

**Christine Sypnowich.** *Equality Renewed: Justice, Flourishing and the Egalitarian Ideal.* Routledge 2016. 268 pp. \$160.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781138208810); \$49.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780367000325).

Christine Sypnowich's new book offers a commendable attempt at two primary goals: 1) Parts I and II offer critical engagement with many of the debates taking place within contemporary political philosophy, or alternatively, justification for excluding some of these debates from the realm of egalitarian discourse; and 2) Part III articulates a new approach to justice that renews the ideal of equality in light of the questions, answers, and exclusions, raised in the first portion of the book. In her words, she calls for 'both [the] retrieval and innovation' of the ideal of equality (4).

Both of these goals have been accomplished in an admirable fashion. That said, while Sypnowich's engagement with many of the debates within contemporary political philosophy is excellent, the advancement of her new conception or approach to justice is illuminating and important, if not slightly less impressive than her first feat.

First, Sypnowich's engagement with many of the contemporary debates occurring within political philosophy is outstanding. For example, her discussion of liberal neutrality is a particularly high point. Sypnowich suggests that while neutralists like Rawls attempt to employ impartiality to address difference, this move, in fact, 'render[s] their theory more vulnerable' (72). The argument turns on the claim that disavowing substantive values undermines equality and autonomy and instead, an egalitarian theory must embrace human flourishing as an end.

Sypnowich argues that the Rawlsian focus on reason and rational persons is harmful to people who might be seen as different. In particular, she focuses on critiques associated with the exclusion of children and mentally disabled persons. While much literature focuses on this perceived exclusion by Rawls (see for example, Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, Routledge 1999; Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Harvard University Press 2006; and for a defensive view, Adam Cureton, 'A Rawlsian Perspective on Justice for the Disabled,' *Essays in Philosophy* 9 (1), 2008), and Sypnowich emphasizes Minow's critique in particular, her novel assessment of the role of impartiality, and the bridging of Young and Marx to arrive at the conclusion that 'impartiality is not only inferior to other modes of interaction; it is also unattainable' (76), is most thoroughly developed and impressive.

Similarly impressive is her engagement with debates focusing on multiculturalism. Continuing the discussion of neutrality from the previous chapter, Sypnowich discusses how liberal multicultural policies fail to engage in any normative assessment of culture. Indeed, Sypnowich argues that cultural reform becomes difficult or impossible under neutral positions that fail to permit the critical assessment and reformulation of cultural practices that are incompatible with flourishing (104).

Her commitments made in Parts I and II serve as foundational and formative aspects to move forward into Part III, where Sypnowich more explicitly advances her new account of equality.

Sypnowich's new approach to justice—one focused on human flourishing—is premised upon the claim that the distribution of 'resources, goods or income is, after all, merely instrumental to the fundamental goal of living well' (7). Importantly, she stresses how resource theorists have been misguided in their focus on equalizing income, for example, because disparity should be viewed as important for egalitarians. After all, its significance lies 'in the consequences of disparities for how people live, how inequality of income affects people's quality of life' (7).

Sypnowich's claims of this sort echo Amartya Sen's when he set out the capabilities approach. In his 1979 Tanner lecture titled 'Equality of What?' Amartya Sen (in *Equal Freedom: Selected Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, edited by S. Darwall, University of Michigan Press 1995, 329) suggests that 'there is evidence that the conversion of goods to capabilities varies from person to person substantially, and the equality of the former may still be far from the equality of the latter.' Sen (in 'Equality of What?,' 326) contends that Rawls' primary goods, in particular, are guilty of being fetishistic: they tend to take the value of goods to embody advantage or well-being instead of understanding that what is of importance for a theory of justice is the relationship between goods and individuals' abilities, opportunities, or end-states. What is problematic, Sen contends, is Rawls' and other resource theorists' emphasis on 'income rather than on what income does, on the 'social bases of self-respect' rather than on self-respect itself, and so on' (in *Equality of What?,'* 329).

Indeed, Sypnowich's account of human flourishing as a currency of egalitarian justice bears a strong resemblance to the capabilities approach. The author proclaims that there is 'no single way of living well' (7), and consequently, 'the human flourishing approach must be resolutely pluralistic' (7). Martha Nussbaum's conceptualization (in *Frontiers of Justice*) of the capabilities approach is based upon there not being 'a single idea of flourishing, as in Aristotle's own normative theory, but rather an idea of a space for diverse possibilities of flourishing' (182). Nussbaum later describes the approach as being 'resolutely pluralistic about value' (*Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, Harvard University Press 2011, 18).

Sypnowich does acknowledge the capabilities approach as an alternative conception of justice however, and attempts to distance her flourishing approach from it. Her articulation of her approach stresses three essential elements (140-141). First, she stresses the value of autonomy and the importance of being able to choose how to live. Second, unlike the individual in Rawls' famous example who counts blades of grass for enjoyment, people need to be free to pursue objectively worthwhile activities. Third, and finally, Sypnowich introduces a notion of happiness, suggesting that individuals should be able to be personally content.

The most developed and interesting point of departure from the capabilities approach begins with Sypnowich's observation that Nussbaum 'counsels moderation, insisting that it is not actual human functionings that should be secured but merely the capacity for such functionings' (63). More explicitly, she suggests that 'Sen and Nussbaum are wrong to drop functioning for capability' (139). Sypnowich concludes that it 'makes sense to take functioning—or, better, flourishing—as the object of egalitarian policy' (140). Sypnowich emphasizes the importance of flourishing as being both an objective, as well as a subjective, measure of wellbeing itself, in contrast to the capability or opportunity for flourishing.

Here Sypnowich cites Arneson, who offers a compelling case in favour of prioritizing functionings over capabilities in some instances (his most compelling case is with reference to states of health). That said, Sypnowich's case seems lacking in some instances. Take for example, her highlighting the disadvantage associated with being a 'double day' mom (64). She uses this example to highlight the distinction between workaholics and those who are simply overworked, and highlights the importance of not taking choices at their face value. She claims that under the capabilities approach, because of its focus on opportunities to function and not flourishing itself, one may very well conclude that the 'double day' mom has made a choice, and thus freely chosen, or self-imposed disadvantage, and such a situation may not be within the realm of justice-based considerations.

However, in the event that seemingly freely chosen paths have a component of pathology, as Sypnowich suggests some may, then this is indeed considered a problem by the capability theorist.

The capability theorist need not move to flourishing itself to address such a coerced or forced choice. Jonathan Wolff and Avner De-Shalit (*Disadvantage*, Oxford University Press 2007, 68-72) discuss security of functioning and suggest that it is unjust for individuals to have to put some capabilities at risk of insecurity, to secure others. Importantly, a capability theorist can deem the mere threat of a capability being vulnerable, and the associated stress that comes with it, problematic. More simply put, a robust capabilities theory can easily account for coerced choice or merely perceived freedoms that are not really freedoms at all, because a myriad of other social, legal, or even attitudinal barriers inhibit an individual from making a genuine choice. Sypnowich's example of coerced choices are just as problematic for the capability theorist, despite the emphasis on opportunity, because the choice was not freely made, and thus, was no choice at all.

While the principled implications of a move to flourishing are interesting, Sypnowich has perhaps spent too little time distancing her approach from a capabilities approach. In fact, it bears striking resemblances that may not warrant such a staunchly worded distancing. Great care is spent in Parts I and II to carefully examine what a theory of egalitarian justice requires and does not require, yet similar attention is not given to contemporary, rival theories of justice.

That said, Sypnowich's book is an excellent piece of contemporary political philosophy. It engages with many interesting debates and very impressively, draws from a wide range of material from throughout history and across sub-disciplines. Despite my concerns about an inadequate conceptual distancing from other theories of justice, Sypnowich has done an exceptional job stoking the debates that are currently taking place.

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