion that "'the end of man... is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole'", and that therefore the object "'towards which every human being must ceaselessly direct his efforts, and on which especially those who design to influence their fellow-men must ever keep their eyes, is the individuality of power and development'".⁵ It is socialists meanwhile who have

³ Slightly more formally, I take it that freedom of choice pertains to the extent that a decision maker has opportunities open to her for selection; the more such opportunities, the greater freedom of choice. It is this sense of freedom that primarily pre-occupies G.A. Cohen in chapter five of *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, which is entitled 'The Freedom Objection'.

⁴ Marx, *The German Ideology*. For good discussion see Elster, 'Self-Realisation in Work and Politics: The Marxist Conception of the Good Life'.

⁵ Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter three.

been accused of ignoring the potency of this type of positive freedom by liberal critics suspicious of the demands that socialism makes of individuals on behalf of the state or community.⁶ The fear is not just that this leads to suppression of the non-instrumental good of each person's individuality but that it has instrumental disvalue too – by creating a world that is grey, boring and stagnant.⁷ It is against such a claim that the argument of this chapter will be directed.

This chapter is unlike the previous ones in that it explicitly discusses the interaction between two valuable ends – community and self-realisation.⁸ As has been made clear previously, I am sceptical about the ability of theorists to put political ends into a philosophical melting pot and come out with any kind of unified or fully consistent answer. However, it does not follow from this that there is no useful work to be done in discovering the nature and extent to which values may cohere or conflict. The present chapter is just such an exercise in assessing the compatibility of the two values just mentioned.

It is helpful to think of this exercise as unfolding in two stages whereby we ask first: are community and self-realisation *logically* compatible? Can we avoid a contradiction between them occurring just by virtue of their definitions? Clearly, if communal reciprocity is logically inconsistent with freedom, as I previously suggested might be the case for the libertarian principle of self-ownership, then we have achieved a valuable insight but our inquiry is thereby done. If, however, we receive a positive answer to this first question, then this prompts a second, further question – in *what circumstances* can the compatibility between these two ends be maintained? If logical compatibility obtains then it follows that there must be *some* world in which the two values cohere, and ascertaining what these circumstances are then becomes a vital theoretical and political exercise. It will be of particular political interest the extent to which these values are jointly realisable in realistic circumstances. If such a world is very far from our own, inhabited by those who are

⁶ I do not say this charge is without merit, for the record of socialists on this score is mixed. In Marx, the motif of freedom as self-realisation is largely absent from his mature work. The most famous market socialist Oskar Lange mentions freedom, only to assume that it has purely instrumental value. Others showed more promise on this score, for example Albert Einstein in 'Why Socialism?' and Oscar Wilde in the 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism'.

⁷ See e.g. David Miller, *Market, State and Community*, pp. 210-11.

⁸ I offer no defence of the value of self-realisation. Those who think it is of no value are free to dismiss this criticism of communitarian socialism and proceed to the next chapter.

unrecognisable to political actors in the here and now then it is of scant comfort to socialist theorists looking to provide support for political blueprints. More prosaically, it is of limited interest to any political theorist who thinks that the first half of that self-description is important. In various places therefore, this chapter will seek to go beyond showing mere logical compatibility, but also show how there is some extent to which community and self-realisation can be compatible in circumstances within our political grasp.

The argument is advanced by way of engagement with two critics of community. The first, Miriam Ronzoni, takes issue with the communitarian specification of G.A. Cohen's socialist camping trip, and is covered in sections one to three. Because Cohen's specification of communal reciprocity is, as we have seen, somewhat sketchy, at various points I elaborate upon it drawing upon the findings of chapter three. The second critic, David Miller is critical of Cohen-type socialist community more generally, and is engaged in sections four to six.

Section two casts doubt on the central counter-scenario that Ronzoni pits against Cohen's communitarian camping trip – the family – arguing that the two examples that she uses to exemplify the power of that scenario do not succeed in marring the attractiveness of community. The first argument, against a Ronzoni example centring on the permissibility of a sibling's request to borrow a pair of jeans, does not rely upon any conceptual innovation but argues merely that Ronzoni's case fails to drive a wedge between our intuitions about the application of community in the camping trip and in the family, for any plausible differences are explained by dis-analogies between the two scenarios. In response to the second example, which evokes the importance of personal space - a 'room of one's own' - I raise the first of a number of conceptual points about community, specifically that the object of communitarian endeavour need not be limited to others' welfare here and now, but can include needs in the future too.⁹ Section three criticises Ronzoni's argument against community more directly, by arguing that Ronzoni is mistaken to believe that adherence to socialist community necessitates commitment to a 'thick' conception of the good life.

⁹ Here as below, the term 'welfare' is used to denote the satisfaction of needs and wants in the expansive sense introduced in chapter three.

In section four I reconstruct David Miller's criticism of a non-market form of community, for which he takes Marx as the chief standard-bearer. I identify what I take to be Miller's two main criticisms which are then discussed in the following two sections. Section five disputes Miller's claim that the communitarian is bound to be unpalatably conservative in what he produces because of a desire to meet 'visible need' which then serves to stifle innovation and so the exercise of the producer's creative powers to introduce new types of product. This conclusion, it is argued is the product merely of information constraints that the communitarian producer faces and as such does not disturb the socialist conception of community itself. Section six examines the criticism that the fact of specialisation (that a person tends to get better in a productive role the more she does it) leads inevitably to individuals being 'engulfed' by their communal roles. It is argued that the reciprocal nature of the socialist conception of community outlined in chapter three will prevent such a problem occurring in all but the most extreme cases. Section seven concludes.

1. Ronzoni's critique of the camping trip

In her paper 'Life is not a camping trip – on the desirability of Cohenite socialism', Miriam Ronzoni disputes the attractiveness of the communitarian socialist mode of organisation that characterises G.A. Cohen's camping trip example, arguing that Cohen fails to establish the general desirability of socialism.¹⁰ This is because, Ronzoni argues, an unacknowledged feature of the camping trip is 'goal monism' - that everyone on the trip shares the same basic aims.¹¹ Absent this special feature, Cohen's communitarian socialism becomes transparently *undesirable*, because communitarian demands ride roughshod over each individual's need for personal space and development. This is demonstrated, Ronzoni maintains, by a rival example – the family – under which goal monism does not exist and in which she argues communitarian socialism consequently appears less attractive. The lesser

¹⁰ Ronzoni's charge is levied not just against community, but equality too. I leave aside here the question of whether Ronzoni thinks that her criticisms would apply to community alone, or merely when it is combined with equality, though her paper suggests the former (see e.g. p. 175, and p. 178). All that matters for our purposes is that the attack on communitarian socialism is clearly an attack on community – whether alone or jointly with another value.

¹¹ Goal monism is not Ronzoni's only charge against Cohen. There is also the secondary charge of 'discontinuity in time' (the camping trip, unlike the real world, persists for a short period of time only).

attractiveness of Cohen's socialist principles when applied to a different, equally feasible social context suggests to Ronzoni that the general case for communitarian socialism is therefore flawed.

Ronzoni's complaint is thus that the idea of communitarian socialism which Cohen paints has only quite limited desirability, dependent as it is on the feature of 'goal monism' that is hardly ever apparent. Absent that feature, community is revealed to impose objectionable infringements on personal freedom.

In this section, in response to Ronzoni's argument, I mount a defence by way of two related counter-claims. Firstly, in two parts, I show that Ronzoni's chosen example of the family fails to show the lesser attractiveness of communitarian socialism when applied to a context other than the camping trip. Secondly, I make the more general point that the conception of community that Ronzoni attributes to Cohen can be challenged. Doing so undermines the central charge that the desirability of community relies on members of a group enjoying the same central goals.

Before this argument is made, we must get a clearer sense of the disagreement between Cohen and Ronzoni. We can begin with an outline of Cohen's hypothetical camping trip mentioned in chapter two. Cohen postulates that the campers run their trip along socialist lines which he suggests includes some communal ownership of the trip's resources and extensive co-operation between the campers. He thinks this kind of set up should strike us as intuitively desirable, but to reinforce that desirability Cohen imagines various kinds of non-socialist behaviours that individuals on the camping trip might exhibit and argues that the other campers (and by extension we) would recoil from such conduct. Thus we have the camper Harry who is good at fishing and so demands a better dinner than the other campers in virtue of the extra contribution that his superior talents enable him to make. Or Sylvia, who happens across an apple tree whilst on the trip and asks for less work or better sleeping arrangements than the other campers if she is to share what she has found with the rest of them.¹²

¹² *Why Not Socialism?*, pp. 7-8.

Cohen thinks that our intuitive negative reaction to these sorts of examples re-affirm the widely shared, if not widely acknowledged, belief that the best way of running camping trips is along socialist lines. We aren't given a precise definition of what a socialist organisational scheme looks like – for example, exactly how it will be decided who does what, and what happens to those who don't pitch in - but Cohen does discuss at some length the principles of equality and community that he asserts the camping trip realises, and that partly explain why, he believes, we find the camping trip desirable.¹³ The principle of equality which we encountered in chapter two is a demanding form of equality of opportunity which is satisfied only when no person has a lesser opportunity to have a good time than the others because of circumstances beyond their control, including the circumstance of the unchosen natural abilities and preferences that they bring to the trip. The principle of community will also be familiar. On Cohen's gloss, campers adhering to that principle work from a belief that "I produce in a spirit of commitment to my fellow human beings. I desire to serve them while being served by them..."¹⁴.

There's no reason to think, Cohen argues, that camping trips are the *only* kind of social situation where socialism is the most desirable way of operating. While the larger and more complex a social situation gets, the more difficult it will be to realise equality and community, these are considerations of *feasibility*, distinct from judgements about the *desirability* of the trip which can be retained even if it can't be put into practice. The former types of reasons can't count against the latter, so don't disturb the general thesis that the communitarian socialism is the most attractive way of organising society at large.

To put the argument more succinctly, Cohen holds that:

- (1) The camping trip analogy shows that "the socialist way... [is] rather obviously the *best* way to run a camping trip"¹⁵

¹³ 'Partly': While Cohen does not modify his argument in this way, it is necessary to do so. There are values other than equality and community that support the socialist mode of organization, though they may not be *distinctively* socialist values. Self-realisation is arguably one of them.

¹⁴ *Why Not Socialism?*, p. 43.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10. Italics are Cohen's.

- (2) “[The realisation of] two principles, one of equality and one of community... explains why... the [socialist] camping trip mode of organisation is attractive”¹⁶
- (3) There are no relevant differences between the camping trip scenario and wider society which count against the attractiveness-giving properties of equality and community also explaining why socialism is the best mode of organisation nationally, or even internationally.¹⁷
- (4) Therefore, socialism is (because of the way it realises equality and community) the most desirable way to run society.

In response to this, Ronzoni attacks Cohen’s communitarian socialism by focusing on counter-examples in a different, family setting. She uses the claimed success of these examples to lodge a wider conceptual criticism that Cohen’s communitarian socialism violates personal freedom. Ahead of setting out her argument more fully below, it can be summarised as follows:¹⁸

- (5) We can think of a relevantly similar¹⁹ example – the family – where communitarian socialism does not seem as desirable.
- (6) The explanation of this lesser desirability is (at least) that in the family scenario the feature of goal monism does not obtain, without which community undesirably infringes personal freedom.
- (7) The lesser desirability of the socialist mode of organisation in the case of the family shows that the attractiveness of the socialist camping trip cannot obviously be generalised to other contexts, including to society at large.
- (8) Therefore (3) is false.
- (9) Therefore (4) is false.

I turn now to a further elaboration and interrogation of Ronzoni’s argument.

¹⁶ *Why Not Socialism?*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 46.

¹⁸ As we shall see below, it is important to note that In her criticism of Cohen, Ronzoni does not dispute (1) but instead focuses her critical attention on premise (3).

¹⁹ Similar, I take it Ronzoni would want to mean, in the specific sense that the family scenario, like the camping trip, does not face challenges on the ground of feasibility.

2. Socialism and the family – against (5)

In the family context that Ronzoni elucidates as her central counter-scenario to Cohen's camping trip analogy, there are two main parts: the first which I discuss briefly concerns the use of a pair of jeans, and the other is a more general claim about the value of 'a room of one's own' in the case of children's upbringing. The jeans counterexample is presented as follows. Imagining the socialist principles of equality and community being brought to bear upon family life, Ronzoni asserts that we would have a different intuitive reaction to those principles than to the camping trip, for:

"I might find it problematic to negotiate with my sister who is going to wear the funky pair of jeans that our aunt gave me, even if the reasons that she gives me are fully compatible with the principles of community and radical equality of opportunity (she is much more of a fashionista than I am and she would get more pleasure out of wearing them, the reason why they are mine is sheer brute luck). If we are both doing reasonably well, it would not be unthinkable to assume that I am entitled to a significant level of discretionary use over my glamorous jeans."²⁰

Families, Ronzoni contends, are not like camping trips, and it is quite permissible for one sister to hold on to a pair of jeans she has been given, even when that choice violates principles of equality and community.

The choice of the family as a counter-example to the communitarian socialist is particularly bold. Radicals such as Kropotkin in the socialist tradition that Cohen is a part of have often compared the communal relations that they favour in society to a family - certainly more often than they have to a camping trip. It would indeed be a coup if it could be shown that, even in this setting, communitarian relations are undesirable. It is telling then, perhaps, that after setting out this apparent counter-example, Ronzoni admits that it is far from decisive:

²⁰ 'Life is Not a Camping Trip', p. 177.

“Granted, the point is not beyond dispute; for some, *being a good sister* means giving up on your vintage jeans altogether if you know that your sister will be able to get more pleasure out of them than you. What matters to me here is, however, that as soon as the social setting changes, the desirability of the social organisation of the camping trip becomes less obvious”.²¹

Ronzoni’s doubts about the example’s success are, I suspect, well founded. For it seems plausible that any intuitive reaction that socialist principles are more ill-suited to a family setting than to the camping trip can readily be explained away by dis-analogies between the two scenarios. In particular, it seems likely that if there is any intuitive difference it can be discounted simply by the fact that the jeans example is more frivolous than the case it is supposed to be compared to. The welfare costs and benefits of making a decision one way or the other about jeans are just smaller, and consequently the right to claim ownership of the gift less momentous, compared to the camping trip example where the participants are gathering resources which are, if not essential (it’s not clear from Cohen’s exposition) are certainly reasonably important for the wellbeing of participants of the trip. Thus, when Cohen’s camper Morgan lays sole claim to the contents of a well-stocked fish pond that his father had left for him, that the campers’ disapproval at his greed might appear stronger than the sister’s disapproval that she can’t wear the jeans she wants is quite unremarkable.

In the background of such a case is surely the conditioning thought that in the jeans case the sister can almost costlessly find an alternative to her sibling’s jeans; she can go and get another pair of trousers from her wardrobe. By contrast, in the case of Morgan no such supposition is warranted – there is no reason to think that the campers have access to a cache of fresh fish.

These differences suggests that the jeans example is not likely to be successful. It is true that Ronzoni emphasises the modesty of her case – she is not trying to show some great schism between these cases. But that admission counts *against* her chance of success. Rather than merely making her task easier by

²¹ ‘Life is Not a Camping Trip’, p. 177, emphasis in original.

lessening the burden of proof, as she intends,²² the weakness of the claim that Ronzoni makes for the jeans example - merely that it is 'less obviously' unacceptable - means that even a small differentiating feature is sufficient to defeat her counter-example. As a result, the more frivolous nature of the jeans case is enough to see that this counter-example fails to drive a wedge between the application of community in the camping trip on the one hand, and the family on the other.

The second example that Ronzoni invokes within the family scenario is that of the need for what she describes as a "certainly metaphorical but perhaps even literal... *room of one's own* within the family [which] is essential not only to provide some protection to the vulnerable, but also an essential space for personal development and individual flourishing." This is important, Ronzoni argues, because "Families are, after all, the place where we first learn to become individuals, and this learning process cannot be successful unless families give us space to explore, and become, who we are".²³ Ronzoni's focus here is different to the jeans case above; not on the intuitive license that members of a family have to resist communitarian demands, but on the more specific criticism that the family scenario reveals why such demands come at a cost to 'essential space for personal development and individual flourishing'. This reveals, the charge goes, an important area of difference between the camping trip and the family scenarios since "This is precisely where camping trips differ: we normally join camping trips as well-rounded and developed individuals".²⁴

The 'room of one's own' example is meant to buttress the jeans case by demonstrating another instance where communal duty should be overridden, in this case because not doing so would suppress personal development, and of children in particular. We might think that the specific nature of this counter-example limits the role it can play in Ronzoni's overall argument. In contrast to the jeans counter-example, the upbringing counter-example looks like it can only *directly* show that community and equality should not be applied to the special case of upbringing that Ronzoni focuses upon – where children are still developing.

²² In private communication, and against the criticisms brought in this chapter, Ronzoni has stressed the modesty of her argument against Cohen as a mitigating factor.

²³ 'Life is Not a Camping Trip', p. 178.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

However, even that more constrained claim looks dubious. There are two things to say. The first is that we might think that “the nurturing of children into well-rounded and balanced human beings” does not clearly rely more on personal ‘space’ from communal responsibilities than their presence. Consider that many of the activities that parents encourage their children to carry out for the sake of making them ‘well rounded and balanced’ are ones which are, at least superficially, consistent with community. To this end, children are routinely asked to contribute to household chores like washing up and keeping the family home tidy; and they are encouraged to join sports teams and social clubs in part to help them work and play together with other children.

But the more important, conceptual point is that any plausible theory of the object of the communitarian endeavour - whether it is the welfare, resources or some other property of one’s fellows - will consider not just (say) welfare here and now, but welfare in the future too. This is certainly what Cohen has in mind when he talks about the metric of justice in *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, and the position that was argued for with regard to community in chapter three.²⁵ In the context of the current example, this feature of the metric of community surely means paying attention to children’s *capacity* to experience future wellbeing gains, and resilience against future wellbeing losses, in a way that is surely relevant to Ronzoni’s charge here.²⁶ If this is the case then just as it was argued that the subjection of the vulnerable was inconsistent with community in the present, so it must also be that the stifling of children at a young age in the way that Ronzoni describes is also off-limits.

In particular, it seems to give fairly straightforward reasons for why, on the camping trip, children would be granted significant exemptions from their communal duties. Rather than communitarian socialism dictating that children be required to perform the camping equivalent of working up chimneys, it seems quite intuitive that they would be given time off to do their homework, play sports, or build a

²⁵ *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, pp. 106-109.

²⁶ I deliberately leave out here what a response open to Cohen, which is to invoke the ‘personal prerogative’, as he does on pp. 61-2 of chapter 1 of *Rescuing Justice and Equality*. This is partly because it is unclear whether that prerogative tempers the demands of community, as well as of justice, and so of its relevance here. As I hope to show here, Cohen need not, in fact resort to invoking the personal prerogative to mount a successful defence against Ronzoni’s argument.

bivouac. Certainly, those kind of exemptions don't seem uncommon on camping trips, and there seems no obvious reason why a socialist camping trip would disbar children from such activities. More broadly, and to give the response pithier formulation: if community dictates that we have responsibility for the wellbeing of members of the community, why shouldn't that responsibility be sensitive to people's capacity to flourish in the future as well as now? If Ronzoni is right that 'a room of one's own' is important for children to develop into well-rounded individuals, then she need not fear community, for accordance with that value would encourage rather than discourage children being given such space for development.²⁷

This point helps clear up the counterintuitive charge in the quote above that the dictates of community are a threat to the *vulnerable* in particular. Typically socialist and communitarian sentiment is thought to be of succour to the vulnerable and a threat to the powerful. But Ronzoni suggests the opposite, and returns to this point later on when she describes community-inspired family life as potentially "oppressive, crushing and dispiriting".²⁸

While it may be the case that some communities make demands of their members that exhibit the negative characteristics that Ronzoni relates, this seems misplaced as a criticism of the kind of communitarian socialism evident on the camping trip. Cohen's communitarianism is surely *sensitive* to the burdens that are imposed on those subject to it and so the oppression or crushing of the vulnerable would not be consistent with the principle of community, which would recommend, other things equal, that those are in such a position be owed assistance or compensation. Whether or not Ronzoni thinks that Cohen's luck egalitarian principle of equality is directly concerned with the kind of suffering that she relates, the value of community *certainly* is, and there are subsequently no grounds to think that the socialist mode of organisation will be blind to that suffering when it occurs. I return to this point below.

²⁷ I do not distinguish here because Ronzoni does not, whether the need for personal space is considered merely subjectively valuable (only valuable if the child, or the child's future self thinks it is valuable) or objectively valuable (valuable irrespective of what the child or the child's future self thinks). This distinction is however explicitly drawn below.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

3. Communitarian socialism and ‘goal monism’ – against (6)

I have suggested that the example of the family does not do the work that Ronzoni needs it to do to impugn allegiance to the communitarian socialist principles underlying the camping trip. Nevertheless, the fall of that premise, while defeating the particular counter-scenarios that Ronzoni brings against Cohen, may not entirely defeat the more general worry about communitarian socialism, which is accounted for by premise (6) – namely that community infringes individual development by illicitly relying upon ‘goal monism’. Ronzoni presents this charge in the following way:

“Cohen implicitly suggests that the goal-monism that characterises camping trips (or at least the clear centrality that communal living plays in them) is appropriate for society, as well. He is suggesting, in other words, that we should enjoy a very specific, and significantly thick, *conception of the good life*. We are encouraged to endorse a very specific form of social setting, one that extends well beyond justice... we should value the ideal of the good life (a life lived embracing communal values more than personal goals, or at least pursuing the latter only within the strong constraints of the former)... We might have normative (not only empirical) reasons for thinking that goal-monism is not desirable and that individuals should pursue a variety of valuable goals – some of which are personal and some others of which are communal.”²⁹

The charge that satisfying community necessitates a ‘thick’ conception of the good life, thus conflicting with the distinctively liberal value of individual flourishing, is a familiar charge. It is however, I think, a mistaken one; the value of community that informs Cohen’s brand of communitarian socialism is not the same as, for example, the Thomism of Alasdair Macintyre or the socialism of Charles Fourier that we saw in chapter one. Communal reciprocity doesn’t mandate a commitment to a thick conception of the good life but is instead compatible with a variety of valuable

²⁹ ‘Life is Not a Camping Trip’, pp. 182-3

pursuits and there is therefore no reason to worry about infringement of individual development on these grounds.³⁰

Before I explain why, consider a trivial respect in which this charge might be true. Cohen clearly does include some ‘conception of the good’ – some view about the campers’ guiding aims and priorities – amongst the premises of the camping trip. He says that “our [the campers’] common aim is that each of us should have a good time, doing so far as possible, the things that he or she likes best”.³¹ But this kind of description of the aim of the campers is deliberately not the kind of ‘thick’ conception of what constitutes a good life that is needed for the Ronzoni criticism to succeed. It doesn’t specify with any definition the kinds of goals that campers must have but rather, to paraphrase Rawls’s own ‘thin’ account, is what it would be rational for anyone to want.³²

This aside, Ronzoni’s worry that adherence to community necessitates that the campers cannot pursue a variety of goals is incongruent with the most attractive conception of community open to Cohen. Recall from chapter two that the conception of community which Cohen is drawing upon is satisfied when, roughly, the decisions that each makes are sensitive to the needs of others. It follows from this simply that an individual’s communal aims and goals will be as diverse and varied as the needs of her fellows. We might imagine on a camping trip, for example, there is a need for tents to be erected, meals to be cooked, games to be organised, children to be looked after and a campfire to be built among many other more mundane activities. There seems no reason to think that subscribing to a communal motivation, *which itself is unrestricted in the range of needs that it addresses itself to*, will lead to lack of varied goals as Ronzoni fears.

The problem here appears to be the lack of definition with which Ronzoni treats community. Invoked in the abstract, and with the lineage of its use in previous

³⁰ Ronzoni’s criticism does not exhaust the grounds upon which the charge of lack of respect for individual development can be made, further such grounds are covered in the next section in reply to David Miller.

³¹ *Why Not Socialism?*, p. 3. It is also worth noting, that Ronzoni’s criticism might be thought to imply a worry about the camper merely engaging in collective rather than individual activities, but this can’t be right. Cohen explicitly writes of the activities of the campers on the camping trip that our common aim is that each of us should have a good time, doing, so far as possible, the things that she or he likes best (some things we do together, others we do separately)”, *Why Not Socialism*, p. 4.

³² See e.g. *Theory*, p. 380.

philosophical debates, community might sound all-encompassing and oppressive, but the idea of communal reciprocity that is used in *Why Not Socialism?* does not demand as its object is some specific and pre-specified conception of the good, but instead is substantially determined by the needs of the group which it encompasses. The campers would, we presume, all come to the trip with a range of aims and ambitions about things they want to do – some will want to relax and read, some go out walking, some go fishing, some visit a local sight of historical interest, and so on. Cohen’s idea of community, as elaborated upon in the last chapter, is satisfied when each takes it upon himself to try to see that, so far as possible, everyone gets to do what they would like to. Some activities, such as reading, will be done alone, some such as sightseeing will be done in a group. Community does not ignore these diverse projects, much less trample on them, but rather promotes them. It is unfair, and a conceptual mistake, to describe as monist, an idea of community that seeks to cater for the plurality of ends that the group has.³³

4. David Miller on community and individual freedom

In chapter eight of his *Market, State and Community*, David Miller marshals an argument with a similar objective to Ronzoni’s, against communitarians who believe extensive non-market co-operation of the type evident on Cohen’s camping trip is compatible with the full development of individuals.³⁴ Miller’s claim is specifically levelled at those who forsake the market in favour of a non-market communitarianism, such as that suggested in some of Marx’s writings.³⁵ “There is a serious danger” Miller argues, “that communism, as Marx described it, will be a stagnant and stultifying society”.³⁶ As we shall see, Miller’s argument while complementary to Ronzoni’s, goes further in certain important respects, so presents a fresh challenge to the socialist ideal of community expounded above.

³³ The reader who worries that the Ronzoni charge may be interpreted in a different kind of way to that which I focus on here – that community narrows the variety of aims and projects that each is able to have – is encouraged to read on to the discussion of Miller below who raises similarly motivated points to Ronzoni, and which have some overlap.

³⁴ I leave the wider question of whether Miller’s market socialist model can be properly considered communitarian aside for the time being.

³⁵ Miller points particularly to the *Grundrisse* and *the German Ideology*. See *MSC*, pp. 210-11.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 219.

Some caution is needed in interpreting Miller's argument, for as the foregoing paragraph suggests it is not brought against community *as such* – indeed, Miller himself endorses a form of communitarianism. Rather the target is any organisation of economic activity, however justified, which does not make extensive use of markets. The need for caution arises for it is not clear, at least *prima facie*, that markets are *necessarily* antithetical to community as defined in preceding chapters. It might be thought, for example, that the 'moral market' described by Joseph Carens in his *Equality, Moral Incentives and the Market* is just such a case of a communitarian market.³⁷

Nevertheless, Miller's criticisms are directly applicable to our concern with community for the transparent reason that the kind of market that he seeks to justify is not a Carensian one. It is instead, something much more like the capitalist market we are familiar with, albeit with some important differences.³⁸ Those differences however are not in focus in the chapter under scrutiny, which offers a defence of markets relatively undisturbed by any mitigating considerations. The market that Miller defends is not, as he insists, a *capitalist* market but it is nevertheless a market, which is distinguished as such by Miller by the fact that "the immediate aim of production is exchange, not the fulfilment of need".³⁹ This argument *for* markets is clearly substantially an argument *against* community as it has been defined in earlier chapters.

Miller's critique is interestingly modelled in part as an internal criticism of Marx, by way of elucidation of two apparently contradictory strands in Marx's thought: alienation and full individual development.⁴⁰ However, the central arguments can also stand quite separately to criticism of Marx and it is in this

³⁷ In the Carensian market scheme, participants act as if they were purely selfish, market maximisers in their jobs but consent to a radical taxation and redistribution of their market income. In this way, the communitarian motivation of actors is unsullied despite their acting in an ostensibly capitalistic fashion in the market place.

³⁸ These differences are concisely set out on p. 10-11 of *MSC*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 213. As readers of chapter three will be aware, the precise terms in which Miller makes this comparison are arguably unfair – for the focus on market interaction as 'exchange', and non-market interaction as 'the fulfilment of need' underplays the extent to which community too should be understood as a reciprocal act. It thereby also underplays what is relevantly distinctive about the kind of market interaction that Miller is talking about – namely that is motivated by self-interest, with each only exchanging with a view to what they can get for themselves. Dressing this up merely as 'exchange' might be thought to obscure this fact.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 203-213.

standalone fashion that I shall discuss them. I take two main arguments from Miller's discussion.⁴¹ First, that the communitarian demand that contribution be directed at the needs of others unavoidably means that existing needs are prioritised over future ones. This reveals, Miller argues, an unattractive conservatism inherent in communitarianism, which limits free variation in production. Secondly, that a principle of community dictates that people specialise in the productive work they do, which necessarily means that they must narrow the range of activities they can undertake, or else spend their time doing less than they might for others, contrary to what community demands. Both of these features of communitarianism, Miller thinks, means that the range of activities that any person can undertake consistently with that value is limited, and this in turn limits the development of her faculties and her chance to enjoy different goods and ways of life. We can take these two contentions in order.

5. Community and 'productive conservatism'

To anticipate, the argument against the first of these conclusions – I'll call it the charge of productive conservatism – will be first that it relies upon a contingent empirical premise, namely a lack of information about future needs, in light of which it is in any case unclear that non-communitarian, market-based solutions fare better. But furthermore and second that the charge of conservatism attributes to community an implausibly narrow definition of needs, which when lifted sees it fare much better than Miller allows.

We need to first look a little more closely at Miller's criticism. To motivate the charge, Miller imagines the situation of a communist planner who is "contemplating making a product for which there is no existing demand. Going ahead with such a plan is inherently risky. It may turn out that there is indeed no need for the produce, so the labour expended will have been socially wasteful... Thus in order to fulfil Marx's ideal of labour as the communal bond linking producer and

⁴¹ These are not the only arguments he offers but they are what I take to be the most important. There is also an argument offered on the importance of markets based on their utility for the capturing and sharing of information on pp. 217-8. These type of concerns are bracketed by Cohen as concerns of feasibility in the camping trip, and I will do so here for similar reasons.

consumer, the optimum course is to ensure that the product meets a visible need”.⁴² The communist planner is hamstrung by his non-market motivation, Miller asserts, into an intolerable risk aversion. This risk aversion limits not only the products available to consumers but, pertinently for our purposes, the extent to which producers are free to exercise their creative potential.

In countering this charge, it is helpful to use Cohen’s camping trip scenario once more, which can help us strip away the extent to which Miller’s claim relies merely on feasibility considerations such as the ease with which complex information about preferences can be collected and analysed, from a criticism of the ideal of community itself. So imagine the following counter-example: on a particular day, it has been decided that a camper Colin is in charge of getting food for the other campers. There is a well-used fishing spot near the campsite and Colin knows, because it has been often used as food for the campers, that a freshly caught and cooked fish will be appreciated by all. Colin thus decides to go fishing. But on his way down to the spot, he comes across an abundance of freshwater shrimp. Pausing, he thinks to himself, “I don’t *know* that the other campers will like shrimp, but given that it doesn’t taste *that* dissimilar to fish and given that they’ve been eating fish a lot in the past week, I think actually the shrimp will go down better than a fish would”. So instead of going on to catch a fish, he resolves to net some shrimp instead.

Is this sort of behaviour consistent with community? It certainly seems so. If Colin genuinely thinks that choosing shrimp over fish will be appreciated by his fellow campers, the communitarian choice would seem to be to opt for the former. But this of course is surely the kind of communitarian yet non-conservative behaviour which runs against Miller’s communist planner example. More generally, it is not clear why in principle this sort of innovation to meet hitherto unknown preferences that is evident in the case of Colin could not also apply in the case of the communist planner. When operating as market actors, individuals seek to innovate to increase their personal gain, while outside of the market, the relevant difference is that individuals are (also) motivated by the needs of others. But it is surely wrong

⁴² MSC, p. 219.

to think that this mere fact means conservatism and stagnation in the kinds of productive activity that people undertake.

Of course, in a modern, large-scale economy there are complications in collecting the right information about what present needs, and what future needs might be – considerations which must influence any comprehensive evaluation of planning versus markets. But in the section quoted, Miller is not seeking to make *that* information-based anti-communitarian argument, of the sort popularised by Hayek. Rather he is seeking to impugn the very principle of producing for the needs of others as inherently conservative.

It is that conceptual charge which I think the example of Colin and the shrimp suggests is implausible. Certain empirical observations also are relevant here in that they help clarify this conceptual point. Consider for example one, moderately communitarian, institution – the National Health Service (NHS). Each year the NHS spends around £1bn on research and almost £3bn on ‘public health’, predominantly education and advice. It is also continually undertaking large-scale capital investment. The exercise of such functions sits uneasily with the picture painted of the communitarian planner committed only to present needs, which he treats as fixed. For research performed by the NHS includes investigation of new treatments, medicines and staff practices includes, for example, exploring solutions to the prediction that an increasingly large proportion of health problems will be age-related, as people live longer. It also includes organisational change, piloting transferring resources from hospital wards to neighbourhood settings to see if patients can be treated more comfortably and cost-effectively in that setting. Furthermore, just as any company in the marketplace would employ advertising to change consumer preferences, public health funding is spent on trying, among other things, to get people to adopt healthier diets to reduce the future incidence of type-2 diabetes. In place of market research, demographic indicators are used to look at areas where there is a likelihood of an increase in the birth-rate and so to commission extra midwifery and neo-natal care.

In all these areas, it is just not evident that the communitarian motivation of NHS is an impediment to innovation in the meeting of need in a way that stifles the creativity of those who work for it. Of course this kind of innovation might be

allowed to flourish or not from one hospital to another, or one government to the next, but the central point is that the communitarian motivation seems quite consistent with that innovation.

Neither, as it happens, does the converse, that self-interested market motivation must be the *enemy* of conservatism in production seem tenable. Of course private enterprise might innovate in the way Miller suggests the communist planner cannot, and the profit motive might provide a plausible mechanism for why such innovation occurs. However, the opposite can also be true. For a good example of both sides of this story, consider the case of what is by some measures the most valuable multinational company, Apple Inc. Once considered a plucky, innovative company responsible for a range of pioneering consumer goods – albeit many of the parts of which were funded and developed outside the commercial marketplace, using public money – in the last few years, it is well documented that the share of Apples' sales revenues spent on research and development has plummeted and the amount the company spends on marketing has increased dramatically.⁴³ As a result the range of new products from the company has stalled, even while its sales have continued to rise. It joins the pantheon of large companies whose interest is in making money from the sales of their goods, rather than finding new ways to meet future needs. Anyone who has paid attention to the number of sequels, prequels and remakes coming out of Hollywood in recent years might also sympathise with the view that private enterprise does not always innovate in this way. As the former Chairman of General Motors Thomas Murphy is famously reputed to have said "'General Motors is not in the business of making cars. It is in the business of making money" and this fact also provides a plausible mechanism for explaining why self-interested market exchange might itself lead to just the kind of conservatism that Miller fears.

The empirical issue of whether community or the market do better at disrupting conservatism in production is of course not thereby settled, but two conclusions are apparent – first that there is no clear *a priori* reason to think that community-spirited individuals - or communitarian state institutions – are able to

⁴³ See e.g. Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State*, chapter 5.

only meet present, visible need. Second, self-interest and market maximisation are no guarantors of productive innovation, indeed under certain conditions such motivation might actually include a bias towards productive conservatism of just the sort that Miller alleges of the communitarian.

Before we move on, it is worth considering a slightly different angle on this charge, which is suggested by the following line in the quote above. Community requires, Miller tells us, a “communal bond linking producer and consumer”⁴⁴. We might think that such a bond cannot be forged from attention to (merely) a consumer’s *future* needs since those needs do not form part of her current preference function. In which case it might follow that the meeting of those, future needs can be no part forging or maintaining a communal bond with that person as she *currently* is, and so – to that extent - no way of forging a communal bond with her at the present time at all.⁴⁵

However, I think this objection founders on the same problems as we have seen above. Running for the moment with the scenario of the producer and the consumer suggested in Miller’s quote, we can imagine two types of need which the producer might require information on in order that he successfully caters for them. It might on the one hand be information about an objective need, for example, the consumer might not currently have a need for warden-assisted accommodation, but very much require it in her old age because of infirmity. Conversely, it might be an ostensibly subjective preference change, for example developing a taste for strawberry over raspberry jam. Can the communitarian producer be expected to meet these future needs even though they are might not be thought to directly enhance the communal bond between producer and consumer here and now? I suspect, as before, that he can.

To revert again to the camping trip, let’s imagine that the campers have detailed information about the weather over the next week, having checked and printed out a copy of the weather report before they left to go on the trip. It shows

⁴⁴ MSC, p. 219.

⁴⁵ This view is the analogue of the view espoused by communitarians such as Michael Taylor, who think that community needs face-to-face interaction. The idea that communitarianism need only respond to *temporally* proximate needs is misguided for similar reasons to that view that community is limited to *spatially* proximate needs.

that, while warm currently, the weather is due to get much colder in a few days time. No-one then could accuse one of the campers, Collette, who spends some of her time gathering and storing firewood as acting in a non-communal fashion despite her not doing anything for the immediate interests of the others, for each would know that they will require it further down the line.

The issue of subjective preferences likewise disappears when the information restriction is lifted. Recall the example of the camper Colin, who brought back shrimps rather than fish for dinner. This was done despite the fact that no camper at the time desired shrimp – perhaps, we might stipulate this time, because none of them had tried it before – but did like fish, which they had frequently enjoyed on the trip so far. There was no objective information by which Colin could suppose that the campers would appreciate shrimp, analogous to that from the weather report. However, his actions in bringing back shrimp rather than fish seem perfectly communitarian.

This suggests that Miller's charge that communitarianism is inherently conservative in the needs it caters for, and so inherently restricts and suffocates the kinds of work that people perform, is awry. Rather, what his charge draws attention to is the feasibility problem of how the communitarian should react when there is limited information. This problem, which also afflicts self-interested market participants – think of the widely discussed 'principal-agent' problem in the economics literature – is nevertheless dissolved once this restriction is lifted. There is nothing, therefore, in our *concept* of communal reciprocity which prioritises present needs over future ones.

6. Community and labour specialisation

The second of Miller's arguments that community lacks respect for the positive freedom for individual development alleges that, once people are subject to communitarian relations, there is a risk is that their productive role 'engulfs' them, so that they cannot do any other line of work than they are currently in. This is because any divergence from a role in which someone has spent some time, and so gained some competence in, will mean that they are likely to be less efficient as an organ for the welfare of their community if they switch roles. Thus, insofar as they

are genuinely communitarian in their motivation, they will be disinclined to vary their productive activity. As Miller puts it, the “rotation [of productive roles] may prevent people from developing their talents to the full, and by implication from contributing as much as they otherwise might to the community’s welfare.”⁴⁶

This charge appears to strike at the heart of our conception of community by pitting the communitarian emphasis on maximising service to others against the ability of those who serve from enjoying a diverse range of roles. Consider the case of Cohen’s doctor-gardener that we saw in chapter two. Even if she chooses to become a doctor voluntarily, because she is mindful of her communitarian duties to others, the concern remains that by making such a choice she has thereby permanently narrowed her ability to use her time for more diverse, more fulfilling activities - she might now be ‘locked in’ to being a doctor. Given her communitarian motivation and presuming medical competence increases over time, her deciding to practice as a doctor generates a ‘comparative advantage’ argument for staying in the same role: she is increasingly obligated to continue being a doctor given that this is what she is increasingly best at.⁴⁷

In short, the worry is that the communitarian drive to be an efficient organ for one’s fellows means that the opportunity cost of changing jobs, or undertaking a diverse range of different activities, or perhaps even taking leisure time, means that such steps would be forbidden by community. This looks to put community squarely in tension with self-realisation.

By way of reply, let us first presume that the counter-argument is a good one and ask again whether communitarianism actually fares worse – in theory or in practice – than non-communitarian ways of organising society. There are good reasons to think not. In fact, any dampening effects of specialisation of labour on self-realisation surely occur quite independently of the motivation to which they are attached. Even a self-interested person may face the problem described because of the simple fact that there are a plurality of different productive and non-productive activities that she could take part in at any given time, not all of which can be

⁴⁶ MSC, p. 216.

⁴⁷ Comparative advantage is an apt metaphor because the relevant comparison is her competence compared to other potential doctors, not to some pre-determined standard of competency.

undertaken simultaneously. Once one role is chosen, the problem of the effects of specialisation described by Miller is likely to apply in exactly the same way: the opportunity cost of leaving a given role will likewise grow the longer one is in a job. Imagine again the case of a doctor who also enjoys gardening, but this time imagine that she is entirely self-interested. As before, we can assume that the more she does the job, the more proficient at it she becomes. And it is plausible that this brings with it a greater sense of pride and self-worth, if not also greater financial remuneration. This will similarly mean that the marginal cost of stopping being a doctor to go and be a gardener will increase, the longer she is in the role.

That these sorts of examples exist should not be controversial given our experience of the way people behave in the labour market in capitalist societies. The market tends to reward skill and experience so – to paint a particularly stark example - anyone who wishes to change from a non-fulfilling, monotonous career as, say, an accountant to more fulfilling and varied job as an artist will have to pay a high price for doing so in terms of foregone income. The phenomenon of people ‘trapped’ in unfulfilling jobs in capitalist labour markets is a common occurrence, even though they are quite free to act entirely self-interestedly.

This says nothing of course about the desirability of communitarianism. However, I believe that it can be defended using an appropriately sophisticated understanding of community, as developed in the previous chapter.

The defence turns upon the conjunction of three ideas - first the obvious fact that each individual is both a producer and a consumer simultaneously. Second, that the idea of reciprocity which was previously defended as integral to a properly understanding of community enshrines the idea that the producer’s service is returned in kind. Third, the presumption that the desire for self-realisation will be part of any individual’s preference function, or else properly considered an objective need. Together these claims form the basis of an argument that community can be positively committed to self-realisation.

We can set up this argument as follows:

- (1) Community includes a commitment to reciprocity

- (2) Reciprocity in the relevant sense means that those who serve have their needs served in return
- (3) One such need to be served is for the space for personal development
- (4) Therefore, community includes a commitment to space for personal development

We might imagine the argument unfolding in the following fashion. One of the campers Oliver is a particularly good cook. In fact, he cooks sumptuous food, even with the relatively modest ingredients that the campers have available to them on their trip. While plenty of the others can cook, no-one does it quite as well as Oliver. Being the community-minded camper he is, Oliver willingly elects to do far more than an equal share of the cooking, as he recognises that he is pretty good at it, and that other campers are all pulling their weight in other ways. Over time, as his position becomes established as the best cook on the trip, Oliver does little else apart from cooking.⁴⁸ Although he is quite happy doing so – given that it is in this capacity that he can be of most service to his fellows, this is his chosen course of action – the campers together decide that Oliver is missing out on much of the opportunities to do the other kinds of interesting things that the camping trip avails. In recognition of this, that it would be good for Oliver not just to have the things that they are already doing for him as a member of the group– for example building a camp-fire, organising after-dinner entertainment, setting up the next day's activities, repairing the tents that leak – they submit that another important way of serving him would be to give him more time away from his duties to do things apart from cooking. For not to do so would be to neglect to reciprocate Oliver's service as a cook in an important way, viz. in recognising that one of his needs is that for space for some measure of time to himself, for individual development. In this way, Oliver's need for self-realisation is actively fostered by the sense of community on the trip.

Of course, for people like Oliver, the *importance* of self-realisation relative to the other things that people need remains an open question, but it isn't necessary to

⁴⁸ Oliver could plausibly claim that he is being done an unfairness, but this is not a charge open to the communitarian as such.

commit to any particular importance for the defence entertained here to work. It could be that we decide that self-realisation is actually of very *little* importance relative to the general welfare of the campers and their need for, for example, good food, efficiently produced. Conversely, it could be that we think it is of great importance. It could even be that we decide, for familiar liberal reasons, that self-realisation is lexically prior to other constituent parts of one's general welfare.⁴⁹ All that need be said here is that whatever importance we decide to grant the objective need for self-realisation relative to other needs, the principle of community can, on its most attractive specification, be sensitive to it.

That said, and though it might be thought to weaken the polemical point being prosecuted here, I myself *am* sceptical of the claim that self-realisation is lexically prior to other needs. Taking this stance is of some consequence, because it does generate the possibility that, under some circumstances, self-realisation of some talented individuals will not be able to be justified on communitarian grounds. Imagine the case of an NHS doctor volunteering overseas in a developing country, where there are acute health needs and scant medical expertise. It might be beneficial from the point of view of her self-realisation that she spends a substantial period of time learning about the cultural or religious practices of the community in which she is placed, or practising local sports. But we would surely think the cost to the local population of her engaging in those pursuits is far too high for her to be able to do this consistently with her communitarian duties. In this case communitarianism looks inconsistent with a full measure of the NHS doctor's self-realisation.

However, the importance of these sorts of cases should not be overstated. They do not disturb the general point that in most circumstances, no one person is as indispensable as we might presume the NHS doctor is in the developing country. Oliver the cook might be the best cook on the camping trip, but it is thoroughly implausible that no other person is able to cater for the campers' culinary needs in an acceptable way. To put it another way: the opportunity cost involved in the talented departing from their specialist role is rarely so overwhelming that it

⁴⁹ Perhaps because, as in Rawls, we have a fundamental interest as rational beings in pursuing our own conception of what is good for our lives.

completely swamps any pursuit of their self-realisation. However, it does leave us with a small class of cases where it may be impossible to achieve this consistently with community.

7. Conclusion

One major charge against socialism is that it infringes freedom, including the freedom for citizens of socialist societies to pursue varied and fulfilling opportunities. This culpability is often thought to lie with a demanding and expansive ideal of community. In response to two critics who endorse this assessment I have argued that, in its most attractive form of communal reciprocity, community need not suffer this fate. Understood in a way in which future as well as existing needs are recognised, in which the object of communal intention is dictated by the diverse and changing needs of others, and in which reciprocity is demanded of the beneficiaries of communal intent, a socialist ideal of community can, perhaps, be acceptable to liberals too.

5

Community and exploitation, or, can luck egalitarians condemn exploitation?

Having set out the lineage and traced the contours of communal reciprocity, and responded to one set of concerns, this chapter and the next now attempt to demonstrate its relevance. In what follows, I attempt something of a conceptual land grab, showing why community rather than the popular ‘luck egalitarian’ account of fairness better explains the badness of exploitation. Luck egalitarians hold that there should be equality, apart from where inequalities are the result of the free choices of those made unequal. I argue here that this thesis is not able to adequately ground a normative complaint against exploitation. This suggests an incompleteness in luck egalitarianism. Moreover, a plausible way of filling that gap is to employ a standard of community of the sort discussed in previous chapters. Doing so not only showcases the application of that standard but also, given that the charge of exploitation is particularly important for socialists, cements the importance of a value of community in the socialist armoury.

1. Introduction

I take it that luck egalitarians¹ successfully maintain a condemnation of exploitation if they offer an account of the badness of exploitation that explains why it is bad,

¹ Or to be more precise luck egalitarians insofar as they are merely adherent of luck egalitarianism, for it is quite possible to be a luck egalitarian and, say, a communitarian too. That’s true even if you think these two standards are sometimes at odds.

whenever it occurs. We might call this type of explanation a *fundamental* explanation. An analogy: if I say racist abuse is bad (only) because it makes its victims feel scared or uncomfortable, then I have no grounds for continuing to object to it when the recipients are out of earshot, or are so used to abuse they no longer feel it is unpleasant. I haven't given a reason for objection to racist abuse that is fundamental in the relevant sense, and so have no complaint against racist abuse as such. The importance of this distinction will become apparent as we proceed.

It might be thought that exploitation is a minor concern for all it features in mainstream political theory. Our particular interest in exploitation here is partly a result of our occupation in the preceding chapters with a *socialist* ideal of community, given that the charge of exploitation has historically been important for socialists. However, what follows is not purely of interest for socialists. For while the question that forms the title of this chapter is certainly more momentous for those proponents of luck egalitarianism who are also socialists (such as G.A. Cohen), in fact *all* luck egalitarians would want to be able to give a satisfactory account of exploitation. Even non-socialists will recognise that exploitation is an important social and political bad, and thus that a failure to account for this would signal an important restriction on luck egalitarianism's power as a normative political theory. To that extent, what follows is of quite general interest.

The chapter proceeds as follows. Section two lays the theoretical groundwork for the rest of the chapter. The first part of the section considers when appeals to exploitation are appropriate and places some restrictions on the proper use of the concept. The second half demonstrates the importance of the distinctive *structure* of exploitation for understanding and assessing accounts of its badness.

Section two presents G.A. Cohen's luck egalitarian account of exploitation. Cohen's main contribution is to critique a popular position on the badness of exploitation adopted by John Roemer among others. But Cohen also takes a, somewhat speculative, positive position which can be reconstructed as the following set of statements.

- (1) All transfers that are exploitative are also unjust

- (2) Injustice occurs whenever an inequality is not attributable to differential choices on the part of the relevant affected agents [the luck egalitarian thesis].
- (3) A given transfer is exploitative if (and only if) it is (i) forced and (ii) unequal.
- (4) [by (1) and (3)] A given transfer is unjust if it is (i) forced and (ii) unequal.

After spelling out Cohen's position in the face of alternative interpretations, I challenge his account by presenting counter-examples of cases which are exploitative for Cohen (they are forced and unequal transfers) but which we nevertheless have good reason to think are not unjust. These counter-examples take the form - to use terminology that will be explained more fully shortly - of an existing unjust pre- or post-transfer state that renders some countervailing transfers not unjust. It follows that (4) is false – there are transfers that are forced and unequal, but not unjust. If we accept that this is an application of the luck egalitarian thesis (2) then Cohen's luck egalitarian account of exploitation fails.

I next consider whether it might nevertheless be the case that a *different* kind of luck egalitarian account that the mature Cohen rejected and which is similar to that endorsed by John Roemer could salvage the luck egalitarian position. That position argues that a transfer is exploitative when and because it is the result of an unjustly unequal pre-transfer distribution. In the latter part of section two I argue that this type of account cannot succeed. Quite apart from Cohen's worry that this would not give exploitation *distinctive* normative content, it is vulnerable to a range of cases whereby a transfer seems exploitative despite a just pre-transfer state.

The third and final substantive section of the chapter outlines the suitability of non-community as an explanation for the badness of exploitation. I argue that the specific features of the socialist ideal of communal reciprocity that we saw in chapter three are well suited to explain why exploitation is bad. Exploitation emerges as a particularly egregious violation of communal reciprocity: rather than wanting to use greater ability as a means to help others, exploitative transfers are characterised by the more powerful seeking to use that power to profit at the other's expense; and rather than wanting genuine reciprocity, exploitative transfers are those where there is an intentional imbalance between 'give' and 'take'. While it emerges that there

may be some cases where non-community is not a *sufficient* explanation for the charge of exploitation, and granted that many instances of exploitation are *also* bad because they are unfair, I suggest it is plausible that exploitation necessarily presupposes a breakdown in community. A final section concludes with some comments on the bigger picture.

2. What is exploitation?

What do we mean by exploitation? Discussion of exploitation is often confined to a relatively small set of problems, purely because of the historical use of the concept in the Marxist tradition. For Marx, the economic, and normative, heart of capitalism was the workplace – the arena where labour is used to create goods for market, and it has been in this sphere that exploitation has most often been understood.² But this historic emphasis on exploitation in the exchange of labour for wages has meant at least three unnecessary restrictions, which must be discarded.

First, Marx's focus on wage labour might lead us to believe that exploitation is confined merely to the labour market: the exchange between employee and employer of work for wages. However, Marx did not seem to think that this is the only place that exploitation occurred.³ Furthermore, what is absolutely clear is that using exploitation purely to describe interactions in this sphere is contrary to the legitimate use of the word in a huge range of contexts away from the factory or office floor where we routinely talk of, for example, child exploitation, sexual exploitation or the exploitation of circus animals.⁴ Our first step must therefore be to relax the stipulation that all exploitation occurs between employer and employee.

Second, the classical Marxist story reduces the way the degree of exploitation is measured purely to 'labour-time': a measure of the time taken to produce a given commodity under normal conditions. The means of measuring the extent to which an exchange is exploitative is given by the degree to which surplus is taken by the

² See e.g. Marx, *Capital*, esp. ch. 1.

³ There are various places where Marx uses exploitation to cover cases beyond the labour market, see e.g. McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, pp. 79, 288, 308, 348.

⁴ For a range of examples away from the sphere of production, see the first half of Alan Wertheimer's *Exploitation*, e.g. pp. 3-4. The class of cases that are my direct focus below might be loosely classed as 'economic exploitation', i.e. exploitation that occurs in the labour or credit market. But the point of raising these objections here are to point out that any theory of exploitation must look to have wider application than just these sorts of cases.

employer, and this is determined simply by whether the employee received remuneration commensurate with the labour-time he put in. However, this metric for exploitation is clearly similarly flawed: it is not just that its claim to accurately explain economic exchange value that has been discredited - though it has – but that the *normative* case for focus on labour-time looks just as weak in light of the kinds of examples just presented. The scale on which exploitation is measured must be much broader than Marx intended.⁵

Third, on some interpretations, the classical Marxist account of exploitation is purely ‘structural’, which is to say that the actors subject to exploitation claims are first classes and only derivatively individuals, as members of a given class.⁶ In this story there is no scope for individuals *as individuals* to exploit one another, merely for them to do so as members of either an exploiting and or exploited class. This status is determined by their material position, rather than their individual preferences. By contrast, I will take it in what follows that in any given set of property relations there is scope for both exploitative and non-exploitative transfers. It is not axiomatic that just because someone has some certain amount of property that they act exploitatively. We do not think that it is *impossible* for the Rothschilds or Gateses to act in a non-exploitative manner and this suggests individual decisions about what they do with the property they possess also plays a role in determining whether or not exploitation occurs.

In these three ways, exploitation is a much broader idea than has traditionally been entertained in the Marxist tradition from which it originated. Having identified these constraints, we are in a position to offer a positive definition. In the most general terms, I will take it that exploitation occurs when one person or group *takes advantage* of another person or group. We can distinguish two features of exploitations complaints so defined, that they describe (i) a transfer, that is (ii)

⁵ For critical discussion of the labour theory of value see Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, pp. 127-141. On the connection to exploitation see G.A. Cohen, ‘The Labour Theory of Value and the Concept of Exploitation’.

⁶ For an elucidation of this idea see Roemer ‘New Directions in the Marxian theory of Exploitation and Class’ in Roemer (ed.) *Analytical Marxism*, e.g. p. 90. It is worth noting that if Marx did characterize exploitation in this way (and I say merely report the interpretation here) he probably did so for the same reasons as Roemer – as a simplifying assumption for modeling economic interaction.

between persons. It is worth briefly fleshing out what these two characteristics entail.

To first see the way in which exploitation is a transfer, we can distinguish between two relevant types of problem that typically arise in normative theorising. Firstly, *static problems* which are problems of the sort ‘which of distribution x , with features f_n and distribution y , with features g_n should be preferred?’. Thus, we might ask which one of the distributions of resources between two persons (a,b) is better: $(5,4)$ or $(3,3)$? By contrast, *dynamic problems* are those where there exist at least two temporally differentiated states and where the former state affects the latter. Examples of dynamic problems include ‘should an incentive be given to person a at t_1 , so that she produces more at t_2 ?’.

Appeals to exploitation are dynamic problems, which can usefully be divided into three stages: a pre-transfer state of affairs, a transfer and a post-transfer state.⁷ These are elaborated below, but couching exploitation in these terms immediately raises a question which does not apply if we conceive of exploitation as a static problem, namely, which *part(s)* of the exploitation story matter in deciding whether or not a given transfer is bad? The question is important. For example, and to use an case that will be relevant below, if all we care about is that the pre-transfer distribution of means of production is unimpeachable, then we might not have any reason (on the grounds of combating exploitation) to regulate market exchange, just so long as we are satisfied that everyone comes to the market with the appropriate stock of goods.

Not all dynamic problems are amenable to assessment on grounds of exploitation. The second condition described above, necessitates that the transfer must be *interpersonal*. To see the truth of this, we can imagine a divided world scenario where we assess the position of two persons, one on each side of the divide, who have no (past, present or future) contact with one another.⁸ Irrespective of whether it is possible to condemn their relative position on other grounds, whatever features the situation has, it’s surely incoherent to claim that either one

⁷ ‘State of affairs’ rather than the narrower and more common ‘distribution’ to allow for those such as Hillel Steiner who think that rights-violations rather than morally condemnable distributions are the relevant antecedent bad. See Steiner, ‘A Liberal Theory of Exploitation’.

⁸ This type of example was first aired in Derek Parfit. ‘Equality and Priority’, p. 206.

could be *exploiting* the other, given that there is no transfer between them.⁹ Or else, we can imagine other types of case where there is a transfer between a person and a non-human such as if someone throws a pound coin into a river and gets back only a splash of water. This can't be exploitation either.¹⁰

This second condition does outlaw the use of the term exploitation to describe common-place statements such as 'American gold-mining companies are exploiting the Amazon basin'. It may be the case that the exploitation that occurs here has a plausible interpersonal basis, such as the use of land that is farmed by indigenous peoples in the area, or it is taken to be under the common ownership of the people in whose country the mining occurs. In these cases a charge of exploitation might still stand. However, where this is not the case, we have other words that better fit the (mis)use of natural resources in this way: 'plundered', or 'abused', or 'mismanaged' for example, and which don't require us to anthropomorphise non-sentient objects.

With these conceptual stipulations in place, we can now turn to the structure of exploitation complaints. It follows from our tri-partite description of dynamic problems that there are three types of way in which exploitative transfers can be criticised.

- (i) Antecedently bad – if the exploitative transfer is not bad for its own sake or in itself, but wrong when, and because, it is tainted by the pre-transfer bad which caused it.¹¹ A more general example: my buying a copy of *Capital* is not bad in itself, but may be so if I stole the money with which to buy it.
- (ii) Subsequently bad – if the exploitative transfer is not bad for its own sake but wrong when, and because, it is tainted by a bad which it causes: shooting a gun might not be a bad thing to do, but shooting a gun when it results in an innocent being killed is.

⁹ Note that this condition does not need to mandate either physical proximity, or direct (i.e. unmediated) transfer between the relevant parties. Exploitation can occur via credit markets for example as well as by more traditional modes of exchange.

¹⁰ It take it that animals can also be exploited, although this claim is not pursued here.

¹¹ I take the discussion the double distinction between intrinsic/extrinsic and instrumental/non-instrumental in Christine Korsgaard, 'Two Distinctions in Goodness' to be definitive in my choice of words here.

- (iii) Bad for its own sake – if the exploitative transfer itself is bad; the normative buck stops there: slavery, irrespective of its causes or consequences, is a bad such that if we know that slavery occurs in society *a*, that is sufficient for condemning *a*.

This apparatus will be put to use in explaining two different luck egalitarian accounts of exploitation, and the objections to them, in the next section to which we now turn.

2. G.A. Cohen and the luck egalitarian account of exploitation

Content aside, which of these structural accounts can offer the best account of exploitation? One suggestion is made by G.A. Cohen in chapter 8 of his book *Self-ownership, Freedom and Inequality*.¹² Here Cohen's aim is to justify the particular importance of exploitation as a concept. He does so in response to claims by John Roemer that we have no reason to care about any exploitative transfer as such, but merely when (and then because) it is a result of an unjust pre-transfer distribution.¹³

Cohen's important argument against Roemer's claim that exploitation has no distinctive normative force is precisely to challenge the latter's account of the normative *structure* of the exploitation complaint. While he agrees with Roemer that it is a typically unequal (and potentially unjust) distribution of productive assets which is the *positive, or physical* cause of exploitative transfers, he maintains that the *normative* cause of our condemnation of exploitation is rather the transfer or 'flow' itself from exploiter to exploited, when it is the result of an unjust pre-transfer distribution. In its pithiest formulation, Cohen puts the point in the following way:

¹² While Cohen writes about exploitation elsewhere, for example: 'The Labour Theory of Value and the Concept of Exploitation' and chapter 6 of *Self-ownership, Freedom, and Equality*, I shall take chapter 8 as the best source of his mature views, for reasons expanded on below. Cohen also refers to exploitation in his paper 'On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice', p. 908, when he says, tantalisingly: "the primary egalitarian impulse is to extinguish the influence on distribution of both exploitation and brute luck". He does not expand upon this statement, but this assertion is dissected at some length in Michael Otsuka's excellent paper 'Justice as Fairness: Luck Egalitarian, Not Rawlsian', which is discussed below.

¹³ Roemer, 'Should Marxists be Interested in Exploitation?', pp. 30-65.

“the [exploitative] flow is unjust because it reflects an unjust division of resources which is unjust because it tends to produce precisely such a flow”.¹⁴

As Cohen admits, it might seem that this structure has bought relevance for exploitation only at the price of incoherence, as the formulation above now seems circular.¹⁵ For it seems that we cannot know whether the ‘flow’ is unjust without assessing the injustice of the pre-transfer distribution, but that at the same time we also cannot know whether the pre-transfer distribution is unjust before assessing whether the flow it tends to produce is unjust. Cohen attempts to show that his position is not in fact circular, on the grounds that the first part of the sentence just quoted (“the flow is unjust because it reflects an unjust division of resources”) expresses a merely positive or physical causal statement while the second part (“an unjust division of resources ... is unjust because it tends to produce precisely such a flow”) expresses a normative statement. Cohen thereby clarifies that for him, and contra Roemer, the normative heart of the exploitation complaint is located in the transfer or ‘flow’ itself – which in the central Marxian case of wage-labour is the extraction of product from the worker.¹⁶

Cohen’s account then, gives us a (derivative) reason to object to an unequal distribution of means of production: because it has an intrinsic tenancy to cause unjust transfers. It also gives us a (fundamental) reason to object to the exploitative transfer itself, on the grounds of its injustice.

Before we move on to discuss the substance of Cohen’s account it is worth looking at a different interpretation to this crucial part of Cohen’s argument, which is instructive in that I think it misinterprets what I have presented as the central *structural* claim. Getting to the bottom of the disagreement can aid us in clarifying Cohen’s position.¹⁷

¹⁴ Cohen, *Self-ownership*, p. 199.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ For the purposes of exploring Cohen’s exploitation, I follow him in assuming that the pre-transfer distribution is formed entirely of productive resources, which have the sole purpose of producing things. Consequently, the injustice of the pre-transfer distribution is *entirely* derivative of the injustice of the exploitative transfer itself. See *ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

¹⁷ Another and otherwise excellent paper, by Michael Otsuka (‘Justice as Fairness: Luck Egalitarian, Not Rawlsian’) also seems to misinterpret Cohen on this point. This point of Cohen analysis (the normative locus of exploitation) is not Otsuka’s main focus in that paper - it is only dealt with

In a recent paper Nicholas Vrousalis signs Cohen up to what he calls ‘the distributive paradigm’ which holds that “The labourer is exploited, and the capitalist exploits, if and only if the exchange in which they are engaged occurs against the background of an unjust distribution of alienable resources.”¹⁸ He further elaborates that this is *not* “a causal view” about the extent to which that distribution propagates injustice in transfer, but rather “The distributive paradigm posits a necessary and sufficient condition for exploitation”.¹⁹ He sets this view out more formally as the claim that Cohen thinks “A exploits B if and only if the exchange in which they are engaged occurs against the background of an unjust distribution, that is, a distribution involving involuntary disadvantage.”²⁰ In his recent work Vrousalis also refers to the ‘Cohen/Roemer’ view, identifying them as essentially of the same view on this subject.²¹

As should be apparent from what I have said above, Vrousalis’s view on the structure of Cohen’s account is wholly ill-founded. Cohen does think that for exploitation to be unjust there must be an unjust background distribution but contra Vrousalis he thinks that this injustice is, for the purposes of defining exploitation, wholly derivative of the injustice it begets in the transfer. Cohen puts the contrary view to the Vrousalis interpretation succinctly in another passage where he says clearly: “forced extraction of a surplus [i.e. the exploitative flow or transfer] is wrong because of what it is, and not because it inherits the wrong of something else.”²²

Just as persuasive as the textual evidence presented is the context of Cohen’s argument. The very purpose of the chapter on exploitation in *Self-ownership* is to dispute John Roemer’s claim that the badness of exploitation is purely derivative of the unjust distribution of private property.²³ Given that, it’s entirely implausible for Cohen to take the structural position that Vrousalis attributes to him - Roemer’s position - which is the very position he is critiquing.

incidentally - so I don’t discuss it here. I do think, however, that what appears on e.g. p. 217 of that paper is contradicted by the account just relayed, and the further particulars given in what follows.

¹⁸ ‘G.A. Cohen on Exploitation’, p. 153.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 154

²⁰ Vrousalis, ‘Exploitation, Vulnerability and Social Domination’, p. 148.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Cohen, *Self-ownership*, p. 199.

²³ Substantively, Roemer’s account is, of course very different to the classical Marxist reliance on self-ownership to ground exploitation. Structurally, though the accounts are the same.

How to explain this mismatch between what we have seen Cohen thinks, and how he has been interpreted? Partly, it is down to the technical and somewhat opaque nature of the key chapter 8 of *Self-Ownership*. But it is also due to the fact that Cohen's view seems to have changed by the time of the publication of that work in 1996, and in particular compared to an earlier, more influential article published in 1988 entitled 'The Labour Theory of Value and the Concept of Exploitation'. In that article, which Vrousalis cites first in his discussion of Cohen, he does indeed appear to endorse what Vrousalis calls the distributive paradigm saying that "A flow of value ... constitutes exploitation only if the contract it fulfills arises out of an unfair bargaining situation".²⁴ There is nevertheless is good reason to think that Cohen's view in the 1996 chapter supersedes the 1988 paper. This is partly just because it comes later and so has a better claim to present Cohen's mature view. But more importantly it is because Cohen explicitly states that the 1996 chapter is his way of *reconciling* his earlier views which were ambiguous on this very point – of where the normative heart of the exploitation story lies. He says, referring to two previous chapters in the book which are the result of earlier work: "I seem to say in Chapter 5... the initial unequal asset distribution is unjust, and that the consequent flow of product from worker to capitalist is unjust *for that reason*. Yet, in Chapter 6, the emphasis shifts to the forced product flow itself... so that the asset distribution counts as unjust precisely *because* it gives rise to such a flow."²⁵ The answer to the conundrum, as we have seen above is that, according to Cohen, these positions need not be contradictory, or circular, because the first statement gives a merely positive explanation for the incidence of exploitation, while the latter provides a normative explanation.²⁶

This clears up the important question of the correct interpretation of the structure of Cohen's account of exploitation. However, we still do not have a good sense of its content, and here Cohen is unfortunately less clear. His main aim in his mature account of exploitation is to resolve the structural question in the way we have seen in the first part of this section, so the question of content remains

²⁴ 'The Labour Theory of Value...', p. 234.

²⁵ *Self-ownership*, p. 197; emphasis Cohen's.

²⁶ For what it's worth, I remain sceptical that Cohen's post-hoc justification of the consistency of his previous work succeeds. But for better or worse that is his position.

somewhat neglected. Nevertheless from what he does say we can piece together what looks like two, necessary and sufficient, conditions for exploitation to occur. The first is that the transfer between exploiter and exploited must be *forced*. The second condition is that the transfer is *unequal* or, as Cohen sometimes puts it *unreciprocated*. At is it stands both of these conditions are ambiguous, and we will need to interrogate them more fully below, but we might think that, at least at this level of abstraction, this account of exploitation *looks* like a luck egalitarian account. It certainly seems to include the generic luck egalitarian features we described at the start of the chapter: (in)equality and (lack of) choice. To help us proceed, we can recollect the Cohen's four claims as presented earlier:

- (1) All transfers that are exploitative are also unjust
- (2) Injustice occurs whenever an inequality is not attributable to differential choices on the part of the relevant affected agents [the luck egalitarian thesis].
- (3) A given transfer is exploitative if (and only if) it is (i) forced and (ii) unequal.
- (4) [by (1) and (3)] A given transfer is unjust if it is (i) forced and (ii) unequal.

The distinctive feature of Cohen's set of claims is, for our purposes, the association of forced and unequal transfer with exploitation, and exploitation with injustice, as set out in (4). Note that Cohen is not making the claim that injustice is exhausted by the set of exploitative claims – that is, that all injustices are necessarily exploitive. The claim being made is rather that an exploitative transfer is a sufficient rather than necessary condition of injustice.²⁷ That a given transfer is forced and unequal is, furthermore, sufficient for that transfer to be exploitative.

Cohen illustrates what he means by 'forced' in this context by giving an example of its absence, whereby two people from an equal starting point engage in transfers that result in unequal reward, but purely because of differences in their respective preferences. In particular, Cohen notes that if differential reward merely reflects the fact that the first person puts a greater weight on remunerated work, while the second puts more emphasis on unremunerated leisure, then it will not be

²⁷ Does it follow that Cohen has more than one conception of justice? It seems so, though this is not acknowledged here. See Otsuka, 'Justice as Fairness' for comment.

unjust, or exploitative.²⁸ Elsewhere he suggests that he has in mind ‘economic’ force or compulsion in particular, which he contrasts to the physical force used in a highway robbery (‘your money or your life’). The former, we might conjecture, would include the power of managers of firms to withdraw employment from workers (‘your money (i.e. your profitable work), or your job’) which we could describe as a *capitalist* exploitation given that the power of the compulsion stems from capitalist ownership of means of production.²⁹

I take it that an equal, or as Cohen sometimes refers to it, reciprocal, transfer between parties holds when the benefits (or costs) which accrue to each are met by a proportionate reward (or loss), absent the extenuating circumstance just described: that the inequality or lack of proportion is voluntary. Again, Cohen does not go into any detail here. But we can surmise from his varied examples that he means the equality of transfer to be measured in a way which includes both money and physical resources, as in the case of a highway robbery, and the welfare of the parties involved, as in the case of the work-loving and work-averse individuals mentioned in first case in the last paragraph. This heterogeneity recalls Cohen’s influential hybrid metric of ‘advantage’ in his influential paper ‘On the Currency of Distributive Justice’.

With these brief details in hand, we are ready to interrogate Cohen’s argument. However, it quickly becomes clear, once we have set out Cohen’s assertions in the stark way above it becomes clear that his account is vulnerable to counter-example. For we can surely imagine a number of cases which involve forced, unequal transactions which are nevertheless not unjust. Consider the following three cases.

Criminal: After committing crimes which damage the homes of a number of innocent people, prisoner is made to perform community service to compensate the damage he has done to his victims.

²⁸ *Self-ownership*, p. 205.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

Robin Hood: In 12th century England, Robin Hood robs rich merchants to redistribute their wealth to the people in nearby villages.³⁰

Imperialism: After the British imperial fleet lands in the South African cape, the local Xhosa tribe act in response to the (perceived) threat of expansionism and capture a British garrison who they force to hand over their weapons.

The threat to Cohen's account from these examples should be clear. While all of these are interpersonal transfers, which seem amenable to judgement as to whether they are exploitative, none of the transfers seem unjust. Yet they should be on Cohen's terms for each is a forced, unequal transfer.

The three cases differ slightly from each other. In the case of the criminal, the countervailing transfer is made directly from the person that has committed the putative injustice, to those who have been on the receiving end. In the case of Robin Hood the redistribution is between the merchant class and a third party - the serfs or agricultural labourers who are the recipients of the proceeds of the robbery. Finally, in the case of imperialism, the transfer is made not against past injustice, as appears to be the case in the first two examples, but against the threat of future injustice by British imperial forces.

What drives our intuition that these transfers are not unjust? Using the structural framework outlined earlier we can see that it is precisely the fact that the pre-transfer state of affairs or, in the imperialism case, the expected post-transfer state of affairs, are unjust which mean that the forced, unequal transfers which do take place do not seem unjust. Because Cohen's account of exploitation is focused *entirely* on the transfer (recall that, as far as exploitation goes, he makes clear that any injustice in the background distribution is entirely derivative of the transfer itself) it is unable to account for these features and so is unable to distinguish

³⁰ In a footnote, Cohen himself makes passing mention of Robin Hood-style cases, but does not seem to fully appreciate the challenge for his account. See *Self-ownership*, p. 198, n. 5.

between transfers that are just or unjust dependent upon their causes or consequences.³¹

Now *perhaps* an advocate of Cohen's account of exploitation might argue that in the criminal case at least, rather than seeing the act of community service as a self-contained transfer from the criminal to the community which he previously vandalised, we should see the community service as the second part of a two-part transfer which was previously left un-reciprocated, with the first part the initial crime where the community suffered costs which the criminal did not. The act of community service then is merely the reciprocation of a previously unreciprocated cost via the legal system, and so not exploitative on Cohen's account. But even if we accept this is true in the criminal case, such a response cannot answer the Robin Hood case, for there is nothing to suggest that the peasants who benefit from Robin Hood's cash owe their disadvantaged position to a prior transfer from them to the merchant class at all, never mind the *particular* merchants who happened to be travelling through Sherwood Forest and who are targeted by Robin Hood. And so there is no way of seeing the transfer from the merchants to the peasants via Robin Hood as reciprocation of a previously unreciprocated act. It seems it must remain exploitative on Cohen's account.

Let's take stock. We have shown that it is looks implausible to say, as Cohen does, that all forced and unequal transfers are unjustly exploitative. To the extent that we accept that Cohen's account of exploitation can be accurately described as a broadly luck egalitarian one, then Cohen's attempt to account for exploitation in luck egalitarian terms must fail.

Before concluding we should also consider what other avenues are open to the luck egalitarian. What other non-Cohenite ways of explaining the badness of exploitation in terms of justice might the luck egalitarian attempt? The obvious alternative is the position taken by John Roemer which we touched on above, and which we saw was roughly the same position as that taken by Cohen in his earlier writings, notably in his 1988 paper on the labour theory of value. This position holds

³¹ Are these transfers nevertheless exploitative even though they are not unjust? I leave this question to one side for the moment as we are working within Cohen's parameters that exploitation is (a form of) injustice. In the next stipulation, we relax this stipulation.

that exploitation occurs when and because there is an injustice in the pre-transfer state of affairs. In particular, when there is an inequality in the distribution of productive assets with which agents enter the market which is not merely due to choice on the part of those agents. Is it plausible that this would be a better luck egalitarian basis for complaints of exploitation?

The first thing to say is that a reversion from the mature Cohen's position to the earlier position is not without cost. For part of the polemical motivation for Cohen's move away from 'the distributive paradigm' was a recognition of the validity of John Roemer's argument that such a position meant that there was no reason to give exploitation as such *distinctive* normative weight. Roemer, we can recall made the argument in a paper called 'Should Marxists be interested in exploitation?'. His answer was 'no'.³²

But let us suppose that the luck egalitarian, following the problems signalled by the counter-examples brought above against Cohen's mature position, was willing to bite the bullet and sacrifice Cohen's desire for any normative distinctiveness for exploitation, in favour of retaining the power of luck egalitarianism to explain why it is bad. I still do not think that it succeeds. For evidence, we can turn to Michael Otsuka's recent paper on exploitation, which was mentioned in passing above.³³

"... consider an example of price gouging that emerges against a background of equality of advantage, which includes an equal opportunity to insure against a natural disaster, where such insurance provides a reasonable, risk-free option. Suppose that someone of sound mind nevertheless exercises an option not to take out insurance and ends up needing assistance when a highly improbable natural disaster strikes. Taking advantage of his plight, you manage to sell him necessities at an exorbitant price that it is nevertheless rational for him to accept, where this price is his binding himself to a sweatshop labour contract. It seems intuitively clear that you thereby exploit

³² I consider in the concluding section whether Cohen was wise to make the distinctiveness of exploitation is important.

³³ While I suggested in a footnote that I was at odds with Otsuka on the interpretation of Cohen's mature position on exploitation, it is precisely this disagreement that explains why Otsuka's reading is relevant here.

him. Cohen, however, is debarred from condemning this price-gouging transaction as exploitative.”³⁴

I think the Otsuka example is persuasive. The intuitive weight is this: If people make bad choices which are nevertheless *genuine* choices such that the inequality which obtains as a result is permissible on the grounds of luck egalitarian justice, then *there is no luck egalitarian reason to object to that inequality being leveraged against the weaker party, to the benefit of the stronger, even though in many such instances we describe such behaviour as exploitative.*

We can see this more generally in the Aesop’s fable derived case of the ant and grasshopper which Cohen himself presents as a paradigmatic case of the fairness intuition which gives luck egalitarianism its distinctive content.³⁵ In such cases, Cohen is clear that it is the ability of his brand of radical equality of opportunity to allow the industrious ants to be permitted to refuse the feckless grasshopper free bed and board after the grasshopper has spent the summer playing his guitar rather than gathering food, that distinguishes it from simple equality. It follows from this idea that so long as there isn’t some other relevant factor determining the different choices that the grasshopper and the ants make, such that they can’t be described as truly voluntary, then there is no means of objecting to whatever negative consequences follow. One such relevant factor would be information. Grasshopper types can’t be said to have chosen what befalls them if they didn’t know about it. But if we assume that the grasshopper *does* know the consequences of his (in)action, and has the genuine opportunity to decide among either path, then there is no luck egalitarian objection to what follows. So imagine the grasshopper fails to collect food during the summer even though he knows he may struggle to find enough over the winter, and that if he has to rely on the ants for nourishment they will only agree to do so if they (a) loan him the money to buy the food at an extortionate interest rate which leave them indebted to them for the rest of his life, or (b) force him to work for them for free for the next 10 years. These are paradigmatic examples of exploitation, yet the early Cohen/Roemer luck egalitarian

³⁴ ‘Justice as Fairness: Luck Egalitarian not Rawlsian’, p. 220.

³⁵ ‘Luck and Equality: A Reply to Hurley’, p. 444.

position just outline cannot obviously account for them. This suggests that we must therefore also reject this alternative position.

3. A communitarian account of exploitation

The two parts of the last section have shown that two different luck egalitarian attempts to account for the badness of exploitation look unlikely to succeed. The first, which is Cohen's mature view that a transfer is exploitative when it is forced and unequal falls prey to counter examples where there is an unjust pre-transfer state of affairs, or potentially unjust post-transfer state of affairs, which seem to render the putatively exploitative transfers not unjust. The second, which is Cohen's earlier view and also John Roemer's view, not only fails to give exploitation distinctive normative content as Cohen intended, but is vulnerable to counter-examples where a just pre-transfer state of affairs nevertheless gives rise to exploitative transfers. In light of these critical comments, in this section I will sketch a positive account of exploitation. This account is not a full one, to provide a comprehensive account of exploitation requires more than one chapter, but it is a communitarian one, and I will attempt to show how the value of communal reciprocity as expanded on in chapter three is a better candidate than luck egalitarianism for explaining the badness of exploitation. In broad terms, the contention is that the badness of exploitation can be explained by the fact that a given exploitative interpersonal transfer is the result of the desire by one to profit at the expense of another.

We must first recall our initial thumbnail definition of exploitation: a transfer between one person or group, and another person or group such that the one takes advantage of the other. We can paint in broad outline how respect for communal reciprocity might ground such a complaint. Communal reciprocity asks that each seeks to promote the interests of others, commensurate with her ability to do so and subject to the condition that she can expect her good intention to be returned. We might think that the attractive parts of each of the two different kinds of luck egalitarian accounts discussed above find resonance here. On the first it was the non-reciprocal actions of one agent towards another that was the crux of the complaint; communal reciprocity satisfies that need for the interaction to be one of

‘give’ as well as ‘take’. On the second, it was an objection to the unequal power over the terms of transfer, due to the pre-transfer state of affairs, which gave the account its intuitive plausibility. Our account of communal reciprocity recognises the allure of that – it is the duty of those who have greater power to do more to assist others; the use of that power *against* others would be the most egregious violation. The greater the power that person *a* has to benefit person *b*, then all else equal, the greater the benefit *a* wants to bestow on *b*. The power of *a* with respect to *b* and the benefit that *a* wants to bestow are perfectly covariant. But under situations of exploitation, we might reasonably assume the relationship between these variables is perfectly *contravariant* – the greater the power that *a* has over *b*, the *less* *a* wants to give to *b*.

We can now look at little harder at the badness of exploitation using the account of communal reciprocity outlined in chapter three, and the two parts of that value which were discussed in section two of that chapter – concern for others, and reciprocity. Exploitation is conceptualised as a particularly severe type of infringement of these standards. Two preliminary points are helpful in framing the discussion. First, the description just given does not say that communal reciprocity and exploitation occupy the *same* conceptual space. There are plenty of acts which are plausibly non-communal, for example a government cutting welfare benefits, but which are not normally described as exploitative. Second, and relatedly, nor will our description of an exploitative transfer be merely our description of an infringement of the value of communal reciprocity. Our use of that value here is an application of communal reciprocity, so instances of exploitation will be but a subset of types of infringement of communal reciprocity – specifically, those involving interpersonal transfers. To put it a slightly different way - exploitation is not a *fundamental* normative concern the way communal reciprocity is.³⁶ And while this latter point does not follow from (and is not required) by the argument here, I think it makes intuitive sense and helps clarify our discussion. The thesis here then is that the violation of communal reciprocity provides a good fundamental explanation for our objection to exploitation, and better than the fairness-based accounts offered by luck egalitarianism.

³⁶ See further, section four below.

On to the first of our two parts of communal reciprocity. An exploiter typically shows no concern for the exploited, and indeed seeks to profit at her expense. This motivation is surely always present, even in Marxist stories about maldistribution of means of production which typically elide this feature. The exploiter takes advantage of the exploited and this requires at least that he has greater concern for his welfare than hers.³⁷ All else equal, and to that extent, this is a violation of the first part of the ideal of communal reciprocity.

It could be objected in response to this point that it must surely be possible to *unknowingly* exploit someone, and so not possesses the required motivation. It is hard to think of cases where this would be true but perhaps we might think of a nineteenth century slave-owner who has been born and raised on a slave plantation and can conceive of no alternative to the incarceration of Africans; or an early twentieth century British colonial administrator who believes (wrongly) that the best course for the native population is to live by British imperial standards. Pinning down the relevant intuitive response to these cases is difficult; it's hard to imagine a case where a (free) slave-owner doesn't see the alternative to slave-owning, or a British administrator doesn't see the extractive nature of colonial rule. But I think that the appropriate response to these cases is to say that they are not exploitative.

This is clearer if we take a less realistic case. Imagine that rather than just being ignorant because of his upbringing, our slave owner was fitted with an electronic chip at birth that forced him to conserve the owner-slave relationship on his plantation perhaps because (the chip told him) that would be best for the slaves. He carries out his day-to-day business just as any other slave owner would but with no choice to deviate from such activity. The slaves know that he is 'programmed' to act in this way.³⁸ Is this still exploitation? Clearly there is still a bad occurring, namely a number of people are being held as slaves. This is bad enough for us to condemn the situation and wish for urgent rectification. But it is difficult to call that bad exploitation without the conscious intent of the putative exploiter. Of course, if we

³⁷ Might there be cases where one person exploits another, but for the gain of a more needy third party? This would perhaps be uncommon but it might occur and in this case I think we would be hard-pressed to call it exploitation. Cases of this sort are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

³⁸ As explained in chapter three there can be no attempt to maintain community in our sense without recognition of the motive for action by all relevant affected parties.

subsequently found out that the electronic chip was purposefully fitted by someone precisely to ingrain the status-quo on the plantation then I think we would think there was exploitation going on – of the slaves, and perhaps the slave-owner too, by whoever fitted the chip.

What about if the opposite occurs, that a putative exploiter intends to enforce a transfer that is harmful to the other party, but fails to, or perhaps, to take the example its fullest extent, even benefits the other?³⁹ Does communal reciprocity commit us to saying that cases of this type are nevertheless exploitative? Using the conceptual apparatus used above we can distinguish between two variants of this question. On the first the putative exploiter succeeds in bringing about a transfer that he thinks is harmful but this results in a post-transfer state that is not harmful (and may even be beneficial). On the second, the putative exploiter tries but fails to bring about a transfer that he thinks is harmful to the other. Neither are entirely straightforward to make sense of, but the first is easier than the second.

In the first case, I think we do find such cases exploitative. On this variant the transfer results in a post-transfer state that is to the disproportionate benefit of the person *b*, but the transfer itself *is* the result of person *a*'s ill intent. Consider by way of example a case where an employer intends to cut his employee's pay to a pittance despite the continuing extremely profitable (to the firm) work she does. The poverty that the worker consequently suffers means she has to sell her car and walk everywhere. However, and unforeseen by the employer, it turns out that the exercise makes the employee much happier, to the extent that she is better off after taking the pay cut.⁴⁰ My intuition here is that this case is nevertheless still exploitative. For evidence that this intuition is not entirely idiosyncratic, I note Jonathan Wolff's conclusion on this score, where he asks whether a tough manager who acts with selfish intent but whose employee unforeseeably flourishes in such

³⁹ I mean 'harmful' here in a broad and non-committal sense; more specifically I mean harm as non-reciprocity, but this is discussed below.

⁴⁰ For those who are worried this example is just a case of competing welfare/resources metrics, they can assume also that the worker finds a big pot of money by the side of a footpath that he now walks along to work. I still consider the employee's actions to be exploitative.

conditions might nevertheless exploit that employee. Wolff similarly concludes that he does.⁴¹

The second variant is more difficult. Consider a case similar to that of the first, but where the employer means to cut the employee's pay despite the latter's profitable work, but in the course of making the change by electronic transfer accidentally adds a few extra zeros to the end of the payment amount and so ends up sending the employee a huge amount of money. Those who I have spoken to about such a case suggest that our intuitions on this are unclear. For some the ill-intent is of the employer means that he conducts the transaction with exploitative intent, and that fact infects our normative assessment of the transfer itself and leads us to describe it as exploitative despite the large flow of money from employer to employee. For others, this is best described as a case where the employer intended to exploit the employee but failed to do so, and given that he failed to exploit the employee he can't therefore *in fact* have exploited her. Let us assume the latter, more pessimistic, interpretation for our account is right. What implication does this have? Simply, infringement of communal reciprocity becomes a necessary but not sufficient condition. While anti-communal motivation must be present it is not enough, for the exploiter must also to succeed in bringing that motivation to bear on the transfer itself.

I am minded to accept the restriction of the explanatory power of the community-based account in this way. For if we are to avoid being drawn into reductionism, it is important to leave open the possibility that this more nuanced answer may be the right one. Application of fundamental principles always leaves open the possibility that our intuitions about a particular bad may be the result of more than one such principle. However, we should not overstate the power of this case: even on this more pessimistic interpretation, communal reciprocity remains a central standard by which to judge the degree of exploitation present and to understand why it is bad - a feature which was lacking in the luck egalitarian accounts discussed above.

⁴¹ 'Marx and Exploitation', p. 115.

Talking about these intention-dependence of the communitarian account brings us to an important advantage of understanding the badness of exploitation as a transfer that egregiously violates communal reciprocity when, to return to the example of the colonial administrator, we come across transparently exploitative cases that nevertheless redound to the benefit of the exploited party, compared to a counterfactual where that transfer didn't take place. Some people think that the building of railways in India in the nineteenth century is such a case. It is often alleged (and in any case we shall assume) that these railways were built purely for the British to extract raw materials and labour, and not for the benefit of the local population. But let's also assume that, as some think, India benefitted as an unintended consequence of the railways being built because they have been able to use this infrastructure for other valuable ends, and wouldn't have been able to build it without British support. This is a classic case of exploitation, similar in content to what is often claimed of the market exchange of labour for wages (even exploited workers are almost always better off in work than out of it). My community-based account allows the exploitativeness of the transfer to be assessed independently of the benefits that accrue to the exploited party. Thus in the case of the railways in colonial India we are able to retain the common-sense judgement, that British rule in this respect was both good because beneficial in providing important infrastructure benefits, but bad in that it was an instance of exploitation, i.e. an instance of the British using the Indians and their natural resources purely for British gain. To be sure, there are other types of account that are able to make this distinction, so it might not *uniquely* identify communal reciprocity as the best account of the badness of exploitation, but the fact that we are able to make it speaks to its plausibility.

With reference to the second part of the idea of communal reciprocity that was expanded on in chapter three: exploitative transfers are also non-reciprocal transfers. It is not harm as such, but lack of reciprocity that matters. For if a firm is losing money it need not be exploitative for employees to take a pay cut if the employer also takes an appropriately commensurate reduction.

What about a situation where there are two entirely self-interested market participants? Self-interest is reciprocated. As was explained in chapter three, communal reciprocity is not satisfied but violated in this situation, for reciprocity

without concern for the other is no kind of community at all. This raises the possibility of what Marx, in *The German Ideology*, recognised as ‘mutual exploitation’ – where both parties to the transfer can exploit each other.⁴² But it is nevertheless worth bearing in mind that all else equal, it will be the stronger party that has the greater duty to cater for the needs of the other, so a reciprocal transfer in this instance will clearly not mean an *equal* transfer, of say money or other resources. It follows that even apparently reciprocal self-interest need not be in fact reciprocal if it occurs alongside a power imbalance. With greater power, communal reciprocity says, comes greater responsibility and failure to exercise that can lead to exploitation even in circumstances of mutual self-interest, say where neither the employee nor the employer cares for one another.

Finally, it is worth saying something about the space that this approach to grounding exploitation leaves for claims about fairness and justice. One way of describing the position of justice in the communitarian account is to say that there can be fair as well as unfair exploitation. We might think that the price-gouging case raised by Otsuka is one such case. However, this does not mean we should discard all connection between fairness and exploitation, though I think it will remain contingent rather than necessary. It can’t be established before the event, but I think that is reasonable to say that most exploitation will be unfair, notably in the early Cohen/Roemer sense of there being an unfair inequality in the pre-transfer state of affairs. Most inequalities in bargaining power, clearly including those examples of imperialism and slavery just mentioned, as well as others of labour market exploitation and sexual exploitation do involve exactly such unfair inequalities, and this gives us additional reason to condemn these kind of transfers; they are unfair or unjust as well as exploitative. However, if what has been said above is right, then it is more plausible to suggest that it is not fairness but community that has a central role in explaining the badness of exploitation.

⁴² McLellan (ed.) ‘The German Ideology’, pp. 201; 203. It is, incidentally, difficult to see how a fairness-based account of exploitation can account for this phenomenon given that, in a two person situation, the unfair disadvantage of one is typically the unfair advantage of the other.

4. Conclusion

We saw in section two that the proximate motivation for G.A. Cohen's mature account of exploitation was John Roemer's article 'Should Marxists be Interested in Exploitation?', and that Roemer answered 'no'. Has the communitarian account of exploitation provided an explanation for the badness of exploitation that would ameliorate Cohen's resistance to Roemer's answer? The answer here is 'yes and no'. It does in that it provides an explanation of badness which, as Cohen intended with his positive account, locates the badness of exploitation in the transfer itself – it is not parasitic on features of the pre-transfer distribution, as Roemer's account is.

However, what it doesn't do is to provide exploitation with *distinctive* normative content, which is Cohen's other aim. For community, as we have seen is a more general normative standard, that accounts for more than just the badness of exploitation. To this extent I find myself in agreement with the sentiment Jon Elster expresses when he says "Exploitation, when wrong, is wrong not just because it is exploitation but because of some further features. Hence, the concept of exploitation has mainly a descriptive and heuristic function, which, in any actual inquiry into social injustice, can be a very important one".⁴³ Elster's point is a constructive one for it allows some normative role for exploitation even though we discard the idea of exploitation as a *unique* kind of badness. In our case, that normative role is to signify a severe infringement of a standard of community.

What then is the practical upshot of our conclusion? One main conclusion if the account sketched above is right is that anyone who takes exploitation seriously cannot be relaxed (to put the point in a familiar Marxist frame) about the use to which justly owned means of production are put. More broadly, the market behaviour of individuals still must remain under scrutiny even if the stock of assets which they bring to market is part of a fair distribution. This view might be thought to be at odds with some variants of left-libertarianism and, perhaps, of market socialism which recommend that contractual market interactions should be allowed

⁴³ *An Introduction to Karl Marx*, p. 196,

a free hand so long as starting points are properly configured.⁴⁴ I take up this line of inquiry more fully in the next chapter.

⁴⁴ The next chapter deals with one self-declared left-libertarian (Hillel Steiner) and one self-described market socialist (David Miller).

6

What's wrong with markets?

Socialists have traditionally been critical of the use of the market to organise economic activity. This chapter examines one ground of criticism – that markets inhibit community - and seeks to evaluate it. Our starting point once again is G.A. Cohen's short book *Why Not Socialism?* which provocatively answers that the use of markets *does* violate community. For Cohen, we have reason to abolish, or supersede, all market activity. Assessing Cohen's argument requires some clarification (section two), and leads us to consider some critical responses to his work (section three) before thereby reaching some conclusions of our own (section four). To anticipate, I shall argue that there *is* an interpretation of Cohen's criticism of market activity that can be substantially defended, if we train our critical attention not on markets in general, but competitive markets in particular.

That markets are inimical to community needn't mean we have a conclusive reason to reject their use. It may be that, as Friedrich Engels lamented "No one at all who enters into the struggle of competition can weather it... without renouncing every truly human purpose". But it needn't mean that it is not also the case, as Engels also celebrated, that the same "struggle of capital against capital, of labour against labour, of land against land, drives production to a fever pitch".¹ Political argument almost always involves trade-offs. That doesn't dull the edge of our case, which if successful still provides good reason to explore other, non-market ways of organising our economic life.

¹ Engels, *Outline of a Critique of Political Economy*, online resource.

1. Preliminaries

Before we begin, three preliminary topics need to be covered off. First, we must be clear about what is meant by a market. Second, I say something about the argumentative strategy used here. Finally, a word about the political relevance and interest of debating the desirability of markets.

A clear definition of what is meant by a market is mostly absent from the relevant political theory literature, with the implicit presumption that the meaning of terms such as ‘the market economy’, ‘market actors’ and so on is obvious, and uncontroversial. This presumption is false and the unacknowledged source of much substantive disagreement. In the economics literature meanwhile, attention is devoted almost exclusively to the circumstances in which markets are *beneficial*, which is not the same as being clear about what markets *are*. To begin, it must be the latter that we are interested in. Given that we want to judge the extent to which all or any markets violate community, we need to start with an definition suitable of making sense of all legitimate uses of that word, not just a sub-set of markets which are considered to bring benefits. Just as important will be to recognise that there is a difference between these two types of definition.

In getting to a clearer understanding it is easiest to start with what markets are not. Perhaps the best comparator at the macro level, because it is both relatively clear-cut and already widely understood, is state central planning, which obtains in broad terms when the rules and targets for economic activity are set by government and its agencies.² More specifically, state central planning typically includes supply-side restrictions on prices, and targets for sectoral production, labour productivity and investment, among other things. Demand is also regulated, including by means of control of the money supply and bank finance, and by wage-setting. The most famous historical example of a centrally planned economy is that of the Soviet Union, where multi-year national plans were set, broken down into extraordinarily granular indicators of success or failure. It has been estimated that at one stage

² A good ‘micro’ example would be the family, as we saw in chapter and four. By using Soviet state socialism as a paradigmatic anti-market type, I don’t want to also suggest that is a paradigm example of socialism.

there was up to 3.6 billion economic indicators in the Soviet Economy, all derived from the national plan.³

It helps to be clear about what an archetypical example of non-market organisation looks like because to arrive at an accurate description of what markets are we will need to have respect not only for the ordinary usage of that term in general, but also to be able to make sense of the differences that exist between market and non-market forms of organisation, including state central planning. If our definition cannot make sense of this contrast then it will be no good.

This insight, simple though it is, immediately suggests that two common ways of defining markets, while suggestive, are not good enough. On the first, market interaction is just 'exchange'.⁴ But this can't be enough: the instruction from a Soviet bureaucrat to a state-owned firm to pay a state-employed worker a certain wage, for work that he has been instructed to do, is an exchange but it is surely not a market exchange. Likewise describing market interaction merely as 'buying and selling' as some have done cannot be right.⁵ Our Soviet bureaucrat could set a specific price for every good in the economy, and the mere fact that vendors then sold these goods and consumers bought them would not justify our describing this as a *market* economy.

There is something in each of these descriptions of market interaction, but more needs to be said if each could as well describe the antithesis of markets - state central planning - as market interaction itself. As a working definition, I propose the following. A market exists when there is exchange according to price (or in the absence of money, product ratios), *where the prices of products are determined by the uncoordinated decisions of decentralised economic agents*. The core feature here then becomes decentralised price setting, and it is this which provides market exchange with its distinctive feature – and which distinguishes it from the rival definitions just given. 'Decentralised' here refers at least to the feature of decisions

³ See part 2 of Alec Nove's *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* for further detail on Soviet central planning, and p. 76 for this particular statistic.

⁴ E.g. Stiglitz and Walsh, *Economics*, p. 11 – "Economists describe any situation in which exchange takes place as a market".

⁵ See Norman Geras, 'Staying Home: G.A. Cohen and the Motivational Basis of Socialism', p. 238. Other attempts to define markets go to far in the other direction, expanding the definition to include factors such as motivation and anonymity which are non-necessary e.g. Frank Cunningham, 'Market Economies and Market Societies', pp. 130-131.

being taken by a large number of actors engaging in exchange, and where the market power of any one these actors (or of a group) is not too great compared to the rest. It is an interesting question what other conditions follow from this definition and so ensure that price-setting really is decentralised in the sense set out here. But for our present purposes it is sufficient that the terms of exchange in a market - what the classical economists including Smith and Marx called the exchange values of products - are determined by the mutual but uncoordinated decisions of producers and consumers.

The difference between market organisation and state central planning should now be clear enough. In our archetypical centrally planned economy, the fact that the terms of exchange are set by a centrally determined plan prevents individual buyers and sellers from determining the exchange value of products through their individual actions.

Does our definition of markets cohere with its ordinary usage more broadly? There are clearly a wide variety of phrases that contain the word 'market' – we routinely speak of insurance, labour, and capital markets and a market for oranges. Our definition has no obvious problem in adding adjectives such as these. More problematic are terms such as 'regulated markets', or markets with monopoly providers. For all effective regulation has an impact on the exchange value of products, so to that extent preventing the formation of prices purely by the buying and selling decisions of individuals. And monopolists can reduce or even entirely trample on the price-forming power of individual economic actors.

This fact can be conceptualised by describing the definition of markets given above as an 'ideal type' – the best description of what markets are, but nevertheless a description that sits at one end of a continuum, at the other end of which we reach a planned system. This allows us to still describe a regulated market with limited regulation as a market system. At some point on the continuum where regulation, or perhaps monopoly provision by a public or private actor, becomes sufficiently dominant then it no longer becomes appropriate to describe the interaction as a market interaction. *Where* exactly the line is not important for our purposes, it is enough that we know how we decide where to draw it.

With this placeholders on markets now set, I can say something briefly of how the argument about the relationship between markets and community will proceed. It is helpful to think of this exercise as unfolding in two stages whereby we ask first: are community and the market *logically* incompatible? Does a contradiction between them necessarily occur just by virtue of their definitions, once those definitions are properly understood? If so, and communal reciprocity is logically inconsistent with market organisation, then we have achieved a valuable insight but our inquiry is thereby done. If, however, we receive a negative answer to this first question, then this prompts a second, further question – are there nevertheless certain circumstances where the market and community are incompatible? If logical compatibility obtains then it follows that there must be *some* world in which they cohere, and getting a sense of what these circumstances can still be a vital philosophical and political exercise. As this answer suggests, in what follows we will return a negative answer to the question of logical incompatibility, but have more to say on the argument that there is a contingent, or circumstantial contradiction between the market and community.

Finally a word about political relevance. Whatever its theoretical interest, a debate about markets might seem anachronistic, and politically irrelevant. For that debate might be said to belong to a period of history when there was actually a serious question in countries such as the UK about the extent to which economies should be arranged along non-market lines; a debate which is entirely absent now. There is some truth in this, but it is overstated. First, it is false to say that an extensive non-market economic programme has ever been a serious agendum in the recent history of the UK. Even at the zenith of such a movement, encapsulated in the ‘alternative economic strategy’ produced in 1971 by Stuart Holland and others and backed by some members of the Labour Party National Executive Committee, the policy was firmly one of market shaping, rather than market replacing.⁶ That fact didn’t stop there being fruitful and relatively widespread academic discussion of the benefits and disadvantage of the use of markets up until the mid 1990s, and is no reason to stop such useful discussion being had today. Second, while the scope of

⁶ For a recent discussion of the fate of the alternative economic strategy see John Medhurst, *That Option No Longer Exists: Britain 1974-76*.

the debate may have been narrowed, it is also false that the debate about market versus non-market provision is thereby extinguished. In recent years there has been fierce argument about the benefits of introducing a greater measure of market forces into public services including probation services, prisons and the National Health Service. In these areas if no others, this topic is very much an area of live debate.⁷

2. G.A. Cohen on community and markets

The link between Cohen's principle of communal reciprocity and the market in *Why Not Socialism?*, the focus of our interest, is not straightforward. In spelling out the relationship, it is useful to proceed by way of what appears to be a dilemma for Cohen. I will look to show that it can ultimately be dissolved, but Cohen's position does not emerge unscathed.

The two horns of the dilemma are simply stated. On the one hand Cohen appears at points in *Why Not Socialism?* to condemn *all* market interaction as contradicting community. But on the other, he explicitly endorses a *market-based* proposal put forward by Joseph Carens as consistent with community.⁸ To get to the bottom of this apparent inconsistency a little more detail is needed on each horn.

Cohen defines his principle of communal reciprocity in explicit contrast with what he calls 'market reciprocity'. "Communal reciprocity" he says "is [an] antimarket principle...". He elaborates: "communal reciprocity is not the same thing as market reciprocity, since the market motivates productive contribution not on the basis of commitment to one's fellow human beings and desire to serve them while being served by them, but on the basis of cash reward."⁹ Communal reciprocity, it appears, necessarily stands in opposition to the kind of reciprocity which operates in the marketplace. While the former offers a model of relationships centred on the

⁷ More prosaically a theoretical argument of this sort need not be overly concerned with practical or political developments given that such developments will be concerned with all-things-considered arguments. What is being argued for here is not an all-things considered argument but how market organisation of the economy fares by one evaluative standard: that of community.

⁸ If we were to hazard a conjecture about the source of this unclarity, we might suspect two sources, first a failure to start with a sufficiently concrete definition of what markets are, and second an unwillingness to admit what such an endeavour would show: that discussion of markets is more nuanced than Cohen would have it.

⁹ *Why Not Socialism?*, p. 40

service of others, the latter offers merely avarice - motivation based on pecuniary reward. These strong contrasting descriptions appear to be borne out by the conclusions that Cohen reaches at the end of *Why Not Socialism?*. He laments that “certain contemporary, overenthusiastic market socialists tend... to forget that the market is intrinsically repugnant”.¹⁰ And further, in reference to Albert Einstein’s famous quote that “socialism is humanity’s attempt to overcome and advance beyond the predatory phase of human development”¹¹ Cohen declares that “Every market, even a socialist market is a system of predation”.¹² In his elaboration of this point Cohen highlights two particular anti-communal motives which feature in market interaction – greed and fear. He says: “the market posture is greedy and fearful in that one’s opposite-number marketeers are predominantly seen as potential sources of enrichment, and as threats to one’s success...” and concludes “These are horrible ways of seeing other people however much we have become habituated and inured to them...”.¹³

So that is one side of Cohen’s view of markets. Consider by contrast, his description of the egalitarian market system outlined by Joseph Carens.¹⁴ In a book-length thought experiment, Carens sketches an economy that he seeks to show is both (a) as efficient as a capitalist market economy, and (b) results in an egalitarian income distribution.¹⁵ This result is achieved by substituting the stipulation of conventional economic theory that individuals are profit maximisers, for a stipulation that each has, and acts upon, a social duty to maximise their *pre-tax* income only. Carens demonstrates that individuals will conduct themselves in their working lives much as if they were post-tax market maximisers, and so the economy is capable of reaching the same equilibria as a conventional capitalist market economy. Price signals will be formed and transmitted in the same way, meaning

¹⁰ *Why Not Socialism?*, p.78.

¹¹ Einstein, ‘Why Socialism?’. The title of Cohen’s book is of course a play on the title of this article.

¹² *Why Not Socialism?*, p. 82.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

¹⁴ *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market*. See also his ‘Rights and Duties in an Egalitarian Society’ for a response to criticisms.

¹⁵ Note that while Carens is focused on marrying the market with equality, he points out on p. 6 (and elaborates on pp. 184-5) of *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market* that his general conclusion could equally apply to satisfying a needs-based principle, such as our communitarian one. We can presume that it is in this spirit that Cohen takes him, and can do likewise.

that the egalitarian market will remain an equally effective indicator of where labour or capital. Incentives will remain structurally the same, with workers, firms and consumers looking to buy cheap and sell dear.¹⁶

The crucial difference comes in the way that post-tax income is treated. Under a conventional market system it is assumed that private property rights mean that market income is retained by the earner, which is also the source of the incentive to produce. But under the Carensian system, individuals produce to maximise satisfaction of a social duty to enlarge the collective fund available for redistribution. This is collected by a 100% income tax and then redistributed equally. Thus an efficient market mechanism is married with strict income equality.¹⁷ Carens fully admits that this description is a utopian one – it seems inconceivable that anyone in the real world would *actually* fulfil a social duty of this demanding type, in this way. But he sees this thought experiment as performing the useful function of showing that in theory the information-collecting function of the market need not be used for private gain, but could be turned to other ends.

Cohen welcomes the Carens result. Crucially for our purposes, he says that it shows “a market mechanism... used to solve the social technology problem [of how to design a system that marries efficiency with other values, at scale], *in the service of equality and community*.”¹⁸ Later on, comparing Carens’s scheme to more conventional ‘market socialist’ proposals he contrasts it favourably with the latter seeing as “community... is prejudiced, under market socialism, because exchange under market socialism is no less market exchange than it is under capitalism: it is not as it is in the Carensian economy... only superficially market exchange”.¹⁹ It is the

¹⁶ For interesting recent proof of the efficiency of a setup similar to that which Carens envisages, see John Roemer ‘On the Problem of Socialist Economic Design’.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that Carens is engaged in a positive rather than normative exercise. He seeks to show that a system combining ‘moral incentives’ and the market mechanism could produce an efficient and egalitarian outcome, not (proximately) to stipulate how individuals should behave. Thus he allows for personal trade-offs e.g. between work and leisure. Cohen’s account of community is more demanding than this, but there is no reason to think that it could not also be run through the Carensian thought experiment to achieve a similar result, though there would have to be modifications to the argument.

¹⁸ *Why Not Socialism?*, p. 64, emphasis added.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Carensian scheme he says, that satisfies “the full socialist ideal”, which as we have seen Cohen thinks involves not only equality but community too.²⁰

Here then the dilemma is made clear, Cohen appears to think both that the market contradicts community and also that the Carensian scheme, which is a type of utopian market economy, is consistent with community. How can these statements be consistent?

Exploring how the dilemma might be avoided is illuminating. The second- to-last quote from Cohen does suggest that he might want to deny that Carens’ scheme is properly a market system at all, but is only “superficially” so. But this is untenable. Cohen himself describes the Carens system elsewhere as a “market” scheme and relying on a “market mechanism”.²¹ More importantly, the Carensian economy clearly is a market system by our definition in section one. The purpose of Carens’s scheme is to recruit the market to egalitarian ends – as he puts it, an assumption of his economy is that “the market would be the principal mechanism for coordinating economic activity”.²²

One other type of response, which we will encounter again in the following section, is that while markets as such, as defined above, need not violate community, if they are *competitive* markets then they must do so. We will leave the more detailed discussion of this idea until later on, but the line of argument would go something like this. Although for an economy to be a market economy it requires only that the exchange value of goods be set by decentralised exchange, economic theory typically tells us that in order to be efficient, other assumptions must apply, including that consumers and firms compete with one another. This, it would seem, would contradict the value of community, and perhaps thereby explain and vindicate Cohen’s more forthright anti-market rhetoric. It would not be any market, but specifically competitive markets that Cohen has in mind. But this response is also inadequate. The aim of Carens’s scheme is precisely to show that competitive markets can be efficient but using *moral incentives* of the sort which we have already seen Cohen accepts are consistent with community, rather than income for

²⁰ *Why Not Socialism?*, p. 75.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4.

²² *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market*, p. 18.

consumption or profits. Such a shift would thus only causes the dilemma to reappear: the endorsement of the Carens model is still at odds with Cohen's damning conclusions about markets.

Having discarded these two potential lines of defence, we can turn now to a better way of rendering Cohen's statements on markets and community consistent. I have already said that it is implausible to treat the Carens system as non-market economy. I also think it is credible for the Carens scheme to be described as communitarian, and take Cohen at his word that he thinks so too. It follows from the terms of the dilemma set out above that *we must therefore relax the stipulation that all market interactions violate community*. This is clearly not without cost for Cohen who must discard some of his more forceful rhetoric on the depravity of the market. However, there is some textual support for a more moderate view which allows some but not all market interaction as consistent with community.

The more moderate view becomes tenable once we see the claim about community and the market as an empirical, and contingent claim rather than a conceptual one. At least in theory, markets do not necessarily contradict community: this is the lesson from Carens's utopian market economy. However, this does not rule out a slightly weaker claim, which we might think is the best one to attribute to Cohen – that all non-utopian, realisable markets do nevertheless result in violations of community.

Such a conclusion is consonant with Cohen's exposition in *Why Not Socialism?* in that most of his strongest judgements on markets come in the part of that book dedicated to looking at the *feasibility* of socialism. Flagrantly utopian schemes such as the Carensian one – or for that matter large-scale camping trips – are out of the picture in that part of his discussion. Instead Cohen's focus is on potentially realisable models for achieving or approaching socialism, including the maintenance of a welfare state and, more prominently, the market socialist blueprint articulated by the economist John Roemer.²³ It seems more defensible to say that *these* more realistic modifications of a conventional market economy will

²³ The details of Roemer's scheme are not important here, apart from the fact that he unlike Carens assumes no motivational departure from capitalist market economies as they are traditionally conceived. See *A Future for Socialism* for the original argument and *Equal Shares* for critical commentary.

violate community, than to say that *all* markets will do so. Thus when Cohen says things like “market socialism is... a deficient socialism because the market exchange at its heart tends against the value of community”²⁴ we can interpret him as saying that all realisable market socialist proposals put forward would violate community, even though it is possible to imagine Carens-type markets that don’t. In this sense, though it runs contrary to some of Cohen’s rhetoric reported above, his socialist critique of markets still holds in a somewhat weaker form.

3. Two criticisms

The discussion of Cohen and Carens has established that it is possible to conceive of markets that are communitarian, but the last part of the last section might lead us to believe that this realisation does little to dent the political, as opposed to philosophical or conceptual, force of Cohen’s blanket criticism of markets. For as we have seen the Carens system is by its own admission a *utopian* scheme. So it might still be the case that every kind of realisable market system is one that violates community. The fact that we can imagine a Carensian system that doesn’t do so need not affect our stance towards actually existing markets, or market-orientated reforms.

This claim has been challenged. In this section I outline and assess two examples from the recent, post-*Why Not Socialism?*, literature which seek to show that communitarian market behaviour is not as exceptional as our reformulated Cohenite view might suggest.

In the first, presenting what we can call the ‘honest shopkeeper objection’ to Cohen, David Miller says: “...it seems a great exaggeration to say that people interacting in market settings are *characteristically* motivated by greed and fear, even though these motives may undoubtedly sometimes be present. It seems to rule out the honest tradesman or shopkeeper who, though no doubt happy to be paid for his services, is also happy that he is able to provide his customers with goods that they need or want.” He continues, further on that “Moreover, it is worth noting that people offering goods and services in the market are not typically engaged in zero-

²⁴ *Why Not Socialism?*, p. 75.

sum competition; that is, they may be satisfied so long as each can maintain an adequate market share. The ambition to own, let's say, the *biggest* grocery store or the *most popular* restaurant in town may exist, but it is an extra-market motivation.”²⁵

The objection is a good one, and intuitively seems right. Nevertheless our first observation is that, by Miller's own admission, even if the objection holds true it doesn't completely let defenders of markets off the hook, or entirely sink Cohen's negative view of markets. Rather it only need show that 'greed and fear' are too strong a form of words, and some weaker form of communitarian condemnation should apply instead. We can accept that the actions of the honest shopkeeper are not egregiously non-communal, because of the features that Miller describes. But even if we permit that the shopkeeper is *not* aggressively pursuing additional market share, seeking to out-compete his rivals and maximise his profit from his customers, this does not mean that he treats them in a communal fashion. We can presume that the honest shopkeeper isn't, say, responding to need by giving customers free or discounted products if they are badly off, or directing potential customers who come into his shop to another premises across the road because he knows that shop-owner has been struggling with slow business. These are the types of actions that we might imagine that the shopkeeper might take if he had taken on board the camping trip mentality that Cohen advocates (dependent of course upon the understanding that the customers and other shopkeeper would reciprocate his good intentions as required).

Moreover, and importantly, it is plausible that the *reason* that the shopkeeper does not engage in these sort of acts is precisely because he sees himself as a participant in a market – to do so would run up against the market norms that normally characterise the shopkeeper-customer or shopkeeper-shopkeeper relationship. It may be too strong to describe the fact that the shopkeeper does not give away free products as 'greed', or fails to direct customers to another shop as 'fear' and this supports the case that Cohen's description of all market activity in these terms is hyperbolic. But it is nevertheless plausibly the case

²⁵ 'Our Unfinished Debate about Market Socialism', p. 133, emphasis Miller's.

that some weaker form of these motivations is present. Even an honest shopkeeper, we might conclude, can't interact in a market without seeing his customers, and his rival shopkeepers in something of the light that Cohen describes.

This latter thought leads us to an additional and more significant comment on the case of the honest shopkeeper. For the sorts of actions that the honest shopkeeper refrains from - not wishing to own the biggest grocery store or the most popular restaurant in town - are exactly the sorts of behaviour that market participants need to engage in to ensure that markets are *competitive* and so efficient.²⁶ Our honest shopkeeper's decision not to be the owner of the biggest grocery store or the most popular restaurant are *precisely* decisions not to compete with other grocery stores or restaurants for market share. And without this competition there is a less than full-blooded rivalry for consumers' custom - on price, on quality or other ways of satisfying consumer preferences. We lose our means of ensuring that costs are bid down and ensuring that the best firm wins. In short the conventional ways in which markets are supposed to discipline firms and maximise consumer surpluses - and so to produce efficient outcomes - are stifled.

None of this is to say that Miller's claim is not a good description of how actual market actors behave, and more accurate than Cohen's rhetoric suggests. But it does become a problem for Miller-type market defenders if the kind of behaviour which vindicates market actors' (not anti-)communitarian credentials is precisely the sort of behaviour which makes it less likely that markets deliver efficient outcomes. This is after all the central benefit claimed for markets as a form of economic organisation, but on this result markets achieve consistency with community only at the expense of efficiency: a different kind of conclusion to the one Cohen defended, but one that does seem to preserve something of its spirit – and political bite.

The move from 'all markets' to 'competitive markets' helps refocus and so preserve something of Cohen's communitarian critique of markets. However, it is still vulnerable to another type of criticism, which is brought by Hillel Steiner, and

²⁶ Competitive markets are formally defined as composed of the following three attributes (i) all firms are price-takers (they cannot individually affect market prices) (ii) firms are rational, profit maximisers, (iii) individuals are rational, utility maximisers. The efficiency of competitive markets is formally set out in the so-called first fundamental theorem of welfare economics. For a non-technical overview of the development of this idea see Mark Blaug, 'The Fundamental Theorems of Welfare Economics, Historically Contemplated'.

which we can call the Carnegie objection after its protagonist, Andrew Carnegie. As Steiner relays: “Carnegie was born in 1835 into a poor Scottish family”, before experiencing a “rags to riches rise – from being a bobbin boy in a cotton mill to the founder and owner of Carnegie Steel which became the US Steel Company...”.²⁷ His working life included the sort of robust behaviour we might expect from a man who had his fought his way to become the era’s most successful steel magnate.

Steiner relays one particularly brutal example when one year Carnegie refused the workforce a proportionate share of the large profits the company had made. The workforce protested with industrial action – the now infamous Homestead strike. Carnegie’s response, which lent the event its infamy, was to lock the workforce out, and bring in a replacement workforce alongside what was effectively a private militia to keep the original workers off of the premises. The resulting violent conflict between the two sides led to the deaths of seven striking steel-workers and gained Carnegie worldwide notoriety.

But as Steiner emphasises this was only one side of Carnegie’s life. He was also a major philanthropist: “Over the course of his life, he gave away in the region of \$350,000,000,²⁸ and at his death his last \$30,000,000 was also given to the numerous causes that he supported. These included establishing libraries throughout the English speaking world”.²⁹ Drawn from Carnegie’s description of his own life, Steiner describes a maxim known as ‘Andrew Carnegie’s dictum’ which encouraged its readers “To spend the first third of one’s life getting all of the education one can; to spend the next third making all the money one can; to spend the next third giving it away for worthwhile causes.”³⁰

Steiner alleges that this story, and the Carnegie dictum in particular, show that market activity is often not irredeemably selfish, and so non-communal. He does grant, and we shall pick up on this below, that market behaviour does display a feature he calls ‘non-tuism’, whereby the *proximate* market interaction is purely instrumental (each marketeer shows no concern for his opposite number in the

²⁷ Steiner, ‘Greed and Fear’, p. 142.

²⁸ Adjusted for inflation, and converted into GBP, this is somewhere in the region of £3.2bn in 2014 prices (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, annual CPI-U average).

²⁹ ‘Greed and Fear’, p. 142.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

marketplace). But this says nothing Steiner claims about what market interaction is instrumental *for*. It may be for personal consumption or it may be something else, including for meeting the needs of others. Here, Steiner leans heavily on the early twentieth century economist Philip Wicksteed, who made this point forcefully, saying: “If you and I are conducting a transaction which on my side is purely economic, I am furthering your purposes, partly or wholly, perhaps for my own sake, perhaps entirely for the sake of others, but certainly not for your sake. What makes it an economic transaction is that I am not considering you except as a link in the chain, or considering your desires except as the means by which I may gratify those of someone else – not necessarily myself. *The economic relation does not exclude from my mind everyone but me, it potentially includes everyone but you.*”³¹

The argument from the Carnegie objection is simple, but powerful.³² Markets not only can but do refrain from violating community because market interaction is consistent with any number of underlying motives, including communal ones. Nor does our move to criticise *competitive* markets in particular, as used in reply to Miller, appear to rescue the critique, for Steiner freely admits that market behaviour may be competitive and antagonistic – even brutal. The challenge posed by the Carnegie objection is different, and more difficult to answer. For as Steiner makes clear in his exposition, the reason why the Carnegie objection has particular bite against Cohen is that the case of philanthropists like Carnegie looks structurally very similar to the Carens-style utopian social market, whereby the fruits of full-going market interaction are subject to ex-post redistribution. The anti-Cohen challenge from the Carnegie case is thus: if you accept on the basis of Carens that socialist markets can combine market interaction with communitarian motivation, then what stops the class of cases being expanded to capitalist philanthropists like Carnegie? And if we accept *these* class of cases then, while not completely without power, the Cohen critique begins to look much diminished. For Steiner, the conclusion of the Carnegie case is clear. He says: “should we... identify greed as the motive [that drives

³¹ ‘Greed and Fear’, pp. 145-6, emphasis added by Steiner.

³² More powerful perhaps than Steiner realises. He undersells himself when he says that “ [Cohen’s principle of] communal reciprocity is more or less the diametric opposite of non-tuism” (‘Fear and Greed’, p. 146). It is not, and the power of the example comes from the fact that the case of Carnegie seems consistent with Cohen’s chosen principle of community.

market behaviour]? The Andrew Carnegie story unmistakeably suggests that the correct answer to this question is ‘it depends’.”³³

In seeing whether we can answer Steiner’s criticism it is important to note that while we have already acknowledged, and seen that Cohen acknowledges, the power of the Carens example to show *in theory* that market behaviour can be combined with communitarian motivation, the burden of Steiner’s argument is not the same as that of Carens. Steiner’s contribution is an attempt to show the implications of a Carens-type view *in the real world*, or at least something closer to it. We are not interested in the mere, utopian possibility that there can be communitarian market interaction – that has already been established - but rather what we can say about the relationship between community and the market in the world as we find it. It is against this standard that the Carnegie objection needs to be judged.

It is because we are looking to answer *this* type of criticism that it is legitimate to first cast some doubt on the extent to which the Carnegie example itself shows that communitarian motivation can be found in actual market economies by looking at (a) whether it is actually a good example of community-consistent behaviour and (b) whether the case of Carnegie is generalisable to market behaviour more broadly. A point on each.

First, it may seem churlish to question the generosity of a man as munificent as Andrew Carnegie, but the Cohen/Carens idea of a community is a demanding one – and it is against that yardstick that Carnegie must measure up. So in this context it is important to note that there is an important difference between the private philanthropy of Carnegie and the mechanism of redistribution that Carens foresees – a 100% income tax and redistribution. In a system where the state distributes all income to its citizens the donor remains anonymous. Steiner recognises that this is normatively relevant, but thinks it is *irrelevant* for community.³⁴ It should be apparent from our definition of community above that it is not, for private

³³ ‘Greed and Fear’, p. 143.

³⁴ “It’s true that the wealth redistribution secured by Carens’ scheme is accomplished by means of its tax regime rather than private philanthropy... [this] may have some bearing on how we might compare Carnegie with Carens from the perspective of justice. However... our primary focus here... is not on justice but motivation”. ‘Greed and Fear’, pp. 143-4.

philanthropists receive recognition and so, at least in some sense, reward for their donations. Thus it was with Carnegie himself. The more than 1,600 libraries he part-funded across the United States all bore his name, and many still do today. Perhaps there was not the contemporary mechanism available for Carnegie to gift money to the state and have it go to worthwhile causes. But nevertheless, private philanthropy is a much more conspicuous way to give money than envisaged by Carens, and that looks relevant for any communitarian assessment of Carnegie's actions.

More generally, unlike in the Carens case there is a vast difference between the living standards of Carnegie and *his* contemporaries for the simple reason that Carnegie did spend lots of money on personal consumption and not just on philanthropy – he is said to have vowed to take home an annual salary of no more than \$50,000, but in today's money that is still in the region of £600,000. And if he did give away 90% of his wealth as reputed, that still would have left him a personal fortune approaching £500 million in today's prices.

Second, on the generalisability of the Carnegie objection, it is worth noting that while Carnegie donated 90% of his income, the average worker in the UK's self-reported donations are something in the region of 4% of gross earnings.³⁵ Clearly Carnegie was an *exceptionally* generous philanthropist by contemporary or modern standards – easily in the top centile, by percentage of income donated.

These points do not say that Carnegie's motivation was not communitarian to some extent, nor that others (including the much less wealthy) do not have such a motivation, but, to repeat, they *do* bear on the extent to which his case shows that real-world market actors in general can match up to the communitarian ideal, and to that extent limits the reach of Steiner's criticism of Cohen.

These observations do little however to pronounce upon the relationship between markets and community. They merely observe that Steiner is a way from being able to use the example of Carnegie to establish that anything like the level of community that Cohen applauds in the Carens economy, or imagines on his camping trip, exists in modern market economies. Perhaps the main ambition of the Carnegie objection is to motivate the conclusion that in real-world capitalist markets we can

³⁵ Community Life Survey 2013/14 and Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2013.

separate market *behaviour* from traditional market *motivation*, and it is this which means that we can say nothing in advance about the extent to which market behaviour is or isn't communitarian. In Steiner's words, "it depends". This claim requires some further interrogation.

The two points made by way of reply both accept the distinction that Steiner, as Carens, makes between behaviour and motivation in the market. However, my strategy is to question whether in practice, as opposed to in theory, these two parts of the picture can be kept apart in the way that the Steiner critique requires. Because of the empirical nature of Steiner's critique, we must rely upon some general empirical truths in responding.

Consider first the fact the feature we noted above that in a *competitive* market there will be antagonistic behaviour between the parties to exchange. This is the case even in the Carens market and is accepted by Steiner. The question then is why should this very fact not count against the market from the point of view of community? Steiner's answer is that antagonistic market behaviour *need* not be a threat to community for that antagonism could be entered into for a noble purpose (in Steiner's language: it could be non-tuistic but still communal). Here Steiner seeks to follow Carens. But this feature holds true in the Carens scenario only by explicit assumption.³⁶ Carens assumes that the only one way to maximise the social surplus available for redistribution and so to maximise community is to undertake competitive market exchange.³⁷ But *that* assumption is clearly not always true in actual economies in a host of very well known circumstances where there is 'market failure'. This can exist, among other circumstances, where consumers or firms have imperfect information, where there are incomplete markets, or where there are effects on third parties (externalities). But if these kind of market failures do occur and so competitive market exchange does not maximise the social surplus then there is, to that extent no reason for people to *think* that it is true. And if people don't think that the best way to meet the needs of others is to engage in competitive

³⁶ See *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market*, p. 199: "To maximize one's pre-tax income is simply to follow the rules and patterns of behaviour which have been explicitly designed for the good of the community as a whole". For relevant comment see also p. 201.

³⁷ He admits that in reality there may be well more efficient ways of organising the economy than by markets, but seeks to show that his egalitarian system can be as efficient as a private market system.

market interaction then that market interaction loses the communitarian appeal vested in it by Carens. In other words, in cases of market failure the communitarian option will be sometimes be to undertake non-market means of realising their goals.

So far so good. This realisation narrows the range of cases in which people might think that the market mechanism is able to promote community to those where it is not the case that an alternative non-market mechanism could meet the needs of others better.

But this reply runs deeper still, once we consider the following fact. For in a great deal more cases, especially large-scale, macroeconomic cases, it will be almost impossible for community-minded economic actors to assess whether a market or a non-market form of interaction generates the best results. Consider that even in micro cases such as that of a community-minded shopkeeper, it will often not be clear to the shopkeeper whether he should subvert the market mechanism by giving an entitlement to the poor customer for free produce, or to charge them with a view to redistributing the profits that he makes. This uncertainty is likely to increase the more complex such decisions become.

But in such cases, where ignorance over the market/non-market option obtains, the market option will now be at a decisive disadvantage. For in the words of Wicksteed via Steiner which were quoted above, the market relation “...*does not exclude from my mind everyone but me, it potentially includes everyone but you*”. The nature of competitive market exchange is still such that the market actor sits in an antagonistic relationship with those in he meets in the market. It follows that, from the point of view of community, non-competitive forms of organisation will immediately have the advantage over market based forms of organisation because the latter, by Steiner’s own admission, are inherently antagonistic whereas non-market forms - such as state central planning, or the family, or norms of social friendship need not be.³⁸ A community-minded shopkeeper who doesn’t know whether the best way of meeting the needs of members of his community is to give away free produce or to charge and redistribute the profit, will still know for sure

³⁸ How can it be the case that this ‘proximate’ motivation counts against the market here, but not in the Carens case? Because there the competitive tendency is absolved by the good intention that motivates it; ruled out here because of the uncertainty present.

that, *given that uncertainty*, the decision to demand payment from a hungry customer for a loaf of bread rather than gift it to him *is* a non-communal act.

There is a second, additional way in which markets are more likely to violate community than non-market forms of organisation. This comes to light once we establish that Steiner's 'non-tuism' point - that whether markets are communitarian or not can be assessed independently of the market interaction itself - implicitly adopts a controversial psychological premise. Namely, it supposes that we can compartmentalise our lives to such an extent that our activities in in one part (the antagonistic market interaction) do not colour our attitudes in another part (our decisions about what to do with that market income). As before, while we might accept this without question in Carens's explicitly utopian thought experiment, there is no reason to do so in Steiner's real-world reply to Cohen. My counter-contention is this: a competitive market scenario where the market disciplines managers of firms to make as much as they can from customers and out-compete rivals, which in turn disciplines workers to get what they can from customers, tends to produce a market ethos that affects more than merely the proximate market transactions: it affects decisions about market income too. The strength of such a tendency is for detailed empirical work to determine, but even in the absence of that I think we can say something of its plausibility.

To motivate this, recall again that Steiner accepts that market interaction is antagonistic and sometimes brutal. This is the purpose of highlighting Carnegie's reaction to the homestead strike. But in order to end up with the conclusion he does, he has to assert that this behaviour is conducted independently of the motivation for distributing post-market income. Steiner invokes Wicksteed to buttress his case, but there are others who would dispute it.

It was this assumption that Karl Polanyi criticised in *The Great Transformation*, saying: "Ultimately... the control of the economic system by the market is of overwhelming consequence to the whole organisation of society: it means no less than running of society as an adjunct of the market. Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the

economic system... this is the meaning of the familiar assertion that market economy can function only as a market society.”³⁹

Or consider Thorstein Veblen’s sentiment in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* where he argues that competitive activity in the sphere of production leads to competitive predilections in consumption too: from the advent of “organisation of industry on the basis of private property... possessions then come to be valued not so much as evidence of a successful foray, but rather as evidence of the prepotence of the possessor of those goods over other individuals in the community... a comparison of the owner with the other members of the group.”⁴⁰

It is possible to disagree about the specific claims that Polanyi and Veblen make but, contra Steiner, it looks more difficult to deny that market behaviour can be completely divorced from - and so have no impact on - individuals’ extra-market preferences.

Consider a more homely analogy.⁴¹ Say someone is a Labour Party supporter, from a Labour-supporting family. But work is scarce and so she plumps for a job she sees advertised with her local Conservative MP. For a while she keeps the parts of her life separate – Labour (or at least, not anti-Labour) at home, Conservative at work. But over time this becomes intolerable. She becomes more convinced of her Conservative politics, perhaps partly influenced by the fact that it is much less costly to give up her after-hours Labour principles than revolt against the Conservatives and find a new job. She also meets other people in her day job that help coax her over to the Tory side. She now plans to vote Conservative at the next election.

I don’t think many would find this outcome implausible, and that reaction suggests that the idea that our day-to-day activities do have some effect on our preferences is an eminently believable one. Some might have trouble with the suggestion that a supporter of one political party would go and work for their rivals

³⁹ *The Great Transformation*, p. 60. For similar passages see e.g. p. 74.

⁴⁰ *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p. 23.

⁴¹ With a few inconsequential tweaks, this is a true story.

in the first place, but that it surely no more of a seemingly schizophrenic decision than Steiner imagines for his philanthropic marketeers.⁴²

If we do find this a plausible scenario what, in broad outline, might be the mechanisms by which non-communal competitive market behaviour leads to the formation of non-communal competitive attitudes? One reason might be that people seek to avoid cognitive dissonance – the holding of two apparently contradictory ideas. Another might be the effect of a variant of the so-called mere-exposure effect – whereby familiarity with some object or activity leads to the development of a preference for it. Or perhaps more specifically, it is a result of the tendency of people to think they have strong normative claims on the income they earn in the market.⁴³ Whether or not these conjectures are right is again a matter for more detailed empirical study. But they are all plausible mechanisms for explaining how behaviour might influence motivation.

So, to conclude our discussion of Steiner, these two latterly responses tentatively seek to pour cold water on the answer with which Steiner concluded his discussion of the story of Andrew Carnegie, that when it comes to the relationship between markets and community, all we can say is that ‘it depends’. The conclusion that they reach - that there is some (negative) relationship between markets and community – surely goes with the grain of intuition, while it is Steiner who goes against. For it would be odd if a type of behaviour which even market-advocates like Steiner admit bears the *very features* which characterise anti-communal motivation nevertheless had no impact upon our assessment of that behaviour from the point of view of community. If market behaviour is necessarily competitive and antagonistic as Steiner allows, it is surely he who is swimming against the current by trying to show that despite having these features markets are consistent with the caring relationships of reciprocal concern that we saw on Cohen’s camping trip. The considerations above seek to expand on why such an intuition is indeed well-founded.

⁴² In fact a more realistic analogy would probably be for a non-partisan jobseeker to find work in a Conservative political office. Here, I suspect our intuitions about the preference change are even stronger.

⁴³ See e.g. Robert Lane, ‘Market Justice, Political Justice’.

4. Conclusion: what's wrong with markets

The last two sections have sought to clarify the relationship between community and markets by looking at the work of G.A. Cohen, and of two of his critics David Miller and Hillel Steiner. In this section I briefly draw together the strands of the argument presented in these sections, and assess their political importance. We can think of the journey travelled as composed of three steps.

First, in section two we advanced from a starting point of Cohen declaring that “every market... is a system of predation”, and thereby a violation of community, to a modified (and more moderate) position. In light of the thought experiment posed by Joseph Carens, it became apparent that a sympathetic reading of Cohen would adjust his conclusion to one whereby every *realisable* market infringes community. The non-utopian examples brought by Miller and Steiner could not rebut that conclusion, for neither the honest shopkeeper nor Andrew Carnegie could plausibly be cast as free from anti-communitarian taint. However, their contributions did clearly show that there are degrees in the extent to which market actors can be said to be violating community.

Our second step was to see, in response to Miller, that while the rhetoric of ‘greed and fear’ used by Cohen couldn’t be justified with respect to all types of market behaviour, such as the actions of an honest shopkeeper, it is more plausible to think that these attributes could apply to the ideal of *competitive* markets, where profit maximising firms and utility maximising consumers are rivals in the quest for personal gain. However, even that communitarian critique of competitive markets was vulnerable to the further criticism supplied by Steiner’s Carnegie case. For this seemed to show that, as with the Carensian economy, real world market behaviour could be divorced from market motivation.

Our third step was to argue that the mere possibility of an idealised market philanthropist on the model of Carnegie was not sufficient to establish its plausibility in the real world, for two reasons. First, as a result of the uncertainty that characterises many economic decisions, there is no reason to think that the theoretical communitarian attraction of pursuing market over non-market solutions – that they meet needs more efficiently – could be substantiated. In such a situation the fact that the market encouraged proximate behaviour that was competitive

would count decisively against it. Second, we saw that in any case there was good reason to think that the competitive behaviour necessitated by the market would affect the preferences people had and so their motivation for engaging in economic activity. The upshot of these objections is that there does look to be an inherent tendency in markets to violate community. This tendency isn't always satisfied, and the extent to which it does will depend upon the contingencies of the particular market, and the actors within it, but it nevertheless exists.

Where does this leave the (communitarian) socialist criticism of markets? The key shift from the focus on markets as such, to competitive markets means that the blanket condemnation of markets that we find in Cohen, and in previous socialists, can't be maintained, at least as far as community is concerned. However, as one door closes so another opens. The fact that markets are competitive is the central means by which their chief benefit is derived – allocative efficiency. Thus a trade off now emerges for market advocates, where they must either sacrifice efficiency or community. A core socialist argument is thereby clarified, for only they can promise to achieve both.

Conclusion

The need for community is pressing, and enduring. This thesis has attempted to show that the best articulation of that value is a radical and recognisably socialist ideal – communal reciprocity. It is a normative political standard with an intellectual heritage to match any other, capable of being as rigorously defined as any other. It is accommodating enough to cope with liberal scepticism and robust enough to be the basis for political criticism and recommendation.

Rather than re-treading ground just travelled, I want to end with some thoughts on the process of political argument, and the role of communal reciprocity within it.

One common worry which has been lodged against community, and particularly against the kind of method of political argument employed by G.A. Cohen which has been the point of reference for much of the preceding chapters, is that it is hopelessly utopian. The only way, it might seem, of reconciling community along with other normative standards that we value is to make hopelessly unrealisable assumptions about the behaviour of people or the make-up of institutions.

Here Cohen has been accused of not advocating a kind of socialism fit for current political practice – even only for the denizens of outer space.¹

But that criticism is surely misguided. The label ‘utopian’ only applies to those who, in Marx’s phrase, seek to write recipes: to weigh up ingredients in the right amounts and describe how to properly combine them. In the political analogue, they seek to generate political prescriptions. Cohen didn’t write recipes in that sense. Instead his method was to isolate and explicate those ingredients which will make

¹ Miller, ‘Political Philosophy for Earthlings’, chapter one of his *Justice for Earthlings*.

for a good recipe. It might be right to describe an ambition to bake a cake with chocolate chips and pineapple pieces as unrealistic, or utopian if those ingredients aren't stocked in the local shops, or if the machinery needed to properly mix them into the cake batter isn't there. But it is not right, and a wrongful use of the label, to describe the act of merely claiming that chocolate chips are a good addition to the mix to be utopian. It is interesting to note that the relevant definition of 'utopian' from the Oxford English Dictionary says "Of a vision, plan, etc.: expressing or founded on an unrealistic belief in the perfectibility of society...". But as we saw in chapter two, Cohen's work *as a philosopher* provides neither a vision nor a plan. The exception is his depiction of a socialist society in *Why not Socialism?* but of course Cohen counselled in the end *against* its (immediate) adoption, precisely on the anti-utopian grounds of feasibility.²

In the preceding chapters it has also principally been the explication of a particular value rather than its organisation into all-things-considered political recommendations that I have been concerned with. If we can imagine a spectrum from having no idea about what course of action to pursue, to having a fully-fledged set of political recommendations ready to deliver to 10 Downing Street, then I might very roughly say that the exposition provided in this thesis gets us something a little more than a fraction of a quarter of the way there.

To explain this schematic and its highly stylised segmentation, I take it that only around the half the work that needs to be done in this process is theoretical, and that this half is split into two quarters. One quarter is the identification, specification and elaboration of the various normative standards which should guide our political practice. How many such standards are there to be considered? Who knows. I think a finite number, but there may be a great many, hence why I say that that I have only covered *a fraction* of this quarter, $1/n$, where the set n contains at least the handful of well-known political ideals in addition to community - for my

² Is it intellectually irresponsible to advocate for a form of society (socialism) which you don't think can be realised? Cohen thought as much at the time of his interview with *Imprints* in 1996 when he said "You have to believe that it [socialism] is a possible form of human association. Otherwise, your praise of it is in a certain way dishonest. Anybody can agree, however right-wing they are, that it would be a nice idea if everyone lived together in equality and community. To be anti-socialist, you only have to believe that that's impossible, even if it's desirable." One way of reading *Why Not Socialism?* is as recanting of that belief.

money fairness, freedom, efficiency and legitimacy are the standards that jointly explain the majority of our political judgements - but that is just a hunch which it would be difficult to defend.³

The second quarter of the 'theoretical half' of the process requires us to take a view as to how to rationalise the competing demand of the principles so far identified. Cohen, we have seen, regards this stage in the process essentially as a 'black box'. We do end up making judgements about how to combine values in the course of practical deliberation, but we're not entirely sure how we do it. They are in any case probably not rationally defensible. Others such as Adam Swift think that the answers we give us to why the standards we value are worthwhile can provide the resources for a discussion about how we combine them, though he agrees with Cohen that this is difficult terrain.⁴ For my part, I say something in chapter four above about how communal reciprocity might be judged alongside an ideal of positive freedom and to what extent there might be conflict, and this explains why I judge my contribution here to be *a little more* than merely a fraction of one quarter.

The remaining half of the process is left to empirical social science. There are a number of tasks left to be done. First, the extent of value conflict or coherence seems at least partly an empirical task – as was mentioned at the beginning of chapter four. Although in theory community and efficiency are divergent ends, the extent to which they actually diverge will depend on real world circumstances – it may be that institutions that are run from and encourage human greed such as is sometimes said of the market, are systematically inefficient – perhaps they always undervalue the welfare of those with the least market power and so are unable to maximise the welfare of this group – in which case the scope for conflict between community and efficiency will be much reduced.

Second, there is work to be done to find the extent to which any given policy prescription satisfies any of the n standards that we should judge those prescriptions by. This is sometimes but not always brought out in e.g. post-hoc evaluations of

³ Difficult but not impossible - one interesting experiment would be to collect and attempt to sort the reasons that people give for their considered judgments about various items of political debate. This would give a rough and ready approximation of how many such standards people rely on in making those judgments.

⁴ Swift, 'The Value of Philosophy in Non-Ideal Circumstances', p. 369.

various government decisions which say things of the type: ‘policy x increased average household income (usually assumed as a proxy for welfare) by $a\%$, but the distributional impact was uneven such that the top income decile benefitted $b\%$ more than those in the bottom income decile”.

Other standards – including community - are surely less amenable to quantitative analysis of this sort. One type of policy prescription that has traditionally promoted communitarian ends is that where the government itself is the main actor – the NHS is and remains a great communitarian institution (though that is not the best thing that can be said for it). Other types of communitarian prescription may take the form of simple exhortation. There may also be behavioural ‘nudges’ or even legislation which over time change the preferences that people have concerning one another. Smoking in close proximity to others was widely thought acceptable even after the health risks of ‘second-hand smoke’ were known. After the banning of smoking in enclosed spaces it is now widely deemed unacceptable. To the extent that this increase in unacceptability is due to increased mindfulness of the negative effect of smoking on others, including amongst smokers, it is positive development as far as community is concerned.

Third, because much that needs to be done is only able to be done by elected governments, and elected government are necessarily beholden to an electorate, it is a contingent but important fact that policies may have to gain public support, and the role of various survey and polling bodies to ascertain what people actually think about various policies is an important further empirical step in the process.

Sometimes this fact will appear to jar with community – the fact that a majority of people in the UK seem to support the reducing of social security benefits to those with the lowest incomes might seem reason for a communitarian-minded government to ignore them. But this avoids the important point that pro-poor policy by dictat might say nothing about, and do almost nothing for, community. If there is no popular support for helping benefit-recipients on low incomes then, to that extent, the relationship between them and the pro-benefit cuts member of the public has already broken down. That fact can’t be righted by mere legislation. Or to give the same point a more positive spin: popular support for communitarian policy is itself a communitarian victory.

The task for communitarian socialists is thus clearly not exhausted by the work done here. We must also do more to capture the conflict or coherence between community and other socialist values and also other non-socialist standards such as efficiency. There is a deep question as to how far this is possible, even in theory and I have suggested that exactly how big a problem it is will partly be determined by empirical work. And then communitarian socialists must still work out how best to realise these standards, and that will include working out how to win popular support.

So, a daunting task! But to catch a glimpse of how high the mountain is, and to have begun to set out on the climb is some progress at least.

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