

Shlomi Segall. *Why Inequality Matters: Luck Egalitarianism, its Meaning and Value.* Cambridge University Press 2016. 268 pp. \$99.99 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781107129818).

Shlomi Segall's new book offers an inclusive, vast, and ultimately impressive, examination of whether equality has a non-instrumental (or intrinsic) value. Ultimately, Segall concludes that some inequalities, namely, those that are arbitrary in nature, are bad in themselves (2). Specifically, Segall sets out to accomplish this task through advancing three major arguments.

In part one, he engages directly with the primary question and attempts to establish what it is that makes equality valuable, and conversely, inequality 'disvaluable' (6). In this section, he proceeds by first attempting to demonstrate that egalitarianism can successfully respond to the most prominent objections to it: namely, the scope and leveling-down objections. Segall addresses claims that emerge from what he calls 'counter-intuitiveness-type objections' (47) and ultimately concludes that egalitarianism is not exposed as being counter-intuitive. Next, Segall attempts to respond to claims that egalitarianism is groundless. He suggests that equality ought to be grounded in the 'badness of being arbitrarily disadvantaged compared to others' (47). He suggests further, that the badness of arbitrary disadvantage ought to be considered the value grounding equality, rather than other values such as choice, responsibility, luck, and desert.

But when discussing the badness of arbitrary disadvantage, Segall asks a question about 'the location of the badness of inequality' (67) and anchors his response within a discussion of desert (61-64). In short, he aims to tie 'the badness of inequality squarely and exclusively with the position of the worse off ... and not also with the better off one (as a proportional justice view might hold)' (67). I believe this view to be an oversimplification on Segall's part and to ultimately be incorrect. I believe that the badness of inequality can at least sometimes be personal as well as impersonal. In other words, I feel it necessary to reject the latter portion of Segall's asymmetrical egalitarian view—the claim that it is '*not* bad, with respect to equality, for one to be equal to another through no merit of efforts of one's own' (65). Segall suggests that 'the badness of inequality resides with the (arbitrarily) worse-off person, and not with anyone else; not with the group (or set) as a whole, and certainly not with the arbitrarily advantaged' (113). Contra Segall, I believe that inequality has, at least, the possibility to be bad in a welfare-affecting way for those experiencing arbitrary advantage.

There exists a rich history within liberal thought that acknowledges just this fact—that the badness of inequality can lie not only in the impact on those experiencing arbitrary disadvantage, but perhaps on those benefitting or remaining neutral in the face of that disadvantage. For example, from Plato, to Hobbes, Rousseau and Kant, compelling reasons are offered to think that harm to society more generally, or to even those benefitting from inequality, exists. This harm exists beyond the further entrenching of inequality by those who are in power; it also exists as harm to those individuals who live in a society with such arbitrary disadvantage, whether they are harmed by or benefit from that disadvantage.

Individuals who live in a society of tremendous inequality are brutalized by the existence of arbitrary disadvantage emerging from a failure to promote substantive equality. Thus, while not experiencing disadvantage, strictly speaking, they are harmed, nonetheless, from the presence of inequality. The normalization of inequality that emerges in unjust societies is damaging not only to those experiencing disadvantage from that inequality, but to the individuals advantaged, as they become more accustomed to failures of basic justice, and potentially less attentive to the needs of the arbitrarily disadvantaged as inequality becomes more integrated into the fabric of daily existence. In short, even if one remains unaffected, or even benefits from the disadvantage

emerging from inequality, one becomes a worse person, and thus, if we are concerned with people retaining and nurturing positive character attributes, it seems correct to say, experiences harm. In other words still, while not harmed by the disadvantage generated from inequality, one (and society more generally) is harmed by the presence of inequality itself.

That said, having defended egalitarianism from typical criticisms, Segall, in part two, sets out to examine potential alternatives to egalitarianism and attempts to ‘reject telic egalitarianism’s close rivals’ (6). More specifically, Segall attempts to launch a damning attack on sufficientarianism that is both thorough and rigorously argued. He suggests that sufficientarians find themselves vulnerable to the leveling-down objection, and unlike egalitarianism, sufficientarianism ‘violates the [person-affecting view] for no good reason’ (119). In other words, he suggests that sufficientarianism is not committed to the person-affecting view. Ultimately, he concludes that sufficientarians fail to adequately ground their theory in a personal value (145).

Second, he engages similarly with prioritarianism, but concludes that while we have no reason to endorse sufficientarianism, a restrained or restricted version of prioritarianism is desirable. Nonetheless, he argues that sufficientarians are in no position to launch the leveling-down objection against egalitarians because their position may also ‘recommend outcomes and prospects that are better for no one’ (178). He goes further to suggest that because prioritarianism violates the person-affecting view *ex ante* (and egalitarians violate it *ex post*), prioritarianism’s fate is tied to egalitarianism (178). In my mind, the most important and powerful takeaway from this portion of the book is the claim that sufficientarians and prioritarians are not in a position to advance the leveling-down objection against egalitarians because they find themselves in a similarly vulnerable situation.

He concludes, however, by suggesting that the restricted version of prioritarianism that we ought to endorse is one he refers to as time-slice prioritarianism (179). More pointedly, according to Segall, we ought to endorse time-slice prioritarianism alongside egalitarianism—we should focus on the equality of complete lives and the priority of time-slices (201).

Finally, in part three, Segall completes his defense of egalitarianism by examining how egalitarians address two outstanding issues: namely, chances and choices. Specifically, he contrasts chances with outcomes, and examines the ‘putative badness of mutually consented-to inequalities’ (6-7). Against the challenge that egalitarians must explain first, why there is sometimes reason to give people equal shares; second, why sometimes people ought to receive equal chances; and third, why when it is possible to do either, we ought to focus on shares rather than choices (205), Segall ‘defend[s] the radical view that on telic egalitarianism, outcomes and only outcomes matter’ (205). Or more to the point, ‘[c]hances have no value for egalitarians’ (205). Segall embraces a minority view and argues against the dominant egalitarian defense that ‘a more equal distribution of chances makes on alternative better than another, with respect to equality, independently of how equal the relative outcomes turn out to be’ (206). Of most interest to me is his view that egalitarians should recognize the importance and value of giving individuals equal chances when we cannot guarantee equal shares (such as those cases involving indivisible goods), but that the reasons for this recognition are not reasons of equality (224). I am uncertain if I agree with this line of reasoning, but it is nonetheless thorough and thought-provoking.

Finally, extending his previous claim, Segall attempts to advance the claim that ‘unchosen inequalities are not necessarily bad, while chosen inequalities could nevertheless be problematic’ (225). He claims that choice alone is insufficient to arrive at the conclusion that inequalities are unproblematic (240). Instead, Segall advances the position that what is most important in examining the permissibility of disadvantage from choice is ‘whether or not it was reasonable to expect parties to avoid them’—or, that voluntarily contracted disadvantages ‘are bad when they are

reasonably avoided' (240). In more frequently employed terms, inequalities emerging from bad brute luck are impermissible (240).

Hopefully, as a result of both my introductory remarks and my treatment of the text, it will come as no surprise that I wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone interested in contemporary political philosophy. My disagreements notwithstanding, I think Segall has written an excellent book and encourage my colleagues to engage with the ideas presented within it. There has been a wealth of examinations of the role of choice and luck within egalitarian theory recently and Segall has often featured centrally in such discussions. There is no doubt that scholars of political philosophy are much richer as a result of his contributions, and this book serves to only reaffirm the importance of such debates and Segall's role within them. *Why Inequality Matters* advances a substantively novel approach, while remaining rooted in the principles that shore up these interesting and central debates.

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