

## Neo-Socialism: A Sketch

[9251 words excluding notes, bibliography and abstract.; 11403 in total]

This paper suggests we conceive of socialism as a normative ideal that is multiply realizable at the institutional level as opposed to being tied to specific policies like state ownership and restriction of markets. To highlight the revisionary nature of this conception, I suggest we call it neo-socialism. I begin with the most well known neo-socialist theory, G. A. Cohen's *Why Not Socialism?* On Cohen's view the debate between socialists and left-liberals concerns whether "express reciprocity", whereby citizens produce and exchange with each other's needs directly in mind, is a necessary feature of an ideal society. Having shown that Cohen's own justification for the socialist position fails, I argue for it by means of an immanent critique of left-liberalism. Drawing on Margaret Gilbert's argument that joint action entails special rights and responsibilities, I rework Cohen's camping trip example to produce a *prima facie* case for thinking that citizens have an obligation to produce and exchange with each other's needs in mind. I then refine the argument, concluding that participants in large-scale economic cooperation must treat express reciprocity as the default mode of deliberation, and that this allows us to explain, justify and revise the traditional socialist policy platform.

### Introduction

In the last few years socialism has enjoyed something of a renaissance in Britain and America, with figures like Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders taking centre stage and magazines like *Jacobin* growing in influence. At the turn of the millennium that would have seemed unthinkable, and it is worth reflecting on why that is. It seems fair to say that the realization of socialism understood as a policy program restricting markets and private property became less and less likely as the twentieth century went on.<sup>1</sup> For one thing, the power of organized labour to shape or curtail markets and to limit the growth of private property holdings diminished in various ways and for various reasons. For another, state ownership became associated with distinctive forms of inequality and inefficiency caused by rent-seeking, patronage networks and calamitous attempts at central planning. If the wheel of political fortune has brought socialism back into favour, or at least into consideration, it is not because it has changed but rather because its rivals have come to seem less attractive.

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<sup>1</sup> See Dunn, *The Politics of Socialism: An Essay in Political Theory*.

But if the socialist revival is to amount to more than an expression of protest, it will have to reckon with the objections just mentioned. The challenge is therefore to provide a theory that captures classic socialist concerns while avoiding naivety concerning state ownership and nostalgia for a lost era of large-scale working-class movements.

This paper suggests one way of meeting that challenge. The strategy is to treat socialism as a normative ideal that is multiply realizable at the policy level. This emphasis on the normative would have been anathema to many past socialists, for whom ideal theory appeared either epiphenomenal where social transformation is concerned, given the truth of historical materialism, or simply otiose, given that socialist economic policies were superior with respect to so many values—efficiency, equity, democracy, community—that they were obviously in the interests of the growing working class, who would therefore fight for them without any need for normative theory.<sup>2</sup> But this repudiation of the normative no longer seems plausible. Whether or not the materialist theory of history holds true over the *longue durée*, the fact remains that in the here and now we still need to act, and therefore to assess possible courses of action.<sup>3</sup> The thought that this assessment would simply be obvious, especially to an ever-strengthening proletariat, was belied over the course of the twentieth century as the costs of socialist policies became clearer and the social movements that were supposed to support them began to fracture. In the context of today's socialist revival, normative theory promises to serve three functions. The first is to clarify what is at stake in the relevant policy trade-offs: given that collective ownership has certain obvious costs, for

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<sup>2</sup> See Cohen, *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?*, ch. 6, and Wright, *How to be an Anticapitalist*, ch. 2.

<sup>3</sup> I take historical materialism to be a theory concerning historical change rather than a theory of metaethics. As such it does not rule out the possibility of reasoning about better or worse courses of action; it only implies that such reasoning will not be the primary explanatory factor in any change between epochs.

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instance, what exactly are its benefits supposed to be? The second is to spur revision of the traditional socialist policy program: ought socialists to support collective ownership at all? The third is to generate an ideal around which a new socialist movement could coalesce in the way that neoliberalism arguably coalesced around Hayek's vision of a spontaneous social order. None of this is to say that ideals can change the world by themselves, or that they are more important than power struggles; it is only to insist that they can play a part.

Treating socialism as a normative ideal might also be thought wrong-headed on a conceptual level, however: if socialism is equated with particular economic policies, as it often is, then talk of a pre-institutional ideal of socialism will make no more sense than talk of a pre-institutional ideal of quantitative easing. As it happens, a normative approach to socialism is hardly unprecedented: it represents a return to the “ethical socialism” of T. H. Green and R. H. Tawney.<sup>4</sup> That said, to highlight the revisionary nature, both politically and conceptually, of this conception, as well as its ambition of providing a counterpoint to contemporary neoliberalism, I suggest we distinguish between “traditional socialism” and “neo-socialism”, reserving the latter name for normative theories. A neo-socialist theory claims that the institutions and policies traditionally equated with socialism only count as socialist by virtue of their relationship with a normative ideal that both justifies and explains them. Structurally speaking, a theory of this kind always has the potential to revise our sense of what counts as socialist at the policy level. This is the great advantage of the neo-socialist approach, especially in the present situation. For by conceiving of specific institutions and policies as merely instrumental, and therefore contingent, with respect to a normative ideal, it insulates

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society*. It arguably also bears a relation to the “utopian socialism” of Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, John Ruskin and William Morris, although it is important to avoid eliding “normative” and “ideal” with “utopian”.

socialism from criticisms of specific policies like state ownership while allowing it to adapt to changing circumstances and to changing theories of institutional design. The question is whether it is in fact possible to specify an ideal that is both pre-institutional and distinctively socialist, and whether such an ideal will be justified.

This paper begins with a brief exposition and analysis of the most well known neo-socialist theory of recent times, namely that presented by G. A. Cohen in *Why Not Socialism?*<sup>5</sup> Cohen takes traditional socialist policies to be merely instrumental with respect to an ideal that consists in the realization of three normative principles. Unfortunately his account falls short in two respects: he backs away from the iconoclastic implications of his neo-socialism vis-à-vis traditional socialism and he fails to justify the normative ideal itself as against the left-liberal alternative. What he does leave us with, however, is the useful suggestion that the debate between socialists and left-liberals concerns whether “express reciprocity”, whereby citizens produce and exchange with each other’s needs directly in mind, is a necessary feature of an ideal society—the socialist answer being yes, the left-liberal answer being no. In the second section I argue for the socialist position on reciprocity by means of an immanent critique of left-liberalism that departs from the premise that a society is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage. Drawing on Margaret Gilbert’s argument that joint action entails special rights and responsibilities, I rework Cohen’s camping trip example in order to show that participation in a cooperative venture aimed at mutual advantage entails an obligation to produce and exchange with other participants’ needs in mind. In the third section I refine the argument in response to an objection that the argument will only work for small-scale cooperative ventures, concluding that in large-scale economic cooperation the

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<sup>5</sup> Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, hereafter *WNS*.

obligation is simply to treat express reciprocity as the *default* mode of deliberation regarding production and exchange. In the fourth section I then suggest one way in which the neo-socialist theory thus sketched allows us to explain, justify and revise the traditional socialist policy platform.

## 1. Cohen's Neo-Socialism

G. A. Cohen's 2009 essay *Why Not Socialism?* is only a sketch, and it certainly does not provide an impregnable doctrine. But the value of political philosophy can lie in opening up new ways of thinking, and *WNS* is unquestionably valuable in this respect. Its most important contribution, in my view, consists in its overall approach to the challenge of theorizing socialism. For Cohen, socialism is a normative ideal—and he takes this to imply that it would be a confusion to equate it with specific policies like equality of income and work hours, as we might be tempted to if we took, say, kibbutzim as paradigms of socialism. The socialist ideal is prior to and independent of all policies, such that the relation between the two can only ever be contingent. Structurally speaking, Cohen's theory is therefore neo-socialist in the sense outlined in the introduction. The thought is that the policies often equated with socialism only count as such in virtue of their relationship to an ideal that lies upstream from them. Given this structure, the theory has the potential to revise the traditional understanding of which policies socialists ought to pursue. Viewed in light of this potential, however, *WNS* has two major flaws. The first is that it lapses back into traditional socialism. The second is that it fails to justify the ideal itself.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> One might immediately object that it is unfair to focus on *WNS*, which is only supposed to be a sketch, as opposed to Cohen's more theoretically sophisticated work. The first thing to say is that this is not a paper in "Cohen Studies"—the primary goal is to provide a new account of socialism rather than a full account of

The question for neo-socialists is whether it is really possible to specify an ideal that is distinctively socialist without making essential reference to institutions and policies. The fundamental claim of *WNS* is that an ideal society would jointly realize three normative principles, inflections of the revolutionary triad of liberty, equality and fraternity. Left-liberalism also pays fealty to some version of that triad, so we might wonder what is distinctively socialist about the ideal.<sup>7</sup> After all, the particular principle of equality that Cohen favours—one that directs us to correct for all disadvantages for which an agent cannot reasonably be held responsibly, including inborn disadvantages, so that differences in outcome reflect nothing but differences of choice—has been espoused by various left-liberals under the label of “luck-egalitarianism”. His preferred principle of liberty, meanwhile—one that directs us to ensure that “people have a right to make personal choices, even if the result is inequality and/or instrumental treatment of people”—has frequently been *rejected* by socialists.<sup>8</sup> The most plausible candidate for a distinctively socialist contribution to Cohen’s overall ideal is his gloss on fraternity or solidarity, which he calls the principle of community. This principle directs us to care for and about one another, and to care *that* we care for and about one another. Cohen thinks this finds expression in two forms of *motivation*.<sup>9</sup> The first consists in being motivated to limit any inequalities that threaten to

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Cohen’s views. The second thing to say is that when we do think about Cohen’s oeuvre more generally, we find that “most of [Cohen’s] ideas are forged in the midst of polemic: they are premises or conclusions of immanent arguments.” See Nicholas Vrousalis, *The Political Philosophy of G. A. Cohen: Back to Socialist Basics*, 4. No matter how sketchy it is, *WNS* is in fact the best statement of Cohen’s view of socialism, which is not to deny that it can be usefully supplemented by his other work.

<sup>7</sup> This distinction between socialism and left-liberalism does not imply that there is no such thing as liberal socialism (which could then plausibly be labeled as a form of left-liberalism). The point is really to isolate what it is that distinguishes a socialist theory from a neighbouring non-socialist theory, so strictly speaking “left-liberal” is just a useful shorthand for “non-socialist liberal theory”.

<sup>8</sup> *WNS*, 47. Socialists have often rejected the “negative liberty” supported by Cohen in favour of some form of “positive liberty”. See Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty.”

<sup>9</sup> This sounds psychologistic, but presumably we could rephrase it in terms of sensitivity to particular kinds of reasons.

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“cut us off from our common life”, even if they would otherwise be permitted by the principle of equality.<sup>10</sup> Once again, it seems to me that left-liberals could accept this: Rawls, for instance, speaks of the need to assure the fair value of political liberties and the need to distribute the social bases of self-respect.<sup>11</sup> The second way in which communal caring is expressed consists in being motivated to engage in “communal reciprocity”, whereby “I serve you not because of what I can get in return by doing so but because you need or want my service, and you, for the same reason, serve me”.<sup>12</sup> Cohen contrasts such “express reciprocity”, whereby we produce and exchange with each other’s needs in mind, with “implicit reciprocity”, whereby we serve one another indirectly, via background institutions. This distinction seems to provide a clear ground for distinguishing between the socialist ideal and the left-liberal ideal: socialism requires reciprocity to be express, whereas left-liberalism is content with its being implicit.<sup>13</sup>

Neo-socialism promises to provide a pre-institutional ideal that explains, justifies and revises the policy program traditionally associated with socialism. This program calls for the restriction of markets and the collectivization of the means of production. It might therefore be said to focus on primary economic life, in which goods are produced and exchanged, as

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<sup>10</sup> Cohen is not particularly clear about this, but reconstructing the position presented in *WNS*, 34-38, the idea would seem to be as follows: (a) if I care about you, then the fact that you are destitute gives me a reason to help you (means permitting) regardless of whether your destitution is the product of your own choices; and (b) if I care that we care for and about one another, that gives me a reason to help you into a position from which you can express your care for me. For an alternative reading see Vrousalis, "Jazz Bands, Camping Trips and Decommmodification: GA Cohen on Community."

<sup>11</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 224-227, 62, 440-446

<sup>12</sup> *WNS*, 39

<sup>13</sup> If some who consider themselves left-liberals turn out to be socialists by this criterion, so be it. Historically speaking there is good reason to associate an emphasis on express reciprocity with socialism—see, e.g., Marx’s “Notes On James Mill”.

opposed to secondary economic life, in which they are subsequently redistributed.<sup>14</sup> We will come back to this distinction in the fourth section, but for present purposes the point is that Cohen's theory seems well suited to explain the traditional socialist platform. The claim would be that a policy program regarding primary economic life is both explained and justified by a normative thesis regarding primary economic life. And that normative thesis would then have the potential to revise the traditional program.

In spite of this structure, Cohen's account turns out to be extremely traditional: he ends *WNS* with an appeal for non-market institutions, speaking of the need to find the "real meaning" of collective ownership and declaring that "the market is intrinsically repugnant".<sup>15</sup> This is surprising, since on the neo-socialist view there ought to be no entailment between normative principles and institutional forms. There seems to be no compelling reason to deny that it is at least *possible* for individuals within actually existing institutional structures to produce and exchange with each other's needs in mind. They might use the pricing function of markets, for instances, to get a sense of social needs, making sure to voluntarily redistribute any unequal winnings. In fact Cohen himself introduces such a possibility when he speaks of officials who engage in maximizing market trades on behalf of charities.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore hard to see why Cohen should be convinced that the principle of community *rules out* markets. It seems that he has simply stepped back from the iconoclastic implications of his view.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Primary and secondary economic life are of course deeply intertwined in reality, since redistribution affects what is produced and exchanged and what is produced and exchanged affects what is redistributed. See Marx, *Grundrisse*, 88-100.

<sup>15</sup> *WNS*, 78, 75

<sup>16</sup> *WNS*, 61-62

<sup>17</sup> This aspect of Cohen's theory has caused some commentators to accuse Cohen of a "bait and switch" strategy. See, e.g., Krause, "Beyond Capitalism?"

A more charitable reading appears at first to be available. On this interpretation, Cohen's point is not that it is *impossible* to realize community under market institutions, but just that it is *unlikely*.<sup>18</sup> Once we set aside his hyperbole regarding the *intrinsic* repugnance of markets, we arrive at the more modest claim that "market exchange ... tends against the value of community."<sup>19</sup> This is an empirical generalization regarding the effects of markets, rather than a claim about their intrinsic nature. Although it does leave Cohen open to the charge of armchair sociology, in its strongest form it would simply amount to the uncontroversial claim that market institutions encourage people to "give as little service as they can in exchange for as much service as they can get"—to buy low and to sell high, in other words—and then the claim that *this* is inimical to community.<sup>20</sup>

But why exactly is buying low and selling high antithetical to community? Clearly someone who tries to give as little service as she can for as much service as she can get is not engaged in express reciprocity, whereby we produce and exchange with each other's needs *directly* in mind. But why think that express reciprocity is necessary for community—or, to put it another way, that implicit reciprocity is antithetical to community? Recall that Cohen defined community as the principle that directs us to care for and about one another, and to care *that* we care for and about one another. Is it really not possible to express this care through implicit reciprocity, for example by endorsing and upholding just background institutions at the secondary level of economic life regardless of whether we buy low and sell high?<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> One piece of evidence in favour of taking this reading as definitive is Cohen's suggestion that a given principle can enjoy "a modest measure of realization" whenever some people act in accordance with it. See *WNS*, 65

<sup>19</sup> *WNS*, 75

<sup>20</sup> *WNS*, 42

<sup>21</sup> See Arneson, "Liberalism, Capitalism, and "Socialist" Principles" and Hodgson, "Community Beyond the Liberal State."

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Adapting an example from John Searle, we could imagine a group of business-school students with an earnest desire to benefit humanity and the sincere belief that the best way to do that is to earn as much money as possible, even if that means acting selfishly, and then to periodically redistribute their winnings, whether through the state or through private donations on the Andrew Carnegie model.<sup>22</sup> Suppose further that on graduation day these students make a compact to act accordingly. This would be what Searle calls “a higher level of cooperation to the effect that there should be no lower level cooperation”—implicit reciprocity, in other words. Would this not satisfy the principle of community as Cohen frames it? Viewed exclusively at the lower level, the graduates’ actions would certainly seem selfish, but it might be thought equally obvious that recognition of the higher-level compact would change our assessment: the actions that fall under the compact seem to manifest the students’ concern for and about their fellow humans, while the compact itself seems to manifest their concern *that* they care for and about them. What then is missing?

Cohen gives a somewhat Kantian response, claiming that buying low and selling high entails the “moral shabbiness” of “treating ... people as mere means” and therefore “horrible ways of seeing people”.<sup>23</sup> Express reciprocity, by contrast, is “required for human relationships to take a desirable form.”<sup>24</sup> Now Cohen is a value pluralist who believes that “the normative requirements we recognize present themselves in competitive array: they cannot be satisfied all the time, nor do we have a method for systematically combining them.”<sup>25</sup> He would not therefore be committed to the Kantian conclusion that treating people as mere means is

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<sup>22</sup> In some ways this hypothetical arrangement is similar to the scheme that Cohen discusses on pages 63-65 of *WNS*, which is derived from Carens, *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market: An Essay in Utopian Politico-economic Theory*. See also Steiner, “Greed and Fear.”

<sup>23</sup> *WNS*, 40, 47, 62

<sup>24</sup> *WNS*, 39

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, 4

never permitted, consequences be damned. His point would just be that a state of affairs in which reciprocity is only implicit will be *in one way worse* than a state of affairs in which it is express, since it involves treating people as mere means.<sup>26</sup> The trouble is that it is not in fact clear that our putative business-school graduates *do* treat others as mere means. Certainly in their day-to-day economic activities they treat others as means to making a profit, but that does not mean they treat them as *mere* means. Quite the contrary: they also treat them as ends-in-themselves, which is why they devote their careers to serving them. So Cohen’s attack on implicit reciprocity does not seem justified.<sup>27</sup>

Earlier we saw that on Cohen’s view the socialist ideal enjoins express reciprocity, whereas the left-liberal ideal is content with implicit reciprocity. The advantage of this way of carving up the territory is that it offers a way of explaining, justifying and revising the traditional socialist policy platform. Restrictions on markets and private ownership of the means of production, for instance, could be explained and justified as attempts to ensure that citizens produce and exchange with each other’s needs directly in mind—but if other policies turned out to be more conducive to that end, so much the better. With respect to these ambitions the failings of *WNS* ought now to be clear. Cohen does concede that traditional socialism is flawed, both in terms of efficiency and in terms of liberty.<sup>28</sup> But his discussion of other forms of socialism founders on his belief that buying low and selling high *necessarily* involves

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<sup>26</sup> Cohen, *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice, and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, 231, referencing Parfit, “Equality and Priority.”

<sup>27</sup> Cohen might respond that while the graduates do treat people *in general* as ends-in-themselves, they fall short of treating each and every individual as such. Suppose they become loan sharks in some legal way, such that their way of benefiting humanity in general involves bankrupting particular individuals. Are those individuals really being treated as ends-in-themselves? The answer, I think, is yes—in some respects, they are. The fact that in this particular instance they stand to lose more than they gain from the operations of the redistributive scheme does not mean that they are not members of a class at whose benefit the scheme is aimed. Thanks to Selim Berker for pressing me to address this objection.

<sup>28</sup> *WNS*, 60-61, 75-76

treating others as mere means, so that institutions that encourage us to buy low and sell high do in fact turn out to be “intrinsically repugnant” on his view—not because they produce mere instrumentalism in every single case, as it originally seemed, but rather because they systematically encourage such behaviour in general.<sup>29</sup> As he puts it at the end of *WNS*, “Every market, even a socialist market, is a *system* of predation.”<sup>30</sup> From a political perspective, then, Cohen ends up backing away from the iconoclastic potential of neo-socialism. And from a philosophical perspective his argument for doing so seems weak.

Cohen’s account may be fatally flawed, but it nevertheless opens up a path for neo-socialism. If we preserve the idea that the crucial difference between the socialist ideal and its left-liberal rival concerns modes of reciprocity, the task becomes to justify the socialist position on reciprocity while taking seriously the possibility that this justification will entail revising the traditional policy platform. If we can execute those tasks, we will find ourselves with a theory fit for the present. This is the challenge I will take up in the rest of this paper. Like Cohen, my goal will not be to give an exhaustive account, but rather to provide a sketch that opens up a new way of thinking. I will also follow Cohen in assuming a dialectical situation in which the opponent is a left-liberal who believes that implicit or “wide” reciprocity is all that is required of citizens in an ideal society with respect to economic life. Where I will depart from Cohen is in argumentative strategy. For whereas Cohen’s approach leaves no room for distinguishing what we owe to our fellow citizens and what we owe to humans as such, I want to argue that the way to justify the socialist emphasis on express reciprocity is to think about the distinctive obligations that arise from joint action for the sake of mutual provision. This in turn allows us to mount an immanent critique of the left-liberal position.

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<sup>29</sup> *WNS*, 78

<sup>30</sup> *WNS*, 82 (my italics)

## 2. Joint Action and the Camping Trip

At the start of *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls invites us to assume that a society is a “cooperative venture for mutual advantage”.<sup>31</sup> His principles of justice are then his answer to a problem made salient by that picture of society, namely how the benefits and burdens of cooperation are to be distributed. What I now want to argue is that participation in a cooperative venture for mutual advantage *also* entails the responsibility to produce and exchange with other’s needs in mind, so that those who seek to get as much as they can for as little outlay as possible are violating their obligations. If this is right, then a socialist conclusion can be drawn from a left-liberal premise.

The critical move is to see that a cooperative venture for mutual advantage is a form of joint action—in providing for one another via a division of labour, we are acting together. As Margaret Gilbert points out, this brings with it distinctive rights and responsibilities.<sup>32</sup> The example with which Gilbert begins her analysis is two people going for a walk together. What distinguishes going for a walk with someone from simply walking alongside each other by coincidence is that it involves a form of partnership. (This is why we typically try to disrupt an unintended pattern of walking in step with someone else as soon as we notice it, thereby rejecting the implication of association.<sup>33</sup>) This partnership brings with it a kind of normativity, as Gilbert brings out with the following example. Suppose James and Paula are out on a walk and this is common knowledge between them. James is a naturally faster

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<sup>31</sup>Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 4. Cohen also makes the passing remark that “a society *is* a network of mutual provision”, although he does not use this to argue for an analogy between camping trips and societies. See *WNS*, 45

<sup>32</sup> See Gilbert, *On Social Facts* and *A Theory of Political Obligation: Membership, Commitment, and the Bonds of Society*

<sup>33</sup> Gilbert, *A Theory of Political Obligation*, 103

walker and races on ahead. Paula calls after him, demanding that he slow down and rebuking him for going too fast. “James and Paula,” Gilbert writes, “will both understand that she has the *standing* to demand that he act in a manner appropriate to their joint activity, and to rebuke him should he act in a manner inappropriate to it.”<sup>34</sup> Someone observing the situation from a park bench would not have this standing. This particular form of answerability is internal to the joint activity, and a function of it. It implies that groups acting around a common aim have a constitutive normative structure entailing distinctive rights and obligations. We could say that membership of such a group entails an obligation to *play one’s part* in the joint activity that constitutes the group. And we can voice this obligation—whether in demands or in rebukes—by speaking in the name of a plural subject: *Hey, we’re on a walk!*

Complex questions arise from these foundations, such as in what sense, if any, that plural subject really exists; how we should understand the form of intentionality at issue in joint action; and whether the relevant form of answerability is a function of joint action alone or joint action plus some facts about mutual answerability more generally. Nothing I have said so far commits me to Gilbert’s own (highly controversial) positions within those debates.<sup>35</sup> What I *am* committed to is the thought that participation in joint action entails distinctive rights and responsibilities and therefore produces special kinds of reason.

This does not imply that these reasons are *overriding*. Suppose James and Paula are out to rob a bank together, and the plan is for Paula to point the gun while James empties the safe. My

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 104

<sup>35</sup> For a survey of some of the issues, see Miller, “Review of *A Theory of Political Obligation* by Margaret Gilbert” and Arruda, “Review of *Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World* by Margaret Gilbert.”

claim is that James has special standing to demand of Paula that she play her part, and vice versa. But it may also be true that others have standing to demand of them that they do *not* play their parts, whether as a function of co-participation in some other form of joint action or simply as a function of their status as moral agents. These latter demands may outweigh the former, so that all things considered neither James nor Paula have sufficient reason to carry out their allotted roles. But this does not mean that there is *no* form of answerability internal to the joint action. Paula may be right, that is, to drop the gun and wait for the police to arrive—but she surely owes James *some* kind of explanation for doing so.<sup>36</sup> The rights and responsibilities internal to joint action can be outweighed, but they cannot be altogether eliminated.

There might also be cases in which our obligations deriving from joint action are simply co-extensive with our obligations deriving from other sources. If the only way that either James or Paula can rescue a drowning child is by acting together, for instance, they would have a moral obligation to play their part regardless of any considerations internal to the nature of joint action. Cases like these might be relatively common, but they do not refute the thesis that joint action issues in distinctive rights and responsibilities.

With this on the table we can now turn to the argument concerning express and implicit reciprocity. Understood as a cooperative venture for mutual advantage, a society is a particular form of joint action in which we provide for one another via a division of labour.

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<sup>36</sup> Unless it so happens that the robbery was undertaken on the understanding that Paula could drop out whenever she felt like it. See Gilbert, *A Theory of Political Obligation : Membership, Commitment, and the Bonds of Society*, 141-144

And this brings with it distinctive rights and responsibilities. We can see this if we recast an example from *WNS* along Gilbert-inspired lines.

To make the case for the socialist principles that constitute his ideal, Cohen invites us to imagine a context in which their realization seems both feasible and desirable, namely a camping trip. He then suggests that their realization at the national or global level would be similarly attractive “to all people of good will” so long as it were feasible.<sup>37</sup> Many consider this to be the signature feature of *WNS*, but in my view it is simply a propaedeutic designed to facilitate our consideration of the desirability of socialist principles without interference from doubts concerning desirability.<sup>38</sup> Argumentatively speaking, the real question is whether Cohen is right to think his principles desirable for society at large, and in this respect the camping trip example is strictly speaking irrelevant. For my purposes, by contrast, the example is *argumentatively* useful. Camping trips involve simple structures of joint action for the sake of mutual provision. As such, they permit us to uncover the normative structure of this kind of joint action.

To take part in a camping trip is to head out as a member of a group organized for a particular purpose. Let us assume, with Cohen, that the idea is for each of us to have a good time doing the things that he or she likes best, whether together or apart, with no hierarchy between us.<sup>39</sup> If Gilbert is right, each member of the trip will have standing to demand of the

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<sup>37</sup> *WNS*, 51

<sup>38</sup> This rhetorical strategy invites the obvious complaint that our intuitions regarding camping trips are themselves dependent on tacit presuppositions regarding that specific institutional context. See Ronzoni, "Life Is Not a Camping Trip - on the Desirability of Cohenite Socialism" and Heath, "On the Scalability of Cooperative Structures." What is unclear, however, is that this constitutes an objection to Cohen's ideal as opposed to the rhetoric he uses to move us towards it. The complication is that Cohen does not really offer *any* arguments for his normative position. He simply invites us to share his intuitions.

<sup>39</sup> *WNS*, 3

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others that they play their parts accordingly. What are the parts of this joint activity? It seems plausible to suppose that they will involve creating the background condition for individual enjoyment. If no one fetches wood, cooks dinner, washes the dishes or puts up the tents, there will come a point where this failure makes it impossible to realize the goods for the sake of which the trip was undertaken in the first place. After a night without food or shelter, for instance, the fishers might not want to go fishing and the hikers might not want to go hiking. Given the goal of the trip, each member would therefore have standing to demand of the others that they play their parts in a division of labour aimed at creating those background conditions.

How is this labour to be divided? The utopian solution would be for everyone to chip in according to their talents and desires. Those who enjoy making fires and are skilled at it will make the fires, those who enjoy putting up tents and are skilled at it will put up the tents, and so on. But clearly enjoyment and talent can come apart: it might be that the person whose talents are optimally deployed in putting up tents would rather make fires, for instance. A fair distribution of tasks would give everyone a roughly similar opportunity to enjoy themselves. This would involve some combination of allocating people to tasks where they can best serve the collective and sharing pleasurable and burdensome tasks equitably.

At this point institutions would have to come into the picture, one might think, to coordinate action and prevent free-riding by means of sanctions and rewards, both formal and informal. This seems right as a matter of fact: camping trips do tend to involve a division of labour enforced by a mixture of explicit rules (e.g. a rota system) and implicit social pressure (including the standing possibility of refusing further cooperation with free-

riders or defectors).<sup>40</sup> But from a justificatory perspective those institutions are downstream from the norms that they exist to institutionalize. If everyone responded perfectly to normative reasons by themselves, there wouldn't be any need for (extrinsic) sanctions and rewards. It is therefore reasonable to ask how trip participants ought to organize their labours in the absence of mediating institutions.

If we accept the stipulation that there is to be no hierarchy, and hence no manager to assign people to roles, each individual would have to decide for herself how best to contribute in light of the group's needs and in light of others' preferences regarding work. Every member of the trip would therefore have standing to make two demands of every other member: (i) that they each think seriously about what a fair and efficient division of labour aimed at creating the background conditions for enjoyment would be; and (ii) that they each play their part in the division of labour as they conceive it, thereby producing with each other's needs in mind. If an individual fell short in either respect, any member of the trip would have standing to rebuke them in the name of the plural subject: *We're in this together, you know.*

If this is right, then the reason that camping trip participants ought to produce with each other's needs in mind is that a camping trip is a form of joint activity involving mutual provision. A joint activity aimed at the realization of certain goods brings with it distinctive obligations, and in the case of a camping trip this includes obligations having to do with mutual provision. In this context the problem with seeking to get as much as we can for as little outlay as possible is not that it manifests undesirable attitudes towards our fellow

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<sup>40</sup> See Heath, "On the Scalability of Cooperative Structures."

humans, as Cohen would have it, but that it prevents the trip from achieving the goods for the sake of which it was constituted. It makes the trip worse *as a trip*.

Can we transfer this line of argument to society at large? Obviously life is not a camping trip.<sup>41</sup> But the Rawlsian premise that society is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage suggests that societies and camping trips have an analogous structure to this extent at least: they are both forms of joint action in which we provide for one another via a division of labour. And if the argument just given is correct, then participants in such joint action have the standing to demand of one another that each think seriously about what mutual provision amounts to and what a fair and efficient division of labour aimed at it would be, and that each play their part within the division of labour as they conceive it. In short, it looks as though qua citizens we ought to produce with each other's needs in mind. And that would seem to entail express reciprocity. If an argument of this general form can hold in the case of society, we would be able to draw a socialist conclusion from a left-liberal premise plus a premise regarding the normative structure of joint action. But the question is whether the difference in scale between camping trips and societies renders this transposition crude or illegitimate.

### **3. The Scale of Joint Action**

The fact that the argument from joint action requires abstracting away from the difference in scale is not in itself an objection, since all models make simplifying assumptions. A map that showed every single topographical detail would not be a map at all. Simplifications have the

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<sup>41</sup> See Ronzoni, "Life Is Not a Camping Trip - on the Desirability of Cohenite Socialism."

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benefit of focusing attention on what remains in the picture; the concern is just whether the benefit exceeds the costs. The answer will depend on our purposes. A map that is useful for hiking will require more detail than a map that is useful for driving, even though both could justifiably be called veridical. And even a non-veridical map—that is, one whose representations are distortions—might be useful for some purposes: the map of the London Underground is notoriously misleading vis-à-vis actual geography, for instance, but it is arguably more useful for travellers than an accurate representation would be. The question, then, is whether and in what sense scale actually matters for the argument from joint action.

Scale might seem to present problems for my argument in three distinct but related ways. The first is that as the group grows bigger, it will become harder to see what the demand to produce and exchange with each other's needs in mind actually amounts to, practically speaking. At some point we will lack the information and the processing power to calculate what the optimal deployment of our talents would be. The second is that scale is likely to affect how much weight we give to that demand in any case. For recall that on my picture the responsibilities issuing from joint action are not absolute, but must be weighed against reasons deriving from one's other responsibilities and, perhaps, one's own interests. The smaller the group, we might think, the more likely we are to heed the demand to play our part in the relevant division of labour. Failure to do so may bring more palpable costs, such as opprobrium from others, than it would in the context of a larger group with a high degree of anonymity. Conversely, the benefits to each actor of a well functioning scheme of cooperation may be more visible on a smaller scale than a larger scale, while increased feelings of solidarity may in any case affect what is taken as *one's own* when making calculations regarding one's self-interest. The third point is related to the second. For it

seems obvious that large-scale cooperation requires coercive institutions to prevent free-riding and to enforce rules of the road. A picture of large-scale cooperation that does not make reference to this fact might therefore be thought deeply misleading.

None of these objections touches an argument of the form sketched above. The claim is that if society is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage then just in virtue of that fact citizens ought to make a good faith effort to produce and exchange in light of a conception of how their work would fit within a division of labour aimed at serving the interests of their fellow citizens. The fact that this leaves a lot open to interpretation from a practical perspective is not in itself an objection to the argument. Nor is the claim that joint action issues in distinctive reasons affected by the fact that those reasons are likely to be accorded different weights in different circumstances, however important that fact may be in practice.<sup>42</sup> Finally, while there is no doubt that in the real world large-scale cooperation requires coercive institutions, it is not clear that this affects the argument either. For as we have already seen, real-life camping trips also have to enforce good behaviour through complicated systems of sanctions and rewards. The reason we abstracted from that fact in the last section was that argumentatively speaking the relevant institutions are downstream from the norms that they exist to institutionalize—if they exist to enforce good behaviour, there is a prior question as to what such behaviour would consist in. And it is precisely in order to answer that question that the argument from joint action comes in. The spectre of coercive perfectionism certainly does hover in the background whenever one speaks of a demand for citizens to deploy their talents optimally within a division of labour aimed at the

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<sup>42</sup> It does not seem to me that the weight we accord to such reasons always varies in lock-step with scale in any case. In cases of emergency (natural disasters, wars and so on) we seem perfectly capable of prioritizing reasons issuing from our roles in large-scale cooperation over our other reasons.

good life, not least given the history of socialist regimes.<sup>43</sup> But it seems perfectly possible to hold liberty lexically prior to the argument from joint action, so that the demand is not for citizens to stick to the station and duties imposed upon them from above, but rather for them to assign themselves to their posts.<sup>44</sup>

In short, joint action seems to entail distinctive rights and responsibilities irrespective of its scale: no matter how large it becomes, each participant still has standing to demand that the others play their parts. Where scale might still matter argumentatively, however, is with respect to the nature of the action itself, and hence what it means to play one's part in that action. For it might be that small-scale and large-scale mutual provision are different enough that we should understand them as different kinds of joint action that issue in different kinds of normative demands. To put it another way, we have seen that participating in joint action brings with it a directed obligation (*vis-à-vis* one's fellow participants) to play one's part in that action. In the case of a walk, this might involve, for instance, *being present* to one's partner, and therefore not striding ahead by oneself, playing video games on one's phone and so on.<sup>45</sup> In the case of mutual provision via a division of labour, it will involve working to provide for one's fellows. But the question is whether working to provide for one's fellows entails different things at different scales.

On first sight it would seem to entail what Cohen calls express reciprocity, that is, producing with each other's needs *directly* in mind—not because noble motivation is necessary “for human relationships to take a desirable form”, as if the locus of value were a good will, but

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<sup>43</sup> For a justification of coercion in related circumstances, see Stanczyk, "Productive Justice."

<sup>44</sup> In this respect my approach is similar to that given in chapter 5 of Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality*.

<sup>45</sup> Obviously one could imagine walks organized on different lines.

rather because structures of deliberation have practical effects.<sup>46</sup> Imagine a farmer's market where I am a farmer and you are a customer. I have a peach that looks fine to you, but which I know to be mealy. (Suppose I know this because if one peach in the batch is mealy, the rest are.) If I am acting with your needs in mind, I will not sell it to you; if I am acting as a self-interested maximizer, by contrast, I will sell it to you unless I believe there will be repercussions. If we iterate such deliberations enough times across a whole society, and with a sufficiently capacious sense of what could count as a mealy peach—that is, as something that will harm the customer however easily it will sell—then it looks as though a society of self-interested maximizers will not provide for our needs optimally. This will be the case even if these maximizers engage in post-hoc redistribution of income, since reciprocity at that level would come too late to remedy the effects of a system in which production and exchange is not aligned with needs. We can see this by imagining that the harm in question is a form of pollution. Suppose I am an inventor. I know that the gadget I am offering you will release toxins in your home, but I also know that you are unaware of this and that you will find the product attractive in terms of price and overt features. You buy the product and ten years later develop cancer. Even if I made sure to redistribute some (or even all) of my winnings, I can hardly be said to have been providing for you optimally.<sup>47</sup>

Unfortunately this intuitive case for the priority of express reciprocity runs counter to standard economic thinking since Mandeville and Smith. The standard view is that express reciprocity is both unnecessary and unhelpful. It is unnecessary because a farmer who sells mealy peaches will not last long at market, and if an inventor whose gadgets release toxins

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<sup>46</sup> *WNS*, 39

<sup>47</sup> Note that the fact that I am not providing for you optimally does not entail that I am treating you as a mere means. See note 24 above.

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over the medium term will last longer, we can solve the problem by imposing regulations. It is unhelpful, meanwhile, because it is inefficient: over the long run, self-interested maximizers will produce more and better goods than those who aim to benefit others directly, so long as markets are free and fair. All of this is familiar, but for present purposes the point is that it bears on the rights and responsibilities attendant on membership in a scheme for mutual provision. As in sport, one might think, so with the economy: sometimes the best way to serve the other person is to compete with them. It seems plausible to suppose that you have the standing to demand of your tennis partner that she direct her efforts towards beating you rather than conceiving of each shot as an opportunity for collaboration; absent special circumstances, if she goes easy on you then you have grounds for complaint. But if express reciprocity gets in the way of mutual provision, then by the terms of my Gilbert-inspired analysis citizens would have standing to demand of one another that they do *not* try to produce with each other's needs in mind. The normative demands internal to the joint action of mutual provision within a large-scale society with free and fair markets would simply be at odds with those internal to mutual provision within a small-scale camping trip.

The problem with this argument is that in the real world markets are rarely free and fair. They are typically characterized by barriers to entry, asymmetry of information, hidden externalities and so on. Even if we make the utopian assumption that regulation could in principle solve these problems, it is worth noticing that regulations will have actuality only to the degree that they are followed. Given the limits of real-time enforcement, *full* compliance would require that citizens act within the rules by themselves. And given the limits of

legislation—which can never address every possible case, not least because situations change—full compliance would also require that citizens act within the *spirit* of the rules.<sup>48</sup>

Imagine you are in charge of a power plant and you learn that it is producing a new form of pollution uncaptured by existing definitions of pollution in the law. Let us suppose that you think, and are right to think, that in such circumstances you could not be prosecuted for continuing to behave as a self-interested maximizer. You may have a moral obligation vis-à-vis your fellow humans not to act in this way, but it seems plausible that you also have a distinct obligation to your fellow citizens as well. As fellow members of a scheme of mutual provision, they would have standing to demand that you produce and exchange with their needs in mind.

If this is right then even within a large-scale society express reciprocity must be *prior* to implicit reciprocity from a normative perspective. We can illustrate this notion of normative priority by returning to the tennis analogy: in the vast majority of cases it is perfectly legitimate, and in fact expected, to throw oneself into beating one's opponent; but if she falls to the ground clutching her knee just as one is lining up a devastating smash then one ought to rush to her aid rather than claiming the point. When the red lights go off, as it were, one reverts to the mode of deliberation characteristic of friendship. In such cases we can say that friendship is prior to rivalry in the order of reasons: competition is undertaken in a spirit of friendship and it is therefore implicitly regulated by it. The neo-socialist position on reciprocity has a similar structure. In certain circumstances it is true that a citizen can best serve his or her fellow citizens by trying to get as much as possible for as little outlay as

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<sup>48</sup> See Shiffrin, "Incentives, Motives, and Talents."

possible. This might even hold most of the time, depending on the extent of market and regulatory failure. But given that a change in circumstances *might* lead to a misalignment between incentives and social needs, as a form of mutual provision implicit reciprocity is not “robust”.<sup>49</sup> A commitment to it should therefore only ever be provisional. Good citizens would have to monitor the system to see whether it is fulfilling its function. They would also have to monitor themselves to guard against the possibility of self-deception. And this monitoring of implicit reciprocity would have to take express reciprocity as the default for good citizenship—that to which we should return in cases of uncertainty.<sup>50</sup> That is what the left-liberal ideal is missing.

#### 4. Revisionary Implications

On the view I have been suggesting, if citizens act and interact so as to provide for one another’s needs, they will ipso facto realize the socialist ideal. The ideal therefore addresses us as citizens rather than as members of a particular class, and it allows us to be flexible about institutional forms rather than dogmatic. That might raise suspicions as to whether neo-socialism counts as socialism at all. After all, Tony Blair is also associated with rhetoric about the changing class basis of socialism and flexibility regarding institutional forms, and in hindsight that seemed simply to be a way of persuading socialists to be (at most) left-liberals.<sup>51</sup> Something similar might seem to be true of my theory: in conceding the possibility that implicit reciprocity, and therefore maximizing behaviour, will play a large role in a large-scale society, even if it will be *normatively* secondary, it might look as though the baby has

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<sup>49</sup> See Pettit, *The Robust Demands of the Good: Ethics with Attachment, Virtue, and Respect*.

<sup>50</sup> On the notion of monitoring, see Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality."

<sup>51</sup> See Blair, "Socialism, Fabian Society."

been thrown out along with the bathwater. From one perspective an objection of this kind might seem uninteresting—the important question would be whether the view is justified, not whether it counts as socialist by the standards of existing usage. But for the purposes of my project it *is* important, because my goal is to suggest a new ideal to those who are attracted to socialism in the traditional sense but aware of its failings. This new ideal ought to be open to challenging the judgements of traditional socialism, but at the same time it also has to offer an account that explains why those judgements are appealing in the first place.

At a normative level the differences between left-liberalism and socialism as I have construed it are certainly slighter than they would be on Cohen's construal. But they are nevertheless real and important. Having a plan that involves deliberately leaving certain matters unplanned is importantly different from having no plan at all, because the former involves a constitutive norm whereby the efficacy of not planning is continually up for question.<sup>52</sup> Something similar is true in the present case. There may be a range of cases in which socialism and left-liberalism may call for the same action, so that for any given state of affairs the difference between them will only be counterfactual, in the sense that it would only become actual if the facts were to change in certain respects.<sup>53</sup> But life is such that this actualization will be relatively frequent—it will occur, as we have already seen, in cases of market and regulatory failure, where one can no longer plausibly claim that aiming to get as much service for as little outlay as possible is the best way of serving the interests of one's cooperative partners. It will also occur, perhaps even more importantly, in our decisions regarding *what* to produce. For the most wide-reaching effect of holding express reciprocity prior to implicit reciprocity would be to shape career choices. The demand is for each citizen

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<sup>52</sup> See Shapiro, *Legality*, chapter 5

<sup>53</sup> See Pettit, *The Robust Demands of the Good: Ethics with Attachment, Virtue, and Respect*.

to make a good faith effort to think about how their talents could best be deployed within a wider division of labour aimed at the good life. If citizens took this demand seriously, it seems likely that what is produced would itself change—to pick an easy example, there might be fewer financial instruments in the world, and more goods of other kinds. Once we see this it becomes clear that a theory (like left-liberalism) that focuses primarily on secondary economic life is missing something desperately important: if production is misdirected, redistribution always will come too late.

There is therefore a genuine difference between the neo-socialist ideal and left-liberalism at the normative level. What is more, it looks as though the ideal can in fact speak to classic socialist concerns while nevertheless suggesting sympathetic revisions. For although neo-socialism is not *at base* an institutional doctrine, unlike traditional socialism, institutions are crucial to its realization. At bottom the neo-socialist ideal is of free and equal citizens cooperating in primary economic life for the sake of mutual advantage. It therefore has to do with action in the first instance. But once we relax the constraint of ideal theory and step out into the real world, we see that different institutions will incentivize us or even constrain us to deliberate in different ways, and therefore institutionalize different norms. The contribution of the ideal to practical politics is not to settle institutional questions once and for all, but rather to focus attention on the question of how different institutional structures affect modes of deliberation with respect to production and exchange—to make this salient as a dimension along which institutions can vary, just as they can vary with respect to efficiency and other values.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> For a similar strategy, see XYZ

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Suppose it turns out, as a matter of empirical fact, that market institutions do encourage us to forget about others' needs in our deliberations, perhaps because they encourage us to act on a heuristic of buying low and selling high.<sup>55</sup> That might give us a reason for preferring non-market models of production. Our judgement might depend on the degree to which express reciprocity is likely to be important to the activity in question. Compare baking and dentistry, for example. If your local baker does not produce with your needs in mind, the results may not be catastrophic. If your dentist does not, you may feel the difference. If a nationalized health service would make this kind of deliberation less likely then that would be one argument in its favour. Of course that argument could be outweighed by other factors, such as efficiency or flexibility. Or it might be that empirically speaking collective ownership does not in fact promote the right kind of deliberation. It might be that some other form of institutional design turns out to be better suited to this task—candidates would include stakeholder systems, cooperative structures, social entrepreneurship schemes and so on. The ideal therefore allows socialists to be open-minded about institutional forms without losing their identity.<sup>56</sup>

To give a concrete example of what I mean, let us consider a case involving a cooperative. In November 2015, the American hiking cooperative REI made the decision to shut its doors on Black Friday, both online and offline, thereby denying itself revenue from the now-traditional post-Thanksgiving shopping spree of American consumers. This is how Jerry Stritzke, REI's president and CEO, explained the decision: "As a member-owned co-op, our definition of success goes beyond money. We believe that a life lived outdoors is a life well

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<sup>55</sup> On heuristics, see John Levi Martin, *Social Structures*, 18-20

<sup>56</sup> See Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*. Of course, cooperative socialism has a long history of its own. See Cole, *A Century of Cooperation*.

lived and we aspire to be stewards of our great outdoors. We think that Black Friday has gotten out of hand and so we are choosing to invest in helping people get outside with loved ones this holiday season, over spending it in the aisles.”<sup>57</sup> His claim, in other words, is that REI’s institutional structure fosters a mode of deliberation in which corporate representatives make decisions based on their sense of the role that REI can play securing the good life for Americans.<sup>58</sup> That role can only ever be partial, since it is merely one role within a wider division of labour. It is also necessarily fragile and uncertain, partly because it depends on the work that others are doing, and partly because it demands continual reinterpretation. For instance, it could be argued that given the likely behaviour of other retailers, the outdoorsy cause would be best served by encouraging Americans to spend their Black Friday budgets on hiking boots rather than other consumer goods. The necessity of interpretation means that the threat of self-deception is inescapable, but then that is true of many judgements in human life.<sup>59</sup> For present purposes the point is that such interpretation is only called for because of an institutional structure that fosters workplace deliberation in terms of the function of one’s work within a wider division of labour aimed at the good life, and that in this case the structure in question is cooperative rather than collective. By the terms of my neo-socialist argument, it follows that such a structure ought to be welcomed by socialists even if it entails private ownership and market participation.<sup>60</sup>

The REI example might be thought telling in another way, however, insofar as one surmises that the cooperative’s 3.5 million members are likely to come from a relatively affluent

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<sup>57</sup> <http://newsroom.rei.com/news/corporate/rei-closing-its-doors-on-black-friday-invites-nation-to-optoutside.htm>

<sup>58</sup> This fostering takes place via the need to provide an annual “stewardship report” – see <http://www.rei.com/stewardship/report.html>

<sup>59</sup> See Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man.”

<sup>60</sup> For more on contemporary cooperatives, see Palmer, *Palmer Worker Cooperative Study*.

demographic. This suggests a second way in which neo-socialism can speak to classic socialist concerns. The ideal of citizens deliberating about how to produce and exchange for each other's benefit presumes that they have the capacity to do so. It therefore enjoins us to consider the distribution of opportunities to deliberate in the relevant way, and this in turn raises the traditional socialist question of access to the means of production. This might give us a reason to favour capital redistribution or a universal basic income that is distinct from (even if complementary with) the reasons that flow from left-liberal reflections on the justice and legitimacy of a coercive state.<sup>61</sup> Redistribution would be considered as a means of giving everyone the opportunity to fulfil their obligations as members of society. In a political context where the language of "makers and takers" seems to have been turned against the poorest in society, this reframing represent a contribution in and of itself.

## Conclusion

In the introduction I said that my aim was to provide an account of socialism that avoids naivety concerning state ownership and nostalgia for a lost era of large-scale working-class movements while nevertheless capturing classic socialist concerns. My plan was to follow Cohen in pursuing what I called a neo-socialist strategy, which argues for a normative ideal that is focused on primary economic life but does not entail particular policies. Cohen's execution of that strategy fails, but what I took from him is the thought that the socialist ideal differs from the left-liberal ideal with respect to its conception of reciprocity in primary economic life. Cohen claims that express reciprocity is necessary for community, and hence that left-liberalism, in failing to promote express reciprocity, ipso facto falls short with

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<sup>61</sup> For examples of such schemes, see, e.g., Blasi, Freeman and Kruse, *The Citizen's Share: Putting Ownership Back Into Democracy* and Van Parijs, "Basic Income: A Simple and Powerful Idea for the Twenty-first Century."

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respect to community. My argument is more nuanced. The ideal is certainly of citizens producing and exchanging with each other's needs in mind, but this does not necessarily imply doing so *directly*. All that is required is for citizens to maintain express reciprocity as the default mode of deliberation in primary economic life, that to which we return in cases of sufficient uncertainty. This sounds trivial at first, but once we consider the role of career choice in shaping what is actually produced in a society, and hence its functioning as a cooperative scheme for mutual advantage, we see that the demand cuts into contemporary practice quite sharply. What is more, it has implications for institutional design, both with respect to production and with respect to distribution. Although I have only provided a sketch of neo-socialism, then, I hope to have demonstrated its political and theoretical promise.

The elephant in the room is that the argument that I offered in favour of this ideal was by no means self-standing. I proceeded by means of an immanent critique of left-liberalism, taking for granted the Rawlsian premise that a society is a cooperative scheme for mutual advantage. This is not *simply* an immanent critique, in that I do believe the premise can be justified. But the fact remains that no such justification has been given here, and further work is therefore called for.

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