

Community, Pluralism and Individualistic Pursuits: A Defence of *Why Not Socialism?*

Abstract: Is socialism morally preferable to free market capitalism? G. A. Cohen (2009) has argued that even when the economic inequalities produced by free markets are not the result of injustice, they nevertheless ought to be avoided because they are community undermining. As free markets inevitably lead to economic inequalities and Socialism does not, Socialism is morally preferable. This argument has been the subject of recent criticism. Chad Van Schoelandt (2014) argues that it depends on a conception of community that is incompatible with pluralism while Richard Miller (2010) argues that it rules out individualistic pursuits. I will show that both of these objections rest upon a misreading of Cohen's argument.

Keywords: SOCIALISM; G. A. COHEN; CAPITALISM; COMMUNITY; EQUALITY

Introduction

In *Why Not Socialism?* G. A. Cohen argues that Socialism is morally preferable to Free Market Capitalism.¹ He starts by presenting a situation in which he claims people would strongly favour socialist principles over the alternatives. On a camping trip, Cohen claims, people would favour a situation in which the group's facilities are placed under collective control for the duration of the trip over one based on free market principles. Cohen then claims that it is the principles of equality and community that are realized on a typical camping trip that make this form of

¹ Cohen, G. A. (2009). *Why Not Socialism?* Princeton University Press.

organization so appealing before going on to investigate whether it would be desirable and feasible for a society to follow these principles.²

In the course of his investigation of the principles realized on the camping trip, Cohen argues that the principle of community is incompatible with a market system. Cohen gives two arguments to support the claim that market societies are community undermining. First, they create divisions in society that are incompatible with community.³ Second, they undermine the motive of communal reciprocity.⁴ These claims are important because they provide moral reason to favour Socialism that does not rest on an appeal to justice.⁵

² We might worry that the goals of those on a camping trip are worryingly disanalogous to those that members of an economic community possess in their everyday lives. For a development of this objection see Ronzoni, M (2011) ‘Life is Not A Camping Trip – On The Desirability of Cohenite Socialism’. *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 1-15.

³ *Ibid*, p.37.

⁴ See Steiner (2014). ‘Greed and Fear’, *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 13 (2) 140-150. and Van Schoelandt, C. (2014). ‘Markets, Community, and Pluralism’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 64 (254), 149-151 for critiques of Cohen’s argument about the undermining of communal reciprocity

⁵ Though we might think that if these inequalities are community undermining then this can ground objecting to them on the basis of justice. For a development of this thought see Gilabert, P. (2012). ‘Cohen on Socialism, Equality and Community.’ *Socialist Studies*, 8(1).

This paper will focus on the first of these arguments. Chad Van Schoelandt has criticized this argument for presupposing a conception of community that is antithetical to pluralism.⁶ Similarly, Richard Miller, while sympathetic to Cohen's project, claims that this argument rests on a conception of community that is at odds with the value of separateness.⁷ In this paper I will defend Cohen's argument against these objections. I will start by explaining Cohen's argument and both Van Schoelandt's and Miller's objections to it. I will then show that these objections rest upon a shared misreading of Cohen's argument. I will finish by responding to some objections that might be raised against the correct reading of Cohen's argument.

1. Cohen's Community-based Argument Against Markets

Cohen's aim is to show that market generated inequalities are community undermining. This Cohen, claims, is the case even under conditions of socialist equality of opportunity, where differences in outcome do not reflect natural and social capacities but only differences in taste and choice.⁸ As Cohen points out, a society with this form of equality of opportunity might still face three kinds of inequality.

⁶ Van Schoelandt, C. (2014). 'Markets, Community, and Pluralism'. Van Schoelandt also criticizes Cohen's argument that markets encourage repugnant motivations, as does Jason Brennan (2014) *Why Not Capitalism* (London: Routledge), 141–148. I will not investigate these criticisms here as my goal is only to defend Cohen's community objection to inequality.

⁷ R. W. Miller (2010). 'Relationships of Equality: A Camping Trip Revisited.' *Journal of Ethics* 14 (3-4): p.252.

⁸ *Why Not Socialism?*, p.18.

First, people may possess differing levels of certain kinds of goods.⁹ Suppose we are presented with a table laden with apples and oranges. Everyone is given the opportunity to take six pieces of fruit. Clearly, those who take five apples and one orange will have more apples than those who take three of each fruit. Cohen claims that this form of inequality is unproblematic, as although there is inequality in the distribution of some good there is no inequality in the distribution of benefits.¹⁰

The second form of inequality is that which results from regrettable choices that people have made.¹¹ To return to the previous example, suppose that some people eat the fruit on the day they get it and the others decide to save it. However, by the time the second group get round to eating the fruit, it has spoilt. In this case, the second group suffers from an inequality of benefit as a result of the poor choices that they have made. Those who did not eat the fruit immediately will no doubt regret the choice that they have made. Cohen does not find this form of inequality particularly problematic, mainly because on its own it is unlikely to lead to high levels of inequality.

The final form of inequality is that which is produced by differences in option luck.¹²

This is the form of inequality that would result from two people who start from a

⁹ *Ibid*, p.25.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.19.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.26.

¹² *Ibid*, p.30. This form of inequality may seem similar to the previous form. The difference, though, is that this form of inequality has resulted purely from option luck while the previous form of inequality was the result of one group making bad (rather than unlucky) choices.

similar position but who pick different options in gambling or gambling-like behaviour. Suppose, for example, that two such people start off with \$100 and decide to place a bet of \$50 with each other on a coin toss. Once the bet has been settled, one of the gamblers will have \$150 and the other will have \$50. This form of inequality arose not through regrettable choices but from reasonable gambling behaviour. As Cohen notes, this form of inequality is a necessary part of a market society.¹³ It is this form of inequality that Cohen finds particularly problematic.

Cohen claims that although the final two forms of inequality are not contrary to justice, they ought to be prohibited, or at least severely restricted, because they undermine community.¹⁴ To support this claim Cohen gives the example of two people, one of whom is rich and the other poor. The poor man has to ride on a crowded bus everyday while the rich man drives his comfortable car.¹⁵ One day the rich man has to travel by bus because his wife needs to use the car. Cohen claims that the rich man cannot reasonably complain to the poor man about having to ride the bus, in the way that he could reasonably complain to his fellow car drivers. This is because there is a natural community between the fellow car drivers that does not exist between the car driver and the bus passenger.¹⁶ This inequality then, is one that Cohen takes to undermine community and we will examine why Cohen thinks this in the rest of the paper.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.33

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.34

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.36.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.36.

What does this have to do with the question of whether or not socialism is preferable to free market capitalism?¹⁷ The answer is that free market capitalists are committed to people being able to choose where to invest their money and their labour and to reap the rewards that follow from these investments.¹⁸ Given this commitment, those who hold this view are committed to allowing these forms of inequality to exist. Socialists, on the other hand, are described by Cohen as being committed to “collective property and planned mutual giving”.¹⁹ Those who hold this view are not committed to allowing these forms of inequality to exist. Of course, as Cohen has pointed out, someone committed to a socialist form of justice *could* endorse the existence of these forms of inequality. The point, though, is that, unlike the supporter of free market capitalism, she is *not committed* to allowing these forms of inequality. She can instead advocate that the collective resources are allocated in other ways. As a result, if Cohen is right to say that these forms of inequality are morally problematic then this will be a reason to favour socialism over free market capitalism.

2. Van Schoelandt’s Pluralism Objection

Van Schoelandt objects that this argument rests on a conception of community that is at odds with pluralism. By this Van Schoelandt means that there is something valuable about the members of a community having different life experiences and that Cohen’s argument presupposes an idea of community that is at odds with this thought. If this is right and we accept that any reasonable conception of community will allow for diversity then we ought to reject Cohen’s argument.

¹⁷ Thanks to an anonymous referee for asking me to clarify the connection here.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.32.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 10.

Van Schoelandt begins his argument by accepting that Cohen's bus example demonstrates how differences in life experience can put communities under strain, at least on some senses of the word 'community'.²⁰ However, he argues that this is no different from the differing life experiences of someone who is strictly kosher and someone who loves eating bacon or those of a maths genius and a skilled manual labourer. Just as the car driver cannot reasonably complain to the bus passenger about having to ride the bus, the bacon eater cannot reasonably complain to the kosher man about a day without bacon, nor can the mathematician complain about having to do one day of manual labour. The reason in all these cases, Van Schoelandt claims, is the lack of shared experience. In all of these situations it is reasonable for people to complain to those whose experiences are reasonably similar to their own. It is not reasonable, though, to complain to people whose lack of shared experience makes it impossible for them to identify with these problems.

If we accept that in all of these cases what is putting strain on community is the lack of shared experience then, according to Van Schoelandt, we ought to accept that if we are to prohibit this form of inequality then we ought also to prohibit these forms of pluralism. Given that we should not prohibit these forms of pluralism, Van Schoelandt concludes that we should not prohibit this form of inequality either.²¹

3. Miller's Value of Separateness Objection

Miller offers a different objection to Cohen's argument. Miller also takes Cohen's argument to be about shared experience. He takes Cohen's point to be that community

²⁰ 'Markets, Community, and Pluralism' p.147.

²¹ *Ibid*, p.148-9.

requires, “the enjoyed sharing of a common life, including the opportunities it affords for empathy based on shared experiences.”²² Despite being sympathetic to this concern, Miller claims that it should not be seen as a decisive reason for change. He explains his reasons in the following:

Just as there is something to be said for keeping one’s fishing tackle largely to oneself, there is something to be said for paying special attention to one’s projects and one’s intimates, for having control over associations that evoke attention and empathy, for cultivating large zones of privacy in which one is unobserved by strangers and unobservant of them, and for individualistic initiatives that do not require cooperation or adherence to public schedules, including initiatives that take adventurous risks and seek to prove distinctive capacities.²³

In other words, while shared experiences are valuable and help to foster community, we should not lose sight of the fact that private experiences, individualistic pursuits and prioritizing special relationships can also be valuable. There is a need, Miller claims, “to balance values of community with values of separateness.”²⁴ If we accept this then the fact that some mode of community organization does not foster community does not give us decisive reason to reject it. After all, it may be that this form community offers opportunities for other valuable ways of life.

²² ‘Relationships of Equality’ p.250.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 252

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 252

4. Why These Objections Miss the Target

Both of these objections rest upon the claim that it is the lack of shared life experiences in the bus passenger example that Cohen takes to be community undermining.

However, given Cohen's frequent emphasis elsewhere in his book of the importance of people being given the freedom to make different choices and live according to their own preferences, it would be strange if this were what Cohen took to be problematic about the bus passenger example. For example, in his initial description of the aims of the camping trip Cohen says that, "our 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 (*some of the things we do together; others we do separately*)."²⁵ Similarly, when Cohen describes the division of labour on such a trip he says, "Somebody fishes, somebody else prepares the food, and another person cooks it. *People who hate cooking but enjoy washing up may do all the washing up*."²⁶ Finally, in response to the thought that protecting people's rights to make personal choices may conflict with the values of the camping trip, Cohen says the following:

There is a right to personal choice on the camping trip, and there are plenty of private choices on it, in leisure, and in labor, [...] under the voluntarily

²⁵ *Why Not Socialism?* p.3 Emphasis added.

²⁶ *Ibid* p.4. Emphasis added.

accepted constraint that those choices must blend fairly with the personal choices of others.”²⁷

In addition to these comments in *Why Not Socialism?*, remarks Cohen makes in earlier work also give us reason to doubt that this is the point he is making. In *If You're An Egalitarian How Come You're So Rich?*, Cohen claims that while division between rich and poor may be problematic, division between those with different interests (beer drinkers and wine drinkers) is not problematic.²⁸ This point is made most explicitly in the following:

In a society with a state-imposed egalitarian income distribution, there is plenty for everyone to decide without regard to social duty about the shape of

²⁷ *Ibid*, pp.47-48. We might worry that all of these examples cannot really be viewed as demonstrating differing life experiences as they all take place against a background of a shared experience – the camping trip. However, it is worth noting that how much shared experiences people have is a matter of degree. Any two humans living at the same time will have shared experiences in some sense, even if it is just the shared experience of living on the same planet. In the case where people are doing different activities on a camping trip there will be to some degree a lesser amount of shared experiences. If Cohen's point was that not having shared experiences undermines community then we should expect Cohen to find this lack of shared experience problematic to some extent. Cohen, though, does not find this problematic, in fact he views it as positive. Thanks to an anonymous referee for helpful discussion here.

²⁸ Cohen, G. A. (2001). *If You Are An Egalitarian How Come You're So Rich?* Harvard University Press. p.159. Note that in this book Cohen identifies injustice as what is problematic in this division.

their own lives [...] Inspired by different conceptions of the good, they can eat fish or fowl, go to synagogue or church, play football or chess, and so on.²⁹

Given this repeated insistence that people should be able to make private choices and engage in separate pursuits it would be surprising if Cohen's community-based objection to inequality were based on an objection to people being left without a shared body of experiences. This, though, is not the point that Cohen is making. Cohen's point is not that community requires a body of shared experience but that community requires that people *care about one another*.³⁰ Cohen makes this clear at the start of his argument where he claims: "the requirement of community that is central here is that people care about, and where necessary and possible, care for one

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.167.

³⁰ On this interpretation, mutual concern is a necessary condition for community. It is worth noting that we might also interpret Cohen as viewing mutual caring as both necessary and sufficient for community. In support of this interpretation it might be pointed out that Cohen seems to define community in terms of mutual caring in the following: "general social friendship, that is, community" (*Why Not Socialism*, p.51). However, in defence of the necessary condition interpretation it could be claimed that mutual caring may be different from general social friendship. It is, after all, possible to care about someone without being her friend. Either way, though, without mutual caring there can be no community for Cohen. Given that it appears to be unclear which interpretation we should accept I will opt for the weaker claim, that mutual caring is necessary for community, as this is all I need to make my argument. Thanks to an anonymous referee for helpful discussion here.

another, and, too, care that they care about one another.”³¹ Given that this is what Cohen says is needed for community, what is it about the bus example that Cohen takes to illustrate a community-undermining form of inequality? The answer is not a lack of shared experience but a lack of communal caring. Cohen makes this point explicit in the following:

We cannot enjoy full community, you and I, if you make, and keep, say, ten times as much money as I do, *because my life will then labor under challenges that you will never face, challenges that you could help me to cope with, but do not, because you keep your money.*³²

The key point here is that by allowing me to suffer challenges that he could easily alleviate, the rich man demonstrates a lack of communal caring. He could help me avoid these challenges that he himself will never face but he chooses not to do so and this shows that he does not really care about me.

We can see that this is the point Cohen is making by returning to the bus example. In diagnosing what is community-undermining in this case, Cohen does not mention a lack of common experience. Instead Cohen says the following:

There is a lack of community between us of just the sort that naturally obtains between the fellow car-driver and me. And it will show itself in many other

³¹ *Why Not Socialism*, p.35

³² *Ibid*, p.35. Emphasis Added.

*ways, for we enjoy widely different powers to care for ourselves, to protect and care for our offspring, to avoid danger, and so on.*³³

The fact that the car driver and the bus passenger enjoy significantly different levels of power to alter their circumstances undermines any community that might have existed between them. The man who drives an expensive car everyday has the power to lessen the challenges that the bus passenger must face. Instead of buying a car he could invest the money in improvements to public transportation. By choosing not to do so, he demonstrates that he does not really care about the bus passenger or, at least, that he does not care in the way that Cohen claims is necessary for community. With other car drivers, however, the situation is different. The car driver is no better placed than any of the other drivers to lessen the challenges they face. The other drivers do not have to labor under challenges he will never face (at least not under the specific challenge of having to ride the bus rather than drive a car). The car driver faces similar challenges to other car drivers and has similar powers to face them. As a result, he has not demonstrated a lack of communal caring for these people and so their community relations are not undermined.

Cohen makes this point once more by returning to the analogy of the camping trip. Suppose that one member of the trip has access to a special pond that is full of fish. If he chooses not to share his fish with the rest of the group as they eat meagrely then he isolates himself from them. Again, the reason for this is that he has the power to help

³³ *Ibid*, p.36. Emphasis Added.

them face their challenges but chooses not to, thereby demonstrating a lack of communal caring and failing to meet Cohen's requirement for community.³⁴

This allows us to see why both Van Schoelandt's and Miller's objections miss the target. Van Schoelandt's claim was that if we reject inequality when it leads to differing life experiences then we should reject pluralism for the same reason. However, as we have seen, this is not what Cohen finds problematic about these inequalities and so Cohen is not committed to finding pluralism problematic. To see why this is the case, consider again Van Schoelandt's analogy. Van Schoelandt claims that the lack of community between the car driver and the bus passenger is analogous to the lack of community between a kosher man and a bacon-lover. However, the problems that Cohen raised with the bus example do not occur in this analogy. The bacon-eater does not enjoy powers to alleviate any challenges the kosher man faces that he does not. He does not, then, demonstrate a lack of communal feeling towards him in the way that the car driver does towards the bus passenger.

Miller's concern is also misguided. Miller's objection that Cohen's view of community is one that clashes with the value of separateness is based upon his assumption that it is a lack of shared experience that Cohen takes to be community

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp.37-38. It should be noted that Cohen is less clear in his articulation of what is problematic in this example than in the previous two. Cohen simply states that this man is "cut-off from communal life" without explicitly stating that the reason why this is so is because he has demonstrated a lack of communal caring. Nevertheless, given that Cohen has just talked us through two examples and that he states that it is condemned by "the ideal of community" which he sets out in the requirement of community, it is clear that this is what he takes to be problematic in this case.

undermining. As we have seen, though, this is not what Cohen takes to be community undermining. Rather it is the lack of communal caring that this inequality demonstrates. This objection to inequality is immune to Miller's objection, as a concern for communal caring is not in tension with valuing individualistic pursuits.

5. Objections and Replies

In the previous section I argued that both Van Schoelandt's and Miller's criticisms of Cohen's view rest upon a misreading. Cohen's community requirement does not require that people lead similar lives. Rather, it requires that people care for and about one another. This claim raises an important question. If Cohen's requirement is understood in this way then what reason is there to think that community will be undermined by inequality?³⁵ This question becomes particularly pressing when we consider that if we understand Cohen's requirement in the way that Van Schoelandt and Miller do then there appears to be a simple answer to this question: inequality would be problematic as it would lead to people leading very different lives and so failing to share similar life experiences.

In order to answer this question we should look again at what Cohen takes to be problematic in the bus passenger case he discusses. Cohen claims that what is problematic in this case is that, "my [the bus passenger's] life will labour under challenges that you [the car driver] will never face, challenges that you could help me to cope with, but do not, because you keep your money."³⁶ This is problematic as "we enjoy widely different powers to care for ourselves, to protect and care for our

³⁵ Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to consider this issue.

³⁶ *Ibid* p.35.

offspring, to avoid danger, and so on.”³⁷ The problem Cohen identifies, then, is not simply that the car driver and the bus passenger face different challenges but that the car driver possesses vastly greater powers to overcome the challenges he faces than the bus passenger does. What, though, is the connection between this possession of power and Cohen’s community requirement that requires that people care for one another?

The answer is that by using his powers to improve his own life rather than the common good the car driver shows that he does not care for other people. As it stands this does not look like a convincing response. After all, caring for people is surely compatible with using your resources to respond to the challenges that you face rather than those facing other people. This response becomes more plausible, though, when we remember that the challenges facing the rich man are less important than those facing the poor man. By choosing to spend his resources on his own less important concerns rather than the major challenges that other people must face, the rich man shows that he does not really care for those less fortunate than himself, or at least that he does not care a great deal. If he really cared about the bus passengers then he would spend his money on their more pressing concerns rather than his more trivial concerns. This explains why Cohen thinks that community will naturally arise between fellow car drivers but not between the bus passenger and the car driver. The reason is that the car drivers do not possess wildly different powers to care for themselves and so the fact that one car driver is not using his resources to help the others is no reason to think that he does not care about the other drivers.

³⁷ *Ibid* p.36.

However, it might be objected that this explanation fails to explain why inequality creates problems for community. After all, if we accept that the problem of inequality is that it displays a lack of mutual concern and that mutual concern is necessary for community then the lack of caring is not caused by the inequality. Rather the inequality exists as a result of the lack of caring.³⁸ It is the lack of caring after all that leads people to use their resources to meet their own trivial concerns rather than using them to help alleviate the more serious problems facing other people. If this is the case then Cohen would be wrong to say that, “inequality should be forbidden for the sake of community,”³⁹ as inequality is only a symptom of a lack of community not a cause of it.

This is an important objection. If we accept this point then it seems Cohen’s argument should be rejected, at least if we accept my interpretation of Cohen’s community requirement. Fortunately, however, there is a response that can be made to this problem. We can accept that, on this account, inequality is caused by a lack of community but maintain that it also contributes to a decrease in community as well. The reason for this is that it seems plausible to think that once we are aware that someone does not care about us it becomes more difficult to care about them. This is not only intuitively plausible but is supported by evidence from empirical psychology that suggests that when an agent perceives that someone is acting in a caring way towards them it makes the agent more likely to respond in a caring way. Similarly, when an agent perceives that someone does not care about them the agent is more

³⁸ Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.37.

likely to respond in an uncaring way.⁴⁰ If we accept this then inequality is damaging to community because it makes people aware of the fact that others do not care about them. By increasing the awareness of the lack of caring in society, inequality serves to exacerbate it and, as a result, to undermine community.⁴¹ The point then is that while a lack of caring is problematic in itself, the problem is made worse when this lack of caring is made evident because it will foster a further lack of care. Inequality is damaging then as it will decrease the extent to which people care about each other.

A related objection that might be raised against this position is that, as yet, we do not seem to have been given any reason to think that a socialist society where there is no inequality would necessarily be one in which people care more for one another than a capitalist society. It is perfectly possible for people not to care about one another in a

⁴⁰ See, for example Canevello, A., & Crocker, J. (2010). 'Creating good relationships: responsiveness, relationship quality, and interpersonal goals'. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 99(1), 78. Canevello and Crocker claim that, "When actors perceive their partners as responsive, they are more responsive in return; when they perceive their partners as unresponsive, actors are less responsive in return." *Ibid* pp.80-81. One reason for this, they claim, is that, "People may reciprocate responsiveness out of caring. Actors' responsiveness strengthens partners' social bonds to actors, including feelings of caring, connection, and trust," *Ibid*, p.81, where being responsive is defined as understanding, valuing and supporting important aspects of the self *Ibid*, p.78.

⁴¹ We might also worry that when there is a lack of caring there cannot be any community to undermine, as in order for there to be community people need to care for one another. If we accept this then a display of a lack of caring cannot undermine community, as community is nonexistent in this case. However, this point ignores two points. First, caring comes in degrees so if someone shows that they do not care *much* about someone else there is still some community to be undermined. Second, even when there is no community to undermine there may be an important precondition to community that could be undermined, making it harder for community to occur in the future. After all, caring may be one-way. The fact that person A does not care about person B does not mean that person B does not care about person A, though, as I argue below, it does make it more difficult. This one-way caring can not be community on Cohen's view, as community requires mutual caring. Nevertheless, it may be an important pre-condition for community and, as a result, undermining it may make community harder to achieve. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this objection.

socialist system where there is no inequality of outcomes. After all, the equality of outcomes in this situation is a result of the social-economic system that is in place rather than the caring attitudes that the members of the community have towards each other.

However, there is a response that can be made to this point. The difference between the uncaring person in an equal society compared to an unequal society is that in the latter the lack of caring is more evident. In a situation where one person possesses significant powers to help other people but chooses not to do so then it is evident to everyone that that person does not really care about the others. It will, for example, be made evident every morning when the rich man drives by the bus in his expensive car. While people may not care about each other in an equal society there will be less opportunities for this lack of caring to display itself. In a society where resources are shared equally there will be fewer opportunities for people to show that they do not care about others by using their resources to secure luxuries for themselves rather than helping others to face the pressing challenges that they face. If we accept that the display of this lack of caring is problematic because it increases the lack of caring in society then the opportunity to show a lack of caring in a free market society will be detrimental for community.

However, it might be objected that while a capitalist society presents opportunities for people to show that they do not care about each other, it also presents opportunities for people to show that they *do* care about one another. To return to the bus passenger example, we could imagine that the rich man donates a significant portion of his disposable income to the public transport system.⁴² Rather than spending his money

⁴² Thanks to Jack Holme for raising this objection.

on an expensive sports car, he buys the cheapest car and donates the difference to the public transport networks. Perhaps he also actively campaigns for higher taxation of the rich to improve the public transport system. In this example the rich man shows that he cares about the challenges facing the poor man. Moreover, this is a case of voluntary giving. The rich man does not have to donate this money. He chooses to because he genuinely cares about the challenges facing the poor man. This display of caring would not be made evident in a system where everyone possessed equal resources. This seems to show that inequality is not only compatible with people caring for one another but also that it presents opportunities for people to make this caring apparent that would not exist in a society with equality of outcomes.

It could be claimed that, while it is true in this modified example that the rich man shows that he cares to some extent about the challenges facing the poor man, the remaining inequality shows the limitations of this caring attitude. While the rich man cares enough to forego the expensive sports car he does not forego any car whatsoever. As a result, there remain important challenges that the poor man faces that he could help him with if he were not choosing to instead spend his money on less important things for himself. As a result, community between the rich and the poor man will still be undermined, albeit to a far lesser extent than in the original example.

Even if we reject the claim that community would be undermined in this case, this response still fails to solve the problem. The reason for this is that it will remain the case in a capitalist society that those who do not possess this caring attitude to other people will be shown not to care about the plight of those worse off than themselves. If we assume, as it seems reasonable to do, that not all of the rich will be as altruistic as the man willing to make do with a less desirable car then it will remain the case

that in a capitalist society there will be situations where this lack of caring is made apparent.

It is also worth pointing out that it is possible for people living in an egalitarian society to show that they care about one another. Rather than transferring resources to each other, those in an egalitarian society can show that they care for each other by being supportive of their egalitarian institutions.⁴³ This then shows that while a capitalist society presents opportunities for people to show that they do care for one another that might not exist in a socialist society; a socialist society creates opportunities for people to show that they care about each other that might not exist in a capitalist society.

However, it would also be possible for people in socialist societies to express disdain for the egalitarian policies and for those in free market societies to express support for egalitarian policies. If this is right then there do not appear to be significant differences between the opportunities for people to show that they care or do not care about one another in these different forms of society.

There are, though, several responses to make to this objection. First, it looks as if there are important differences between showing support for a socialist system of government in a socialist society and doing so in a free market society. It is, after all, entirely consistent to express this support in a socialist society and be quite happy with the status quo. However, to do so in a capitalist society seems to require, at pains of inconsistency, a commitment to reducing inequality if possible. In addition, while the better off in a free market society can show that they care about the plight of the worse off by giving them resources this also involves reducing the inequality that

⁴³ Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this response.

exists in society. In effect, then, these ways of demonstrating care for others in a free market society are aimed towards making society more like a socialist one.

Second, if society as a whole decides to structure itself in such a way that the worse off are dependent on the good will of the better off to put them in a position to face their challenges then this itself seem problematic. After all, it could reasonably be claimed that society as a whole is demonstrating a lack of care for the worse off by leaving them at the mercy of the better off.

The most important response to this objection, though, is the pervasive nature of the display of the lack of caring in a free market society. While it is possible to display care in a free market society and lack of care in a socialist one, Cohen's point seems to be that a lack of care will be constantly made evident in a free market society. We can see why by looking at the car driver case. All the car driver has to do is drive to work in his car to demonstrate that he does not truly care about the bus passengers, at least not to the extent that he would make comparatively trivial sacrifices to significantly improve the lives of those riding the bus. So while it is possible to go out of one's way to display a caring or non-caring attitude to one's fellow citizens in both free market and socialist societies, in free market societies well off members of society who do not care for their fellow citizens will be inadvertently displaying this lack of care almost all the time.

Another objection that might be raised against my interpretation of Cohen's account of community is that minimizing the opportunity to display a lack of care for others is not necessarily something that leads to a flourishing community.⁴⁴ Suppose, for example, there was a totalitarian society that forced people at pain of death to act in a

⁴⁴ Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

caring way towards one another. This society would minimize the opportunity for people to show that they do not care for each other but would not realize a worthwhile form of community. This is an important objection to raise against Cohen's argument. Given that it is the extent to which market societies make evident a lack of care that Cohen takes to be problematic it seems that he could not object to the totalitarian society on these grounds.

However, in response it can be pointed out that there is no need to think that it is the considerations that make socialist societies preferable to market societies that also make them preferable to totalitarian societies. We might plausibly think that the reason why socialist societies are preferable to a totalitarian societies are different to those that make socialist societies preferable to market societies. The response to the previous objection can help us to see one way in which socialist societies are preferable to totalitarian. The difference between the totalitarian society that enforces people to act as if they care for each other and a socialist society in which people are not coerced to act in caring ways is that in the latter but not the former people will be able to show that they actually do care for one another. In the totalitarian regime it will be difficult for people to work out whether people genuinely care for them or are just acting as if they do for fear of the dreadful consequences of not doing so. In a non-coercive socialist society however, people will be able to show that they care for one another by showing their endorsement for the egalitarian society they live in. Moreover, it seems reasonable to think that the fear and mistrust that would likely be present in such a totalitarian society will be damaging for community in other ways that a non-coercive socialist society would not. Note that this is a different advantage to that claimed to make socialist societies preferable to capitalist ones. While both capitalist and socialist societies allow space for people to show that they care about

each other, the capitalist society makes a *lack* of caring far more evident than in the socialist society. The form of totalitarianism we are considering shares with socialism the advantage of making a lack of caring hard to detect. However, the socialist society is preferable because it possible to make evident a *presence* of caring. I take it that there are of course many other ways in which the socialist society is preferable to the totalitarian one. What I hope to have showed, though, is that even if we look only to the extent to which caring attitudes are made evident the socialist society can be shown to be preferable.

A final worry that might be raised against Cohen's Community Requirement is that it might be thought to demand that people care about equality.⁴⁵ If what is required from people is that they care about each other to the extent that they would not use resources for their own use when they could be of greater help to other people then this might be thought to demand that people care about equality. This would be problematic. First because it is not clear why caring about equality is a necessary condition for people living in community with one another. Second because it makes Cohen's argument appear question begging; if caring about equality is essential for community then of course an unequal society will create problems for community but few advocates of capitalism will be persuaded by this.

However, Cohen's Community Requirement does not depend upon people caring about equality but upon people caring for each other. This requirement could be violated in situations where equality of resources exists. To see the difference between the two consider an example where people possess equality of resources but demonstrate a lack of caring attitude to one another. Suppose two people, A and B,

⁴⁵ Thanks to Ian Carter for raising this issue.

have both been poisoned with different poisons and, as a result, are in severe discomfort. Both A and B are in possession of an antidote but not to the poison they have received. A is in possession of the antidote to B's poison and B is in possession of an antidote to a different poison to that effecting either A or B. Both A and B possess equal resources in this example. However, if A were to refuse to give the antidote to B but to keep it for himself then this would show that she does not care about the challenges B faces. Likewise, there could be cases where the requirement is not violated but where people do not care about equality of resources. Imagine if A finds a small quantity of an antidote to both his and B's condition. If either were to take the entire portion of the antidote then they would be completely cured. Half the dose, on the other hand, would only reduce the symptoms by half. If A gives the entire dose to B then he shows that she cares about B. This is compatible, though, with A not caring at all about equality, after all she has chosen one of the two options that would bring about less equality.

The first part of the previous response highlights the fact that there will be opportunities under a system where people possess equality of resources to display a lack of caring attitude for one another. This, though, does not create a problem for Cohen's argument. Rather it shows that the difference between the lack of caring that is evident in a society with outcome equality and one with outcome inequality will be a difference in degree rather than a difference in kind. While opportunities for people to show that they do not care about the other members of the community will be available in a society with equality of outcomes, Cohen's point is that they will be less common than in a society that lacks this equality.

Conclusion

In this paper I have investigated Cohen's argument that economic inequalities are community undermining. I have shown Van Schoelandt's and Miller's objections that this argument rests on a conception of community that is incompatible with pluralism or the value of individual pursuits are off target. I have argued that both objections rest on a shared misreading of Cohen's argument. Both Van Schoelandt and Miller take Cohen's point to be that community is undermined when people lack a shared body of experiences. This, though, is a mistake. The point Cohen is making is that economic inequalities bring about situations in which a lack of communal caring is made evident. It is this display of a lack of a caring attitude for the other members of his community that undermines the community between the rich and the poor that they have the power to help. I finished by defending this argument against objections that might be raised against it.⁴⁶

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