

Book Review: Shlomi Segall (2013), *Equality and opportunity*. Oxford University Press, ISBN: 9780199661817.

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The idea of equality of opportunity (EOP) has come to some prominence in recent years. Segall notes at first that EOP was not always this fashionable. For decades, the ideal of EOP was associated with the political right, whereas liberals or left wings preferred their egalitarianism to be of what they considered a stronger blend. This has changed. Today many egalitarians, Segall included, acknowledge that EOP can, if properly interpreted, be a vehicle for egalitarian distributive justice.

Segall attributes this renewed theoretical interest in EOP to the fact that one prominent branch of egalitarianism, luck egalitarianism, highlighted its egalitarian potential. As luck egalitarians roughly believes it to be unfair if some are worse off than others through no fault or choice of their own, this connects to what it means for people to have (un)equal opportunities and how we should evaluate the distributive upshot from such state of affairs. Segall's book explores an ideal of Radical EOP from a distinct luck egalitarian perspective, often offering important insights to the contemporary literature on both these topics. Segall's radical EOP states that: “*It is unjust for one to be worse-off, over her life-time, compared to another, with respect to what ultimately matters to persons...to the extent that she is not responsible for her being at that absolute level*” (Segall 2013, 6).

The book delivers two kinds of contributions from this perspective. The first is a discussion of Segall's Radical EOP. This part of the book addresses a number of theoretical implications and objections to this way of interpreting EOP. Here Segall gives an interpersonal understanding of why we should be concerned about inequalities, argues that equalities are not unjust and that at least some unequal outcomes, which can be attributed to unequal opportunities, are not unjust, namely those also reflecting imprudent behaviour. The second kind of contribution is the application of this ideal to a number of real world issues, all of which have a considerable pedigree in the EOP literature. This part of the book address EOP and

discrimination in the context of hiring, before turning to matters of upbringing and health.

Early in the book Segall conducts a very interesting discussion regarding why we may be concerned about inequalities, contrasting this to those so called relational egalitarians who believe that we should ultimately be concerned with relations rather than distributions. Segall elaborates on a mechanism which has a strong (and acknowledged) resemblance to Cohen's interpersonal test. On Cohen's account, the talented should try to justify their higher pay. Segall's offers a broader notion where inequalities are as such suspect, and advantages in whatever we ultimately care about (as opposed to mere differences in features, which do not affect this) require justification. We have, according to Segall, a basic moral duty to provide bona fide justifications of our own advantages. Such justifications can be more or less successful. While some fail to justify the disadvantages, those who fare better can either show that our superior holdings are indeed just because they reflect sound principles of distributive justice, while others can establish that they are at least permissible, perhaps for all things considered reasons. This way of discussing the luck egalitarian approach to evaluating distributions is interesting because it bridges an important gap between luck egalitarians and relational egalitarians. The latter often stresses that justice is not about evaluating distributions, but instead pertains to obligations and specifications regarding what we owe to each other. Introducing a duty to justify one's advantages reveals that the shape of distributions and how they came about is interesting because it refers to relevant obligations existing between people.

An interesting feature of Segall's formulation of EOP is that it addresses only inequalities. This means that equalities, even those not reflecting people's exercises of responsibility are not unjust. One reason for this follows from the above, namely that under equality no one is under the obligation to justify his or her superior position as no one has an advantage compared to others. But as this evaluation of equalities is somewhat controversial (Albertsen and Midtgaard 2014; Knight 2011), Segall dedicates a chapter to argue for his view. There he provides two kinds of arguments, which are presented in terms of which of two of responsibility sensitive egalitarianism we should prefer. One is termed the non-responsibility view, which addresses only disadvantages not reflecting responsibility. The other is the responsibility view, which also allows equalities to be unjust, provided that they in a similar fashion do not reflect responsibility.

The chapter provides two kinds of argument for why we should prefer the former interpretation. The first argument involves an extended discussion of a two-person scenario, where differential bad luck equalizes a distribution, which reflected exercise of responsibility beforehand. Segall recounts how different tweaks to the scenario yield different judgements by the two accounts under examination and argues that the judgements on the non-responsibility view are not inconsistent. He then provides an argument for the non-responsibility view related to a causality requirement. That is a requirement that people's level of advantage must causally reflect their prudent or imprudent behaviour. Segall argues that such a requirement is plausible and that this gives us reasons to prefer the non-responsibility view. However, this is only the case because Segall defines the two positions as disagreeing both about whether equalities can be just and whether they accept a causality requirement. The disagreement about a causality requirement is not very helpful because rejecting such a requirement is not a necessary part of a view, which can consider equalities as unjust. While I am persuaded that we should maintain a causal requirement nothing precludes maintaining this and the view that equalities reflecting differential luck are unjust.

Space does not allow for a detailed account of the content of the applied discussion in the last part of the book.

Segall fleshes out the idea that in some areas we have reasons related to radical EOP to distribute them unequally in order to offset inequalities in what ultimately matters. This line of thought could provide us with at least pro tanto reasons for discriminating against the better off in the allocation of jobs. It should be noted that spread around these more applied chapters are also several discussions which have a more general interest to the literature on EOP and luck egalitarianism; for example a discussion on the relationship between natural and social inequalities. While much good can be said about both the theoretical and the applied part of the book, it does however miss one interesting opportunity to contribute to the existing literature. It would have been very valuable if there had been more reflection over how the conclusions drawn in some of the applied chapters might be relevant for other areas as well. Nonetheless, this book is a valuable contribution to two different and often too unconnected branches of the existing literature on distributive justice. It offers important and thought provoking insights into both luck egalitarianism and the idea of equality of opportunity.

References

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