

COMMUNITY AS SOCIALIST VALUE

Jesse Spafford

I. Socialism and Community

Why favor socialism over capitalism? One popular suggestion is that capitalism is uniquely corrosive to *community*, with socialist economic arrangements being necessary to repair the damage capitalist markets have wrought. For example, in *Why Not Socialism?*, G. A. Cohen argues that one reason for distributing resources in the egalitarian fashion advocated by socialists is that such a distribution is necessary for preserving community.¹ This view is also embraced by John Roemer, who suggests that large inequalities undermine the ethos of solidarity and cooperation that he takes to be the defining feature of community.² Similarly, Erik Olin Wright argues that one reason for preferring socialism to capitalism is that, under the latter, “a large domain of important social interaction is dominated by motives antithetical to community.”³ However, while all of these philosophers appeal to the importance of community in making the normative case for socialism, their respective explications of the concept are rather cursory. Of the three, only Cohen devotes more than a few pages to the subject, but his account has proven ambiguous, with two rival interpretations of his position appearing in the recent literature. Indeed, while most philosophers take Cohen’s suggestion to be that community involves relations of empathetic understanding, others contend that community on Cohen’s account is better understood as obtaining to the extent that persons care for and about one another.

This paper will avoid taking sides in the interpretive dispute, and will, instead, use these rival accounts as a starting point for a discussion of what socialists *should* say about community (as opposed to what Cohen *does* say). Specifically, the paper will introduce a set of *desiderata* that any adequate theory of

¹ Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*; Cohen advances a similar claim in “Back to Socialist Basics,” and, while he does not put things in terms of “community,” he voices the same core concerns in “Future of a Disillusion” (18).

² Roemer, “Socialism Revised,” 309–10.

³ Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, 80.

community should satisfy, with the contention being that an account of community succeeds to the extent that it provides complete and convincing answers to two questions (introduced in section II) and also delivers correct results when applied to four paradigmatic cases of compromised community. The paper will then introduce the two Cohen-inspired accounts of community and argue that these accounts fail to successfully answer the aforementioned questions and deliver incorrect judgments about the paradigm cases (sections III–VI). Finally, the paper will present an original account of community that maintains that there is greater community among persons to the extent that they are disposed to promote one another's welfare (section VII). This account, it will argue, succeeds where the others have failed, thereby providing a firmer foundation on which the moral case for socialism can be built (sections VIII–X).

II. Assessing Accounts of Community

Before introducing the three accounts of community mentioned above, it will be helpful to posit a set of *desiderata* that can be used to compare and evaluate these accounts. The suggestion here is that a complete account of community *qua* socialist value should answer two questions. First, what, exactly, is lost when community is undermined? A complete answer to this *community question* will have three parts: (a) an analysis of the concept of community, (b) an account of the observable signs of compromised community (i.e., how a loss of community manifests itself), and (c) an explanation of what is normatively valuable about community such that there is reason to promote it via the restructuring of social arrangements. Second, a socialist-friendly account of community must, if it is to hold onto its modifier, explain why it is that capitalism undermines community. Call such an explanation an answer to the *mechanism question*.

Additionally, any adequate account of community should declare that community has been lost in cases that are pre-theoretically judged to be ones where community has been compromised. To this end, it will be helpful to lay out a variety of such cases, beginning with the examples cited in the existing literature on the topic. Each of these cases displays some sort of social dysfunction, with the described interactions being marred by resentment, awkwardness, and self-censorship. Indeed, as will be argued

below, there is a common feature of social breakdown present in each of these examples, with that feature being posited as the manifestation of compromised community (i.e., an answer to subpart (b) of the community question). However, all that needs to be maintained at this point is that something has gone wrong in each case that might reasonably be characterized as a loss of community, with a successful theory of community then being one that is able to account for what has gone wrong in each of these cases.

Consider, first, Cohen's case of two commuters suffering from a loss of community:

I am rich, and I live an easy life, whereas you are poor [but in a way compatible with socialist principles of justice]. You have to ride the crowded bus every day, whereas I pass you by in my comfortable car. One day, however, I must take the bus, because my wife needs the car. I can reasonably complain about that to a fellow car-driver, but not to you. I can't say to you: "It's awful that I have to take the bus today." There is a lack of community between us of just the sort that naturally obtains between me and the fellow-car-driver.⁴

Second, consider another fictional example, this time borrowed from a popular American television comedy series.⁵ The scene involves two friends, Nick and Winston. Winston has asked Nick to repay a gambling debt of two hundred dollars. However, in response to this request, Nick counters by calling in some of *Winston's* outstanding debts:

I did pay for gas here, though. So that's, let's say, ten bucks, so we're at one-ninety. Let's say a clean one-ninety. I hate to be this guy, but I got the fights on Friday, so that's thirty. So, let's call it one-sixty and be done with it. Twenty dollars for beer that night so one-sixty takes us to one-forty. Just to be fair.

Later, in response to this claim, Winston attempts to call in some of Nick's other debts:

Winston: I have a few accounts that I'd like to settle. Account number one: a fifteen-dollar receipt for a Chinatown box turtle. Bam, there we go.

Nick: We're doing this, huh?

Winston: Yeah, we *are* doing "this." Item number two. [A] cancelled thirty-five dollar check for registration of a domain name...

Nick: I have to go to *work* at a bar where you drink for *free*. How much does four hundred cognac and colas add up to, Winston?

Winston: You want to go there? How about all the times I sat around listening to you... moan about how Caroline broke your precious little heart?!

⁴ Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, 35–36.

⁵ *New Girl*, "Control."

This would seem to be a clear example of a loss of community between the two friends. Of course, the details of the case have been exaggerated for comedic effect, but the interaction is hopefully still a recognizable one. Further, Cohen would likely have recognized this interaction as a core case of undermined community. While the claim does not appear in his final discussion of community, in an earlier work Cohen argues that there are two sorts of expectations of reciprocity, only one of which is compatible with community (with the other being the characteristic motivation of market exchange).⁶ According to Cohen, “the difference [between the two forms of motivation] is expressed in the lack of fine tuning that attends non-market motivation. Contrast taking turns in a loose way with respect to who buys drinks with keeping a record of who has paid what for them.”⁷ The *fine-tuning case* presented above, then, seems to be an exaggerated version of Cohen’s example of keeping track of who bought the last round of drinks.

Third, there is the familiar case of the family that imposes a strict rule forbidding the discussion of politics during holiday dinners. This rule is put in place because certain family members have sharply differing political views that, when discussed, lead to heated arguments and potentially even the dissolution of the gathering. While Cohen does not discuss such a case, the fact that such a rule is needed suggests that the family is suffering from a loss of community.

Finally, consider a case that will likely seem odd and unrealistic to anyone who has not experienced the described interaction firsthand. A group of young, twenty-something professionals are chatting at a house party. In the hope of identifying common acquaintances, people start asking about where others went to college. “Oh, I went to school in Boston,” one person replies, evasively. The person next to her, unfamiliar with the euphemism, presses for a more detailed response, thereby forcing the Harvard graduate to explicitly state the name of her alma mater to the uncomfortable reception of everyone else present. Here, too, it is suggested that there is a lack of community between the party-goers.

⁶ These works are *Why Not Socialism?* and “Back to Socialist Basics,” respectively.

⁷ Cohen, “Back to Socialist Basics,” 10.

III. Community as Common Ground

With these examples in place, it is now possible to consider some theoretical accounts of community. Specifically, the paper will consider two Cohen-inspired accounts of community, as these theories can then be contrasted with the original account presented below. The first of these is articulated by a popular interpretation of Cohen's theory that takes a lack of community between people to consist in *their inability to empathize and converse with one another* due to their lack of shared experiences. Thus, when Cohen says of the commuter case that the car-driver "can't" complain to the bus-rider, this account of community maintains that the source of the driver's inhibition is that the rider lacks the set of background experiences necessary to fully comprehend or appreciate the driver's complaint.

Proponents of this interpretation include Richard Miller, who suggests that community for Cohen involves "the enjoyed sharing of a common life, including the opportunities it affords for empathy based on shared experiences," where "even kvetching over shared inconveniences has genuine value."⁸ Similarly, James Otteson endorses the "shared experience" reading, suggesting that the loss of community between Cohen's imagined car-driver and bus-rider is due to the fact that, "if they happened to ride the same bus one day, they would... scarcely have anything to talk about."⁹ And Chad Van Schoelandt argues that the different lifestyles of car-driver and bus-rider "leave them in different social worlds unable to identify with each other's experiences."¹⁰

Most recently, Jason Brennan has interpreted Cohen as endorsing the common ground account, which he helpfully elaborates as follows:

The main idea here seems to be that if one of us [is] much better off, we will lead such different lives that we will not have a sufficient degree of common experiences, including exposure to common challenges. Since we face different challenges and have such different experiences, we will not be able to properly empathize or sympathize with one another. We will be virtual aliens to one another, and so cannot properly be in community with one another.¹¹

Taken together, these readers of Cohen provide a fairly complete answer to the community question. With

⁸ Miller, "Relationships of Equality," 250.

⁹ Otteson, *End of Socialism*, 73-74.

¹⁰ Van Schoelandt, "Markets, Community, and Pluralism," 146.

¹¹ Brennan, "Equality, Community, and Diversity," 119.

respect to subpart (a), community is analyzed via the claim, roughly, that there is greater community between two people if and only if they are more able to empathize with and thereby relate to one another. The loss of community is then manifested, per subpart (b), in socially awkward exchanges where people find themselves with nothing to talk about—or at least nothing that might be comprehended by their interlocutors. And, as Miller notes (above), there seems to be something morally valuable about commiserative verbal exchanges and, further, many have made the case for the moral importance of empathy, thereby giving an answer to subpart (c) of the community question. Finally, this answer to the community question then yields a straightforward answer to the mechanism question: market exchange results in inequality, which, in turn, undermines community because significant differences in wealth give rise to different experiences—a divergence that strips people of their ability to empathize and converse with one another.

IV. Against the Common Ground Account

The problem with this account of community is that, as Brennan argues, it is both unsupported by the arguments Cohen provides and, if one holds that social life ought to be restructured so as to promote community, entails unacceptable conclusions. On the former point, Brennan notes that there are many cases where people with (significantly) differing quantities of wealth have more in common with each other than with their similarly economically situated peers. For example, two people—one rich, one poor—who are both intellectuals or guitar enthusiasts or members of the same religious community will likely have much greater kinship with one another than two members of the same socioeconomic stratum who lack these shared commonalities.¹² Given the framework provided above, this claim can best be understood as a rejection of the common ground account's answer to the mechanism question: market-generated inequality will be largely unimportant in determining the degree of common ground that any two people share, i.e., the community that obtains between them.

¹² Ibid., 121.

Brennan's second objection can then be understood as an attack on the account's answer to subpart (c) of the community question (i.e., its explanation of why community is morally valuable). He argues that if the danger that inequality poses to community is that it strips away common ground and shared experience, then many other forms of diversity will have a similar deleterious effect.¹³ If my driving a car while you take the bus undermines community, then what if I take up motorcycling as a hobby while you get a Jet Ski? Join a bowling team while you spend your time playing Scrabble? Study philosophy while you learn Japanese? Convert to Catholicism while you dabble in Buddhism? In each of these cases, you and I will come to have less in common and our portion of shared experiences will grow smaller—we will, in other words, be left with scarcely anything to talk about. But if this is the case, then promoters of community would have to condemn these forms of diversity as well as unequal wealth, since they would have the same harmful effects.¹⁴ Given that the common ground account would entail illiberalism, liberal socialists (Cohen included)¹⁵ would have to reject community as a value upon which to build the normative case for socialism. For this reason, a common ground account of community is unacceptable for those who wish to employ the concept in developing the socialist project.

In addition to Brennan's objections, the common ground account is marred by the fact that, in characterizing the manifestations of lost community, it can't seem to adequately make sense of what has gone wrong in the commuter case—that is, it gives an inadequate explanation of why the car-driver cannot complain to the bus-rider about her predicament. According to the common ground interpretation, the prohibitive factor in that scenario is a lack of comprehension on the part of the bus-rider: because she doesn't own a car, she is unable to understand the driver's hardship, thereby making the complaint meaningless to her. However, it seems apparent that the bus-rider would be able to make sense of the complaint and could respond in a socially adept way *if she so chose*. Indeed, people talk about their different

¹³ Ibid., 122–24.

¹⁴ Van Schoelandt also argues that the community principle—given his standard reading of it—would militate against pluralism. See: Van Schoelandt (“Markets, Community, and Pluralism,” 147–49).

¹⁵ Alfred Archer notes the many places where Cohen expresses a liberal commitment to diversity of lifestyle. See Archer (“Community, Pluralism,” 62).

experiences all the time, with much small talk centering around the involved parties describing their differing life experiences to one another in response to friendly questioning. This fact runs contrary to the common ground account's claim that the relevant conversational constraint is a lack of social ability on the part of the discussants. Similar remarks can then be made about the family dinner and fine-tuning cases, as neither scenario is characterized by the awkward inability to make small talk. Thus, the common ground account's answer to subpart (b) of the community question also appears inadequate.

Finally, the common ground account's analysis of community—i.e., its response to subpart (a) of the community question—proves inadequate, as it fails to account for either the fine-tuning case or the family dinner case discussed above. For, in neither of these cases is there an obvious inability to sympathize with and relate to one another on the basis of shared experience. Indeed, the conflict in the fine-tuning case centers entirely around *shared* experiences where Nick and Winston have engaged in some activity together! Similarly, the conflict in the family dinner case appears to emerge out of a shared interest in and experience of observing politics. Thus, if the common ground's analysis is correct and there is a loss of community only if there is a lack of sympathy and mutual understanding, then these cases would not count as cases where a lack of community obtains. However, this runs contrary to the posited premise that the four scenarios are all paradigmatic cases of damaged community.

V. Community as Mutual Caring

Not everyone, however, agrees with the common ground interpretation of Cohen and the commuter case. Notably, Alfred Archer has attributed an alternative account of community to Cohen, where this account maintains that there is greater community among the members of some group to the extent that the relevant parties care for and about each other.¹⁶ On this reading, there is a lack of community between the bus-

¹⁶ Ibid., 63. This statement of Archer's interpretation is a bit more formal than what appears in his paper. It also puts things in comparative terms, as it is more plausible to think that community is a matter of degree rather than a binary concept.

As an interpretive matter, Archer's reading does seem to best fit with what Cohen actually says about community (see Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, 34–35). Archer presents numerous reasons in his paper for preferring his interpretation, and I think there

rider and car-driver because the latter does not adequately care for or about the former.¹⁷ Specifically, the lack of care is made manifest in the inequality that obtains between the two: if the car-driver cared about the bus-rider, she would not sit idly by as the bus-rider struggled through the challenges of commuting with limited finances.¹⁸ Rather, the car-driver would transfer some of her wealth to the bus-rider to ensure that there were no unique hardships faced by the latter.

With respect to the community question, this account both provides an analysis of community and gestures toward why community is of value (e.g., because there is something valuable about people caring about and for one another). It also provides a clear answer to the mechanism question: the inequality generated by markets is, itself, a lack of community, as it indicates failure on the part of the better-off to adequately care for the worse-off. However, this account provides a less clear answer to sub-part (b) of the community question, which asks how a loss of community manifests itself. Clearly a loss of community on this account has some inhibitory effect on community members' ability to make conversation, as this is the central phenomenon described by the commuter case. However, this answer to (b) is vague in that it lacks any additional description of the *kind* of inhibition where that kind is perhaps best specified by identifying the source of the inhibition. Specifically, the question that must be answered is: why can't the car-driver complain to the bus-rider on this account? Is it because the bus-rider will not really understand her point of view (as maintained by the common ground account)? Or is there something else inhibiting the car-driver? Perhaps this gap can be filled in as follows. It seems that certain conversational topics—for example, the mention of hardships—often function as tacit requests for an interlocutor's sympathy; however, if it is clear that the speaker does not care about the interlocutor, the latter will be reluctant to express sympathy in response. Thus, to avoid the awkwardness of having her overture rejected, the car-driver must refrain from complaining about her predicament.

Finally, the mutual caring account allows for a clear, two-part answer to the mechanism question.

are even a few additional reasons that he does not mention. However, resolving the exegetical dispute is not necessary for the purposes of this paper.

¹⁷ Archer, "Community, Pluralism," 64.

¹⁸ Ibid.

First, the inequality generated by markets is, itself, a failure on the part of the better-off to care about/for the worse-off, for the reasons discussed above. And, second, as Cohen argues, most market exchange is motivated not by concern for the well-being of trade partners, but, rather, by a desire to promote one's own interest.¹⁹ According to Cohen, a distinctive feature of market motivation is that one provides benefits to other people only if doing so is necessary to personally benefit; if someone can obtain that benefit without providing aid to others, then she will not provide such aid.²⁰ Given that such an attitude reflects a lack of concern or care for others, markets will undermine community to the extent that they promote this attitude.

VI. Against the Mutual Caring Account

The mutual caring account of community is promising in that it avoids some of the problems of the common ground account. For example, it avoids Brennan's worry about community requiring illiberal social arrangements, as people can care for/about one another without having some basis of shared experience upon which to draw. Additionally, it seems to provide a more plausible explanation of why the car-driver cannot complain to the bus-rider than the common ground account's suggestion that there would be a lack of *comprehension* on the part of the bus-rider.

However, the account runs into problems of its own that weigh heavily against it. First, one might take issue with its answer to the mechanism question by noting that there are many apparent cases where two people care about one another despite inequality of the relevant kind obtaining between them. For example, grandparents tend to be much wealthier and live more comfortable lives than their adult grandchildren, yet seem to care about them nonetheless. Or, to use an example not complicated by age differences, many close friends and adult siblings live lives marked by inequality, yet still seem to care about one another, suggesting that inequality doesn't necessarily lead to a lack of caring, i.e., a loss of community.

¹⁹ Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, 39-40.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 42, 44.

Second, like the common ground case, the analysis of community provided by the mutual caring account fails to count certain paradigmatic cases of damaged community as such. Specifically, in both the fine-tuning case and the family dinner case, there is no apparent lack of mutual caring between the relevant parties, as there is presumably much familial compassion and support in the latter case and a documented history of aid and assistance built into the former. Thus, given that the account's analysis entails that community is undermined only if there is a lack of mutual caring, it conflicts with the premise that the cases are genuine examples of compromised community.

A more worrying objection for the mutual caring account is one directed at its answer to subpart (c) of the community question, namely, its claim that communal caring is valuable such that there is reason to structure social arrangements to promote it. It might be argued that, although it is very important that friends, romantic partners, and family members care about one another, it is not obviously important that a person cares about strangers, the people who produce various consumer goods for her, or the people who happen to stand next to her on the bus. Indeed, were Cohen to complain that the car-driver does not care about the bus-rider, a critic might ask, "So what?". After all, it is not even clear that a person has the capacity to care about every fellow participant in the economy—and little of moral importance would seem to hang on this question.

There is one further practical problem with this account, namely that it will not do the work that Cohen and others would want it to do, namely function as part of a justification for socialist economic systems. The problem for those who would lean upon the account is that, even setting aside the other objections, it is a lack of care (i.e., a loss of community) that causes inequality rather than the latter causing the former. Given the direction of causality here, reorienting the economic system in a socialist direction will not resolve the lack of community on this account. Indeed, eliminating inequality would do nothing to change the attitudes that gave rise to that feature of the market. Redistributing wealth will not make the car-driver care about or for the bus-rider; nor will any other obvious economic reform.

The direction of this causal relation is not a problem for those who are drawn—as Cohen was later

in his life—to the idea that socialism must come about through a “revolution in feeling or motivation, as opposed to (just) in economic structure.”²¹ If inequality is eliminated through changes in attitude, then caring (i.e., community) will be restored to the society, providing an additional reason for favoring such a moral revolution. However, if one wants to defend externally-imposed economic restructuring by appealing to community, the mutual caring account will fail to provide any support for that effort.

VII. The Dispositional Account

Given the significant shortcomings of the previous two accounts, an alternative account of community is needed if the concept is to play a useful role in the socialist philosophical project. Rather than analyzing community in terms of people caring for/about others or their ability to relate to others, it is suggested here that greater *community* exists among group members to the extent that they have a stronger disposition to aid—and a weaker propensity to harm—one another.

While this analysis is likely clear enough for most philosophical purposes, the remainder of this section will be devoted to giving greater precision to this account by analyzing the notions of “disposition to aid” and “propensity to harm,” and by providing an account of what it means for such dispositions/propensities to be “stronger” or “weaker.” As it turns out, there are a few rival ways of filling in these details, each with its own strengths, weaknesses, and complications. Given the absence of an obviously superior elaboration of these notions, no particular specification of community will be explicitly endorsed; rather, this section will merely work through some of the possibilities, leaving it open which should be adopted by those seeking to employ the concept of community as analyzed in the previous paragraph.

To begin, an analysis of a disposition to aid starts with the observation that people often engage in actions that improve the welfare of others.²² Some such actions occur in the context of conditional

²¹ Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian*, 120. Cohen does not fully endorse this view, but says that there is “more truth in it than I was once prepared to recognize.”

²² The paper will remain neutral regarding how welfare is measured; however, it does assume that people's welfare is commensurable such that numerical values can be assigned to the welfare people experience.

exchange, e.g., via the division of labor and leveraging of comparative advantage. Beyond such exchange-based production, people also engage in many non-reciprocal transactions whereby they unconditionally provide some benefit to another person that improves the latter's well-being. For example, parents care for children, locals offer tourists directions on the street, and passersby rush to the aid of someone undergoing some sort of emergency. Call all such transactions that enhance the well-being of others *constructive actions*. By contrast, some actions decrease the well-being of others in the community. Most notably, this category includes acts of violence, confinement, and property destruction in addition to non-physical methods of inflicting harm such as verbal disrespect, harassment, or other forms of aggression.

Further, note that each individual can be said to have a *disposition to engage in constructive action* (from here on, "disposition")—a term that here is intended to replace the term "disposition to aid" employed in the analysis of community above. Such dispositions are to be understood as functions from possible situations to the constructive actions (or absence thereof) that one party would undertake to benefit any other member of the community in that particular situation. Thus, if a person *P* would provide benefit to another in some situation but person *Q* would not, then *P* and *Q* have different dispositions to engage in constructive action.

To say that a disposition has been *strengthened* is to say that it has been made either (strictly) *broader* or *deeper*. The term "strictly" has here been parenthesized because there are two different ways of defining these notions, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Some disposition *F* is *strictly broader* than some other disposition *G*—or, conversely, *G* is *strictly narrower* than *F*—if and only if (i) there is at least one situation that yields a constructive action when input into *F* but does not yield a constructive action when input into *G* and (ii) there is no input that yields a constructive action when input into *G* but not when input into *F*. Or, to use the language of set theory, if *P* has a strictly broader disposition than *Q*, the set of situations where *Q* enhances the welfare of others is a proper subset of the set of situations where *P* enhances the welfare of others.

An alternative way of comparing dispositions to engage in constructive actions is to assess their comparative *depth* where F is *strictly deeper* than G —or, conversely, that G is *strictly shallower* than F —if and only if among those situations that yield a constructive action when input into both F and G there is (a) some situation s such that constructive action $F(s)$ enhances the well-being of its beneficiary (or beneficiaries) more than constructive action $G(s)$ and (b) there is no situation t such that $G(t)$ enhances the well-being of its beneficiary more than $F(t)$. In less technical language, if one agent has a strictly deeper disposition than another, this means that she will confer greater benefit upon some person in at least one of the situations where both agents would provide that person with benefit, with the same not being true of the other agent.

Note that a judgment about which disposition is strictly deeper than another considers only those situations that yield constructive actions when input into both of the functions being compared. Thus, it is possible that that F is strictly deeper than G even though G is strictly broader than F . For example, a person with disposition F might act to benefit another in only a single situation while a person with disposition G might act to benefit another in both that situation and thousands of others. However, if the beneficial act yielded by F confers greater benefit in that single situation than the act yielded by G , then F is strictly deeper than G . That said, such divergence is unlikely to occur in practice, with there being few dispositions that are not only strictly deeper but also strictly narrower than some other disposition.

The concepts above are introduced with a “strict” modifier because of their non-applicability in *problem cases* like the following. Consider two dispositions F and G such that when situations $a, b, c \dots w, x$, and y are input into F , they yield a constructive action, but yield no such action when input into G . However, further suppose that there is one additional situation z where $F(z)$ is *not* a constructive action while $G(z)$ *is* a constructive action. Given the way the case has been described, F would not be strictly broader than G —this despite the fact that a person with disposition F would act constructively in far more situations than a person with disposition G . Similarly, a person with F might confer greater benefit to the relevant other parties in situations a through y than would a person with disposition G , but F would not

be strictly deeper than G if the output action $G(z)$ yielded slightly more benefit to the other parties than $F(z)$.

These results are unfortunate given that the goal here is to specify the notions of depth and breadth in such a way that one ends up with a welfare-based reason to prefer a political community in which members have broader and deeper dispositions to engage in constructive action. The problem is that it seems as though F is the superior disposition in the two cases presented immediately above; after all, wouldn't it be better if someone acted to benefit others in 96 percent of the relevant situations rather than in just 4 percent of the situations? Or, if in 96 percent of situations they provided greater benefit to others relative to the rival disposition, even though they provided less benefit in 4 percent? Thus, if one wants the notions of depth and breadth to track those dispositions that are *better* in the relevant sense, one might introduce a more lenient account of breadth whereby disposition F is *broader* (*tout court*) than disposition G if and only if there are more situations that, when input into F , yield a constructive action than there are situations that yield a constructive action when input into G . On such an account, F would be broader than G in the first problem case because there are twenty-five situations where F yields a constructive action while there is only one in which G yields such an action.

Similarly, one might say that F is *deeper* (*tout court*) than G if and only if the total benefit generated by all of the constructive actions yielded by F is greater than the total benefit generated by all of the constructive actions yielded by G . Thus, in the problem case above, F would be deeper than G because it yields greater benefit when a through y are input into it than when those situations are input into G —twenty-five individual surpluses that, when added together, would exceed the surplus benefit produced by $G(z)$ when compared to $F(z)$. Given this, the total aggregate benefit produced by $F(a)$ through $F(z)$ will exceed the total aggregate benefit produced by $G(a)$ through $G(z)$.

When the problem cases are described abstractly, the non-strict versions of the concepts appear to track welfare-superiority, as F is broader in the first case, deeper in the second, and seemingly the superior disposition to have in both. However, this apparent superiority can dissolve depending on how one fills in

the details of the two problem cases. Suppose, for example, that, in the breadth problem case, situations *a* through *y* are all passing encounters between the agent and another party on the street. By contrast, in situation *z* the other party begins to choke on a bit of food in a diner. Would it be better for the agent to have a disposition *F* such that she would spontaneously give the other party ten dollars in situations *a* through *y*, but not come to their assistance in situation *z*? Or would it be better for her to have a disposition to provide such life-saving assistance but never surprise monetary gifts? Here the latter seems like the superior disposition, but it is also the shallower of the two, as it corresponds to *G* in the abstract description of the problem case.

Similarly, one can fill in the details of the depth problem by stipulating that a person with disposition *F* gives moderate aid given a large number of possible situations but does not give aid in a single situation—say, where a person is choking—such that the total aggregate benefit for all the other aid is greater than that which would have been provided by saving the choking victim. Given this stipulation, *F* would be deeper than some other disposition *G* that yielded none of the moderate aid but did yield aid in the choking situation; however, one might still think that *G* is the superior disposition in this case.

Thus, the concepts of depth and breadth as well as their strict counterparts turn out to be imperfect proxies for what is valuable from a normative point of view, namely the tendency to promote welfare. The strict versions of the concepts have the apparent virtue of not yielding as many “false positives,” since a disposition will be strictly broader than another only if it is also normatively superior (from a welfare perspective)—with the same being true of strict depth *ceteris paribus*. However, there will be many cases where one disposition will be superior to another without being strictly broader or strictly deeper than the inferior disposition. By contrast, the looser concepts will be applicable to many of these superior dispositions; however, their use will also yield false positives where deeper/broader dispositions turn out to be welfare-inferior to ones that are shallower/narrower.²³

²³ One might further complicate assessments of depth and breadth by factoring in how likely certain situations are to obtain. So, suppose disposition *F* yields highly welfare-promoting constructive actions when given situations *a*, *b*, or *c* as arguments, but yields no constructive action given *d*. By contrast, disposition *G* yields no constructive action given *a*, *b* or *c* as arguments but yields a mildly welfare-promoting value given argument *d*. In this situation, *F* would be deeper and broader than *G*. However,

In addition to the complications discussed so far—e.g., that there are stricter and looser ways of defining breadth and depth and that these notions come apart such that F might simultaneously be (strictly) broader and (strictly) shallower than G —there is a final complication regarding how one aggregates the individual dispositions of group members to arrive at some value representing the degree of community that obtains among the group members. One possibility is to say there is more community *among* the members of some group if and only if at least one member has a (strictly) broader or deeper disposition and no member has a (strictly) narrower or shallower disposition. Alternatively, to get a measure of aggregate breadth, one might take each member's disposition, count up how many situations would yield a constructive action as a value if input into the function as an argument, and then add up the total results to arrive at numerical value to ascribe to the group. Or, instead of counting options, one could aggregate the welfare produced by all the constructive actions output by each disposition to get a measure of aggregate breadth. Or, one might develop some hybrid scheme that factors in some or all of these values and assigns them various weights to calculate a terminal value representing the strength of community among group members.²⁴

As noted above, no stance will be taken here regarding the best way to calculate the strength of community among the members of some group. Rather, the intention has merely been to introduce some of the tools that will aid in that calculation as well as to lay out some of the difficulties that must be overcome if the calculated value is to consistently correlate with the extent to which group members act in a way that is optimal from the perspective of welfare-maximization. However, even absent an exact specification of how to determine the degree of community among group members, these details can be added in or adjusted such that the dispositional account allows for a precise description and quantification

if only d is at all likely to obtain, then G would seem to be the superior disposition from a welfare perspective. To avoid this outcome, one could weight the calculations of breadth/depth so that each value counted more in proportion to how likely it is that its corresponding argument obtains. However, this potential refinement will not be further developed here, as only a rough and ready account of breadth/depth is necessary to flesh out the account of community.

²⁴ Aggregation is also complicated if one wants to compare groups of different sizes. However, given that the concern here is comparing the strength of community that would obtain among the same group given different social arrangements, this problem can be safely ignored.

of community—a major theoretical advantage over the more amorphous notions of “mutual caring” or an “ability to relate to one another” upon which the rival accounts rest. And, until those details are filled in, one can still speak loosely of community being stronger or weaker depending upon the extent to which the group members have (strictly) broader and deeper dispositions to engage in constructive action with respect to one another.

Finally, this discussion has so far focused on dispositions to engage in constructive action, but there is also the equally important piece of the analysis of community, which asserts that community is stronger among some group of people to the extent to which group members have weaker *propensities to engage in destructive action*. What are such propensities? They are the welfare-reducing counterpart to the dispositions described above (i.e., they are functions that take situations as arguments) where the only difference between dispositions and propensities is that the values of the latter are destructive actions that lower the welfare of others. And, while the details will not be spelled out here, the same notions of (strict) breadth and depth that allowed for comparisons of dispositions to engage in constructive action can be applied to propensities to engage in destructive action, with the slight adjustment that one replace all mention of constructive actions with “destructive actions,” references to increased welfare with “decreased welfare,” and language of “benefits” with “harms.” Of course, the introduction of a second aspect of community—i.e., making community now depend upon both group members’ dispositions to engage in constructive action and their propensities to engage in destructive action—further complicates the project of arriving at a single quantitative value representing the degree of community that obtains within any given group. However, one can still make the less sharply-defined claim that there is greater community among a group of people to the extent that the people under consideration have stronger dispositions to engage in constructive action and weaker propensities to engage in destructive action.

VIII. The Value of Community

This analysis of community, as demanded by subpart (a) of the community question, leads to a natural answer to the request expressed by subpart (c) for an account of the value of community: because community has been analyzed in terms of welfare, its value can now be defended on welfare grounds. The members of a society where people are inclined to come to each other's aid in crisis; to trade and cooperate with one another; to give each other gifts; to refrain from engaging in strikes, boycotts, and acts of secession; and to refrain from acts of violence and aggression will have, *ceteris paribus*, much more welfare than their counterparts in societies that lack these features. Thus, there are strong welfare-related reasons for valuing community.

In addition, dispositions to aid (and the absence of propensities to harm) generally accompany an affective state that can best be described as a sense of "fellow-feeling" or camaraderie among people. Such a state might also be described as a feeling of *warmth* toward others coupled with a general sense of optimism about the state of one's social relations. The suggestion here is that there is something morally valuable about feeling this way toward both those one encounters as well as those one has never met. Indeed, if one considers the opposite case of the person who quietly dislikes, resents, or feels cold indifference toward those with whom they interact, that would seem to be a bad way to go through life. Contrast the person who warmly greets the cashier at a grocery store with the person who robotically passes through the checkout or the one who quietly glowers at the cashier while having her items scanned; a society composed of the latter sorts of people would seem a much worse one than that composed of the warmer type, even setting aside any sort of welfare considerations. Further, from an individual perspective, going through life lacking in fellow-feeling would seem to be a loss in the same way that never having feelings of love or friendship toward another is a loss. Granted, an absence of fellow-feeling is perhaps not as significant a loss as failing to ever hold these other attitudes, but it, nonetheless, seems a valuable human emotion whose absence leads to a socially impoverished life.

IX. Signs of Community Lost

The final piece needed to provide a complete answer to the community question is an account of how a loss of community manifests itself (i.e., an answer to subpart (b) of the community question). While the common ground account sees a loss of community in awkward silences and the mutual caring account stays largely silent on the question, the proposal here is that a loss of community makes itself visible when certain topics of conversation become taboo. Specifically, these taboos make the broaching of certain topics seem tactless or gauche with the added risk of other parties to the conversation becoming antagonized and retaliating if the topic is pursued.

To illustrate this suggestion, note that Cohen's commuter case is built around a taboo precluding discussion of the car-driver's material situation—where a transgression of that taboo seems both tactless and likely to provoke aggressive retaliation. Suppose, for example, that the car-driver strikes up a conversation with the bus-rider about the former's predicament. "Ugh, I hate when my wife needs to use the Lexus for the day," the car-driver might say. "The bus is so crowded, it takes twice as long to get to my office, and it doesn't even have heated seats!" How might the bus-rider who cannot afford a car respond to this attempt at conversation? Not well, one suspects. Perhaps she will maintain a façade of politeness, but internally she will be aghast at the coarseness of the car-driver. "You can't be serious," she might say, expressing her disbelief at the driver's boorishness and total lack of social grace.

Note that the problem isn't that the bus-rider has nothing to say in response; it's that she has no *desire* to respond—or, at least, not politely.²⁵ If she wanted to, she could certainly continue the conversation: she might ask if the seats of the car are genuine leather, if it came with satellite radio installed, if it has Bluetooth connectivity, etc. But why would she want to indulge the tactless car-driver by engaging

²⁵ Brennan, in fact, almost begins to read Cohen's case in this way, going so far as to write:

Moreover, it seems inappropriate for me to complain about many of my problems in front of you, since things I might regard as temporary misfortune—such as having to take a crowded bus to work—might be common experience for you. So, differences in wealth can bring us apart ("Equality Community, and Diversity," 120).

Indeed, I contend that it is this *inappropriateness* that indicates a loss of community. However, this is a very different account of the manifestations of community than the "awkward silences" interpretation that Brennan advances throughout the rest of his paper.

in a discussion of the details of the luxuries enjoyed by the car-driver but denied to her? Rather, she might respond with a sarcastic quip along these lines: “Oh, you *poor thing*. That must be *such a hardship* for you!” Revealed by this quip is that the taboo—which forbids discussion of the car-driver’s material situation—not only restricts the scope of acceptable social interaction, but also reflects an underlying discord between the parties. This hostility, lurking just below the surface of their social interactions, makes them not just alien to one another, but, in fact, antagonistic. If the car-driver were to insist on going on about her luxurious vehicle, the two commuters might even come to blows. “I thought I told you to shut up about that!,” the bus-rider might say, which, in turn, could elicit a “Why don’t you make me?!,” with violence erupting shortly thereafter. It is this threat of conflict that best explains why the car-driver “can’t” complain to the bus-rider about her car.

Similarly, in the fine-tuning case, the discussion of any subject relating to past debt becomes a tripwire capable of igniting underlying antagonism: even passing mention of past debt incurred is liable to spark the sorts of accusations and recriminations presented in the initial description of the case. Indeed, one imagines that these sharp words could escalate to a full dissolution of the friendship (in fact, this is how the plot of the story unfolds). The same is true in the family dinner case where the taboo banning discussion of politics has been made explicit, as has the justification for avoiding such topics: talk of politics is likely to provoke conflict, including shouting matches, the dissolution of the dinner, and potentially even the severing of friendly ties between family members altogether. Finally, the Harvard case features a similar taboo forbidding mention of the university’s name, with this taboo helping to avoid the threat of snide responses along the line of a sarcastic “Wow, you must be a pretty smart!,” with the associated risk of escalating conflict. Thus, there is a unifying description that captures what has gone wrong in all of these cases—a theoretical virtue of this answer to subpart (b) of the community question.

Finally, note that these taboos are a manifestation of a loss of community because they reflect underlying antagonisms—but to say that there are such “antagonisms” is simply to assert that the relevant parties have a stronger propensity to harm and/or a weaker disposition to aid one another. Note, for

example, that many of the cases threaten to erupt into physical violence or some other form of destructive action if the conversation wanders just a little too far into dangerous territory. The involved parties are described as antagonistic because there are many more situations that will culminate in harmful actions than there would be if there were not such antagonism between them—i.e., people have strictly broader propensities to harm. Or, alternatively, the presence of underlying antagonisms means that there will be many fewer situations where the relevant parties will engage in cooperative activities (e.g., listening empathetically, picking up a round of drinks, or staying after a family dinner to help clean up), which is to say that they have strictly narrower dispositions to aid one another. Thus, in each of the cases the taboo functions to reduce the risk that a situation might develop that would lead to the parties inflicting harm upon or withdrawing aid from one another. While it may be somewhat effective in this task, the existence of such a taboo nonetheless reflects that community has been undermined (relative to some non-taboo baseline).

X. The Mechanism Question

The final missing part of the account of community is an answer to the mechanism question that explains how markets undermine community. To answer this question, a more general explanation will be given regarding what causes a dissolution of community. This general explanation will then be applied to the case of markets via a demonstration that they are a particular instance of the kind of social arrangement that undermines community.

With respect to the general account, the suggestion here is that community is undermined between people to the extent that their social environment is structured in such a way that individuals' interests are *structurally opposed*. For two people to have structurally opposed interests, they must be in a choice situation where the payoffs they receive are a function of the choices they make. Further, it must be the case that there is some set of possible outcomes where the payoffs the two persons receive are inversely correlated such that, for any two outcomes in the set, if one person fares better in the first than the second,

the other person fares better in the second than in the first—with the *degree* of structural opposition that obtains corresponding to the magnitude of the variance in how well the parties fare across outcomes in the set.²⁶ Finally, for each outcome in this set, it must be the case that there is no other possible outcome where both parties would fare better.

To put this slightly differently, two persons' interests are structurally opposed if they are in a mixed-motive game of a particular sort. In a pure two-person conflict game, every outcome is Pareto optimal such that player one can only do better only if the rival player fares worse. In such a game, persons' interests are structurally opposed. However, their interests can also be structurally opposed if there are multiple Pareto-optimal outcomes, with one or more outcomes that are Pareto-inferior to those outcomes. For example, in the ultimatum game, player one decides how to split a sum of money between her and player two, where player two can either accept the split—in which case each player receives the amount stipulated by player one—or reject the proposed split, in which case each player receives nothing. This game is not a pure conflict game because not every outcome is Pareto-optimal (the outcome that obtains if player two rejects a proposed split is Pareto-inferior to all other possible outcomes). However, it would qualify as a situation where their interests are structurally opposed.

These situations are notable because while the parties have reason to cooperate to avoid the Pareto-inferior outcome(s), they will be working at cross-purposes when it comes to realizing one of the cooperative, Pareto-optimal outcomes. Thus, insofar as they are both prone to maximizing and able to act in ways that bear upon which outcome obtains, they will struggle against each other, with each trying to

²⁶ For these purposes, a more precise statement of how to quantify the variance in how well people fare across different outcomes—and, thus, how to quantify the degree of structural opposition between persons—is not necessary, though one would eventually want to provide a formal account. For now, all that is needed is the intuitive idea that, given a game with two Pareto-optimal outcomes *X* and *Y*, player *P* and player *Q*'s interests are more structurally opposed if *P* gets 95 units of advantage in *X* and 5 units in *Y* while *Q* gets 5 units in *X* and 95 units in *Y* than if *P* gets 51 units in *X* and 49 units in *Y* while *Q* gets 49 units in *X* and 51 in *Y*. In both cases, one person is able to maximize her own well-being only by precluding the other from doing so; however, in the former the stakes of maximizing/failing to maximize are much higher. The suggestion here is that the higher such stakes, the more opposed people's interests will be and the more community will be undermined.

bring about the outcome that maximizes her own benefit at the expense of the other (even as both seek to avoid total defection of the kind that will leave both worse-off than they could have been).²⁷

To see that structurally opposed interests have this effect, note that this relation obtains in each of the four paradigmatic cases of compromised community presented above. For example, in the fine-tuning case, the strict tabulation and expectation of repayment of debt creates a situation where any time one person benefits another or incurs a cost on the other's behalf, she can leverage that cooperative effort into a claim against the other person that the latter must now sacrifice for her benefit. For Nick and Winston, small favors, ranging from buying a round of drinks to providing emotional support, are transformed into a means of extracting benefits from the other person. Any benefit one provides to the other must be repaid via some sacrifice later on. In this way, a fine-tuned norm of reciprocation makes individuals' interests structurally opposed.

With respect to the family dinner case, the interests of the family members are structurally opposed because the relatives are committed to mutually exclusive visions of how society ought to be structured. Indeed, many of their individual efforts and personal resources will be directed toward realizing these incompatible goals. Thus, the more personal and financial success that one has, the more that the other's ends will be hindered. So, like the fine-tuning case, the lack of community in the family dinner case occurs within the context of a social environment where the interests of the relevant parties are at odds.

The commuter case is also one where the bus-rider's and car-driver's interests are structurally opposed: both are interested in avoiding hardships where the opportunity to avoid those hardships is scarce such that only one of them can take advantage of that opportunity. Specifically, both the car-driver and bus-rider would like to have a hassle-free commute where they get to sit in a comfortable heated seat and avoid being pressed up against sweaty people. However, given the relative scarcity of cars, only one of

²⁷ Note that this account of what undermines community will prove amenable to even some critics of socialism such as Brennan, who has advanced a very similar claim, albeit without using the language of "community." One of his arguments against democratic political systems is that they make participants into what he calls "situational enemies" by situating them in "a zero-sum game with winners and losers," which "creates adversarial relationships in which we have grounds to oppose one another and undermine each other's interests, though we have no intrinsic reason to dislike one another" (Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 235).

them can avoid that hardship, and so they must compete to try to attain it. Given this, the car-driver's interest in avoiding the commute is in conflict with the bus-rider's, with the former being further willing to call upon the coercive power of the state to ensure that her interest is protected at the expense of the latter's (e.g., if the bus-rider one day attempted to drive the car-driver's car to work without the latter's permission). Thus, here, again, a case of undermined community occurs within the context of opposed interests.

Finally, the Harvard case is also one where interests are structurally opposed. Here, the scarce resource is the limited number of slots at academic institutions that both provide enrollees with significant cultural capital and function as a gateway to joining the economic and political elite. Given this scarcity, anyone who attempts to attend such an institution will find herself in a situation where her benefit comes at many others' expense. And, insofar as the credential of having graduated from such an institution provides a competitive edge in other endeavors, the ability and willingness of some people to leverage that advantage to outcompete others puts them at odds.

All of this has so far merely demonstrated that a loss of community obtains when interests are structurally opposed. However, this co-occurrence is also non-accidental, as there is a straightforward explanation for why conflicting interests might undermine community: given that a high level of community involves the provision of benefits to others, it would appear irrational for there to be such community between people who have oppositional interests. Indeed, if I am actively channeling my resources toward realizing an outcome that would preclude the one that you want to be realized, why would you provide me with any sort of benefit that might help me in that task? Or, supposing that the struggle has already played out and I successfully furthered my own interests, it would seem strange for you to provide me with benefits that would function as compensation for my efforts to thwart you from furthering your own interests. Given that there is such a plausible explanation for why structurally opposed interests might undermine community, it is reasonable to posit that there is a causal relation that obtains in addition to the two being merely co-occurrent phenomena.

Given this general account of what compromises community, it must now be shown that market economies put participants' interests at odds with one another. Specifically, there are three features of market economies that render participants' interests structurally opposed: the inequality markets produce, the acts of conditional exchange upon which they rest, and the competition that they require to function efficiently. Regarding the first feature, note that, absent external interference, markets result in significant inequalities with respect to the share of benefits and burdens afforded to each market participant—i.e., individuals in market economies will end up with very different levels of aggregate life enjoyment.²⁸ For example, some will live lives of high consumption and high leisure, where what work they do is generally enjoyable and gives them a sense of purpose and meaning. By contrast, others will work dangerous, laborious, time-intensive jobs that they hate, for little money. This inequality amounts to a form of scarcity: there are good and bad “shares” of life enjoyment where the good shares are held by a limited number of people, thereby leaving only worse shares for everyone else. Those with good shares could even things out by either transferring money to the worse-off or laboring for their benefit; however, they decline to do so and thereby preserve their benefit at the expense of everyone else.²⁹ This description helps to reveal that the interests of market participants are structurally opposed, as those who are better-off can only be so positioned if there are others who are worse-off as a result of the choice made by the former to retain their material advantage at the expense of the latter. Thus, the inequality generated by markets will have the effect of undermining community (as observed in the commuter and Harvard case).

Second, the acts of conditional exchange upon which markets rest pit the interests of market participants against one another. Specifically, markets require buyers and sellers, with the former giving money to the latter only on the condition that they be provided with some good or service.³⁰ This

²⁸ This notion of equality is that which Cohen takes to be the currency of egalitarian justice, as stated in *Why Not Socialism?* (19).

²⁹ The better-off do not merely maintain their privileged position by declining to aid the worse-off but, rather, impose their preferred inequalitarian distribution via the threat of violence. For, if the worse-off were to try to establish an egalitarian distribution via using or appropriating the wealth of the better-off, the latter would call upon the coercive power of the state to enforce their property rights.

³⁰ For simplicity, this discussion will focus on markets where goods/services are exchanged for money, but everything said here applies equally to markets that rest upon bartering.

relationship between buyer and seller is one of opposed interests: the seller wants to get as much money for her product as possible while the buyer wants to spend as little as possible. They are, thus, situational enemies, as any gain to one—at least, above the minimum amount necessary to make trading preferable to her relative to not trading—comes at the expense of the other, with all of the harmful effects on community attending.

Finally, markets feature a significant degree of competition between sellers, where the providers of a good or service attempt to cut in on one another's market share so as to maximize the profit they produce (indeed, this competition is taken to be one of the primary virtues of markets). Thus, the interests of competing sellers are structurally opposed: any innovation that increases the number of customers buying from one seller cuts into the sales of a competitor—and thereby threatens her livelihood. The market reliance on competition, then, establishes yet another basis for the compromised community that philosophers like Cohen believe to be characteristic of market economies.

XI. Conclusion

It has been argued that the dispositional account provides a complete answer to both the community and mechanism questions while avoiding the difficulties that plague rival accounts discussed in sections IV and VI. Further, the account has been shown to have the additional theoretical virtue of having significant explanatory power, as it is able to make sense of a diverse array of cases of compromised community (namely, those presented in section II). Given these strengths, it will hopefully provide a firmer foundation for community-based critiques of market economies and prove to be a useful tool in building the case for socialism.

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