

Left-Libertarianism and Rawlsian Equality: A Good Match?

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Abstract

Doubts have been raised whether left-libertarianism can coherently reconcile its two core commitments, self-ownership and equality. Jonathan Quong argues that left-libertarians fail to do so because they specify their commitment to equality in terms of luck-egalitarianism. He maintains that focussing on equality in cooperation ‘Rawlsian equality’ might save left-libertarianism’s coherence. Although Quong’s shift of focus is promising, this paper suggests that it still fails

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to fully reconcile equality and self-ownership for two reasons. First, left-libertarianism based on Rawlsian equality doesn't appropriately account for persons unattractive to cooperate with. Second, self-ownership demands that persons are able to set the terms of their cooperation themselves, a requirement which conflicts with Rawlsian equality.

Persons should both be in control of their lives and, to some extent, equally well-off. Left-libertarianism tries to account for this widely shared intuition. Many scholars, however, doubt that the compromise left-libertarianism offers between these ideals is coherent. They argue that left-libertarianism's two core commitments, self-ownership and equality, are in tension. Jonathan Quong tries to resolve this apparent tension.¹ He holds that self-ownership and equality are only incoherent when equality is understood in luck-egalitarian terms. Instead, Quong proposes to replace this conception with equality in cooperation, 'Rawlsian equality', in order to reconcile equality with self-ownership. In this paper, I probe Quong's attempt to save left-libertarianism. Though promising because it is less demanding than other accounts due to its restricted scope, it faces severe difficulties with respect to both equality and self-ownership.

To show this, I first recapitulate the main tenets of left-libertarianism and the challenge left-libertarians face (Section I). I then outline

¹ Quong, J. (2011): 'Left-Libertarianism: Rawlsian Not Luck Egalitarian'.

Quong's response: how he rebuts luck-egalitarian conceptions of left-libertarianism and his proposal of left-libertarianism based on Rawlsian equality (hereafter: LLRE; Section II). Afterwards, I suggest that it fails to fully reconcile the two commitments. For LLRE, it is hard to guarantee that severely disadvantaged persons are considered equally (Section III). Also, how cooperation is regulated on this account conflicts with self-ownership (Section IV). Section V concludes.

I: Left-Libertarianism's Challenge

Left-libertarianism is a theory of justice: it tries to answer the question of who ought to get which rights and goods. Left-libertarianism's answer rests upon two central commitments. The first is self-ownership: persons have stringent use rights over their body, their labour, and fruits of their labour.² Note that self-ownership lacks substantial implications of what persons are actually able to do and which level of well-being they can attain. In everything you do, you are dependent

² There are various attempts of defining self-ownership. I here loosely follow the formulation of Barbara Fried (2004): 'Left-Libertarianism: A Review Essay', p. 75, which in my eyes captures the gist of the concept. A more detailed account which is also followed by Quong can be found in Vallentyne, P., Steiner, H. & Otsuka, M. (2005): 'Why Left-Libertarianism Isn't Incoherent, Indeterminate, or Irrelevant: A Reply to Fried', pp. 3-4. Fried has questioned whether self-ownership and its implications can be spelled out in a determinate way at all. This is a pressing challenge but shall not be addressed in this paper.

on the access to land and other natural resources. Therefore, some account on how to regulate ownership of the natural world is necessary for all libertarian theories. Left-libertarians believe that large scale inequalities between persons' life prospects should be avoided. Here, their second commitment marks the departure from right-libertarianism: persons have claims to (somewhat) equal shares of the natural world.³

Left-libertarianism is appealing when we view persons as autonomous and equal: they should be the sovereigns over their own lives and, at the same time, should be somewhat equally well-off. Whether left-libertarianism pursues its appealing aim successfully, however, is disputed. One main issue is whether the two principles fit together coherently. Left-libertarians have to show more than that it is possible that individuals enjoy both self-ownership rights and have an equal share of the natural world, say in a world in which everyone is similarly endowed by nature. Rather, they have to show 'that the two ideas can comfortably co-exist within a single theory.'⁴ This is what Quong calls 'the challenge' left-libertarians face.⁵ An account which successfully answers to the challenge, I assume in the following, carries no major trade-offs between self-ownership and equality.⁶

³ What exactly these shares amounts to is controversial. For a discussion, see Vallentyne, P. (2001), pp. 5-10.

⁴ Quong (2011), p. 67.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Or, as Quong (ibid.) puts it, it must contain no 'inconsistency' or regular 'zero-sum choice' between the two values.

II: Quong's Proposed Solution

Different objections to the coherence of left-libertarianism have been advanced.⁷ Quong agrees with these that no account of left-libertarianism proposed so far can answer to the challenge. The crucial question seems to be: What does equality require? Consider a world with two persons, Able and Infirm. Infirm has a severe disability and cannot make use of resources necessary for survival (say, farm land). Able, by contrast, is a talented farmer. Arguably, it wouldn't be equal to simply give Infirm the same amount of land as Able. As material equality can coincide with vast inequality of well-being, a plausible conception of equality has to account for the diversity of abilities in making use of resources.

However, there may be cases where a distribution taking this into account threatens either equality or self-ownership. It is conceivable that unless Infirm gets all land he is not equally well-off because Able can make disproportionately better use of the resources she is dealt. Yet giving Infirm all land would render Able's self-ownership

⁷ See e.g. Risse, M. (2004) and Fried (2004) and (2005): 'Left Libertarianism, Once More: A Rejoinder to Vallentyne, Steiner, and Otsuka'. For responses to some of these objections, see Vallentyne, Steiner, and Otsuka (2005).

practically useless.⁸ She would have no place to occupy or no means of subsistence without Infirm offering her a job (or some other form of cooperation). Even a distribution aiming for equal opportunities to well-being is sometimes infeasible given persons' unequal endowments and, as a result, their disparate bargaining positions.⁹

Why are these attempts of establishing equal resource possession or equal opportunity for well-being so problematic for self-ownership? According to Quong, because they are based on luck-egalitarianism: Typically, left-libertarians hold that an unchosen inequality is unjust.¹⁰ There ought to be compensation whenever some persons are born into poor families, with few talents, or hit by a natural disaster. Compensating such inequalities, however, might work in a world in which persons are equally situated by nature: when all persons have similar abilities or can satisfy their preferences similarly well, there seems to be little need for compensation. But in the discrepant world we live in 'no amount of philosophical ingenuity can change the

⁸ This is what Otsuka calls a violation of 'robust self-ownership'. Cf. Otsuka, M. (2003): *Libertarianism Without Inequality*, p. 32. Formally, being a full self-owner is compatible with owning no natural resources. But if we are interested in persons realising their self-ownership rights, nobody should be required 'by necessity to come to the assistance of others in a manner involving the sacrifice of one's life, limb, or labour' (ibid.). Thus, following Quong's implicit assumption, robust self-ownership seems a necessary requirement for reaching a full reconciliation of the two commitments.

⁹ Cf. Quong (2011), pp. 68-75.

¹⁰ See e.g. Lippert-Rasmussen, K. (2014): 'Justice and Bad Luck'. Outcomes are typically regarded as unchosen if persons couldn't influence them and there was no (reasonably-priced) insurance available against them.

fact that [...] Infirm will die without Able's services'.¹¹ Sometimes, only distributing worldly resources will not be enough to equalise the results of luck without rendering persons' self-ownership rights practically useless. To reach an equal distribution, persons would have to work for someone else. For instance, Able would have to give food to Infirm. If persons don't want to interact, they would have to be forcefully induced to do so.¹² This is incompatible with the rights implied by self-ownership, e.g. an entitlement to the fruits of one's labour.

Instead of abandoning left-libertarianism altogether, however, Quong proposes to modify it. Instead of focussing on equality in resulting distributions, we should consider 'the manner by which distributions are brought about'.¹³ When persons voluntarily engage in interaction, then they should do so in a way that they treat each other as equals. This means that 'there is no obligation to cooperate, only an obligation to cooperate on terms that are fair'. Quong maintains that this conception 'a different way of interpreting equality' can be reconciled with self-ownership: nobody is induced to cooperate if they choose not to. Note that Quong employs an expansive notion of cooperation which includes all conventions associated with soci-

¹¹ Quong (2011), p. 76.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹³ *Ibid.*

ety, e.g. the protection of property and other laws.¹⁴ Benefits that emerge in the social framework, e.g. becoming rich through trade, are fruits of cooperation. The burdens and benefits of social cooperation should be shared equally ‘since to do otherwise would be to treat those with whom we interact as less than our equals’.¹⁵ Following John Rawls’s reciprocity-based conception of justice, Quong calls this Rawlsian equality.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 81. Quong’s exact definition is the following (2011, p. 80): ‘A cooperative relationship exists whenever: (a) there is an organized attempt to ensure at least one person benefits from another person’s actions (or inactions), (b) where these actions (or inactions) go beyond the mere respect of self-ownership rights, (c) where these actions (or inactions) are not simply gifts or similar one-off interactions, and (d) where a mutually beneficial set of arrangements is possible.’ On this expansive notion of cooperation, it is questionable whether persons can simply opt out of cooperation. After all, they are born into systems of cooperation, e.g. their families and societies. Quong argues that an area can be designated to which everyone can depart (2011, pp. 85-86). It is unclear how this can feasibly be conducted. Given Quong’s previous concern for infeasibilities in distributing goods to Infirm which guarantee him equal bargaining power, this should at least worry him. I will, however, grant him the possibility of choosing whether or not to cooperate in the following. For a discussion of Quong’s expansive notion of cooperation, see: Lister, A. (2012): ‘Reciprocity, Relationships, and Distributive Justice’, pp. 20-21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* What exactly sharing the burdens and benefits of social cooperation amounts to is deliberately left open by Quong in this first sketch of his account.

III: Sufficiently Left?

Quong's attempt to save left-libertarianism is promising. Placing constraints on certain forms of interaction rather than universally imposing equality nicely matches the deontic nature of libertarianism. Rawlsian equality (supposedly) leaves self-ownership rights untouched because nobody is forced to cooperate. Simultaneously, on the expansive conception of cooperation, burdens and benefits will be shared frequently. In the following, however, I suggest that LLRE, too, fails to reconcile self-ownership and equality coherently. In this section, I examine how the way LLRE treats severely disadvantaged persons is problematic for its coherence.

Rawlsian equality comes into play when persons voluntarily choose to cooperate. This only guarantees an equal share for persons involved in cooperation, not for all persons. Persons who are unattractive to cooperation, e.g. the severely disabled, will be left out.¹⁶ Consider the case of Able and Infirm described above. There may be no incentive for Able to cooperate with Infirm (say, because she's not interested in gaining more resources). Able, if wholly self-interested, would then choose not to cooperate with Infirm. It is legitimate for her to do so because, following Quong, the choice to cooperate should

¹⁶ Though, as Quong (2007, p. 94) rightly notes, only very few persons will be so disadvantaged that they are completely unattractive for cooperation. Again, it is questionable whether on an expansive notion anyone can be excluded from cooperation in reality. However, I here follow Quong's assumption that cooperation doesn't apply universally.

be voluntary. As no cooperation takes place between Able and Infirm, no redistributive demands can be put forward by Infirm. Able could lead a prosperous life, while Infirm would starve to death.

Most people - and all left-libertarians - share the intuition that it is unjust to let Infirm die purely on grounds of his arbitrary endowments while others are well-off. It is thus relevant for any left-libertarian theory to account for this problem. Quong acknowledges this burden: anything else would be 'insufficiently egalitarian'.¹⁷ But how can he avoid this pitfall? On his account persons cannot be forced to cooperate. It is the key tenet of his theory that cooperation happens only on voluntary grounds. Quong concedes that those not cooperating fall out of the 'scope' of the reciprocal conception of equality.¹⁸ Due to space constraint, he does not consider the problem of Infirm explicitly. However, in a footnote he hints at another paper, 'Contractualism, Reciprocity, and Egalitarian Justice' (hereafter: CRE). In it, he shows that it is not the case 'that reciprocity based theories wrongly exclude the severely disabled or infirm'.¹⁹ CRE is a defence of Rawlsian liberal egalitarianism against objections offered by G.A. Cohen.²⁰ Quong seems to believe that following it, a solution for the problem of Infirm can be found.

¹⁷ Cf. Quong (2011), p. 68.

¹⁸ Quong (2011), p. 82. Here, Quong follows Derek Parfit's distinction between 'telic' and 'deontic' conceptions of equality. See Parfit (1997): 'Equality and Priority'.

¹⁹ Quong (2011), p. 83, fn. 61; Quong (2007): 'Contractualism, Reciprocity, and Egalitarian Justice'.

²⁰ See e.g. Cohen, G. (1995): *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*, pp. 209-28.

The solution Quong offers in CRE refers to natural duties. Following Quong, certain obligations apply to persons within a system of cooperation (e.g. treating others as equals). But even detached from this system, Quong argues, the well-off owe a natural duty to aid to Infirm and, more generally, persons in need because of their ‘status as equal moral persons’.²¹ Consider the example of a child in the pond who you can easily save from drowning. Irrespective of any institutional framework which you might share with the child, you are obliged to help her. These natural duties, Quong holds, can be justified in Rawls’s Original Position (a thought experiment in which representative parties determine how society should be structured).

However, what Quong suggests here, is, taken for itself, not applicable to solving the problem that Infirm falls out of the scope of equality in LLRE. Note that, even if we grant Quong the point in Rawls’s defence, the fact that reciprocity-based theories are not generally incompatible with helping Infirm doesn’t mean that this applies for all reciprocity-based theories, such as the proposal of left-libertarianism under discussion. So, in order for the reference to CRE to be relevant, Quong would need to show how the justification in terms of the Rawlsian Original Position could be applied to left-libertarianism. This seems especially difficult because libertarians are not convinced by arguments of hypothetical contracts like the original position.²²

²¹ Quong (2007), p. 93.

²² Quong (2011) cites Otsuka on this libertarian scepticism of hypothetical contracts (pp. 85-86). See Otsuka (2003), p. 131.

Quong would thus have to provide a different justification of natural duties to aid to account for Infirm. Yet, it seems impossible to establish such duties without violating self-ownership rights. Self-ownership implies stringent rights to choose what to do with one's labour and the fruits of one's labour. This entails that persons have the right to withhold help from others. Thus, when endorsing self-ownership, it might be extremely desirable that you help the child in the pond, but you have the right to refrain from doing so. Granting the child (or Infirm) an enforceable right to your aid is incompatible with a stringent notion of person's control over their labour. (For Quong this burden seems even heavier as he believes that positive duties should reach so far that other individuals should be enabled to live a decent life.²³)

Still, one could reply, a weakened version of natural duties might offer a way out: natural duties which are not legally enforceable could be compatible with self-ownership rights.²⁴ Wouldn't such moral requirements suffice to situate the severely disadvantaged (somewhat) equally? I believe they would not. Anything less than enforceable duties to aid towards the disadvantaged appears insufficiently

²³ Cf. Quong (2007), pp. 93-94. Note that there is a debate on positive duties within libertarianism. Nicolas Maloberti (2009a) has argued that an account of 'samaritan rights' is a possibility to justify the state. Other authors, like Joshua Katz (2009), have contested this argumentation. Crucially, Maloberti also acknowledges that enforcing positive duties involves an infringement 'upon individuals' ownership and enforcement rights' (2009b, p. 7).

²⁴ For a similar line of reasoning, see Vallentyne, P. and van der Vossen, B. (2014): 'Libertarianism'.

egalitarian. When concerned with equal moral persons, we want to grant persons like Infirm a claim right to a share of resources that guarantees (somewhat) equal life prospects. An unenforceable moral requirement to aid doesn't guarantee the disadvantaged to be actually equally well-off: They will always remain dependent on the (unforeseeable) assistance of others. This creates a highly asymmetric relationship: the well-off can generously abide by their duty and help the disadvantaged; if they don't, this is lamentable, but cannot be changed. To avoid these asymmetries, Infirm would have to be granted a claim to a share of the natural world. This conviction is captured by the left-libertarians Quong refers to as luck-egalitarian.

In short, LLRE is problematic because of the restricted scope with which it pursues equality. If realising equality on this conception can allow for some persons being left to starve while others are well-off, then this is not the type of equality left-libertarians should be striving for. Defenders of Rawlsian equality thus have to rely on duties external to cooperation in order to account for those left out. Establishing such duties, however, appears incompatible with the libertarian commitment to self-ownership. Thus, a full reconciliation of self-ownership with a commitment to equality is not given for cases where persons don't cooperate. Notwithstanding this, can LLRE provide a reconciliation in cases where persons do cooperate?

IV: Sufficiently Libertarian?

When there is cooperation, Rawlsian equality requires persons to treat each other fairly and to share the burdens and benefits of their cooperation. Equality is thus guaranteed for those persons cooperating. Moreover, the Rawlsian conception of equality ‘cannot conflict with self-ownership because it leaves each person as the sovereign authority over whether or not to cooperate with others’, argues Quong.²⁵ Prima facie this seems correct. Nobody induces persons to cooperate against their will. They are in control of this decision. However, does that mean that self-ownership rights are fully respected?

Consider a standard case of cooperation. Suppose that you and your friend agree to build a house together. All you use is your labour and some wood each of you owns. You support each other constantly (say, by carrying wood for each other). Assume further that you agree in advance that after having completed building the house, you toss a coin. The winner of the coin toss gets the whole house and the loser gets nothing at all. What you engage in is a valid case of cooperation. With your property (labour and wood) you committed yourself to a binding agreement. You haven’t violated anyone’s rights and only acted on your ownership rights. However, under Rawlsian equality, you will be required to do exactly what you explicitly agreed not to do: share the burdens and benefits. Hence,

²⁵ Quong (2011), p. 83.

stringent (self-) ownership rights and Rawlsian equality appear to be in tension.

The same tension can be witnessed in the large-scale cases we are concerned with when discussing justice. Suppose a group of persons decides to form a free market society. Assume they firmly believe that everyone should earn exactly what others are willing to pay for their actions, i.e. their labour's market value. Would a society following these rules be a form of cooperation? According to Quong it would. Quong's expansive notion of cooperation applies (among others) when there is conventional respect for and police protection of persons' property rights.²⁶ The society imagined here involves a legally regulated system of property. Thus, following Quong, the burdens and benefits of this cooperation should be regulated in a way that everyone gets a fair share. But this implies that a free market society, based on the principle of everyone earning at market value, ought to be regulated by a principle of sharing burdens and benefits of social cooperation. This is self-defeating; it undermines the initial objective of the society. Such a society would no longer be a free market society.

Consequently, certain forms of cooperation, like the free market society, are ruled out by Quong's proposal. They are made impossible because they would be regulated by Rawlsian equality. Why is this

²⁶ Cf. Quong (2011), e.g. p. 85: 'Any organized system where some people trade with others [...] and demand those appropriations be recognized by systems of law and protected by enforcement agencies [...] are clear instances where social cooperation is occurring, or is being attempted and thwarted.'

a problem for persons' self-ownership? Self-ownership, as specified above, implies stringent rights over one's labour and the income one can gain from it.²⁷ Rawlsian equality acknowledges these rights in the sense that it lets persons decide whether or not to cooperate. It restricts them, however, in the sense that if persons want to cooperate, then they have to do so in the specified way. When persons voluntarily trade their belongings in a certain way, it is incompatible with self-ownership to rule out these form of cooperation. In this sense, self-ownership is neutral: as long as other persons' self-ownership rights are not infringed, persons can do with their bodies and their labour whatever they want to.²⁸ Rawlsian equality interferes with this. It regulates all forms of cooperation such that some forms of voluntary interaction are precluded. Hence, Quong appears to merely relocate the problem of the tension between self-ownership and equality. While the decision whether to cooperate or not is not interfered with, choosing the rules of cooperation is.

At this point, one might object that the fact that cooperation is regulated doesn't necessarily clash with self-ownership. Recall that self-ownership has no substantial implications for the ownership of natural resources. So formally, regulating what persons can do with the natural resources involved in cooperation doesn't conflict with

²⁷ Cf. e.g. Otsuka (2003), p. 15.

²⁸ As Otsuka has pointed out in his commentary on my paper, this has drastic implications. For instance, persons have the right to renounce their self-ownership rights and enslave themselves. (Note that self-ownership by itself doesn't imply that other persons have the right to become slave-holders. Cf. Vallentyne (2000), p. 3-4.)

self-ownership rights. Thus, isn't LLRE sufficiently libertarian after all?

My answer to this objection is negative and twofold. First, cooperation doesn't always have to involve natural resources. We can conceive of cases in which persons engage in voluntary transactions using nothing but their body parts or their labour. Think of persons trading working hours against intellectual property rights.²⁹ In such cases, too, LLRE requires you to share the burdens and benefits of cooperation, even if you explicitly agree not to share them, which is, as self-ownership entails, your right. Therefore, LLRE clashes with self-ownership here.

Secondly, although self-ownership has no substantial implications for unappropriated natural resources, it has implications for the cases discussed above (e.g. house building). In suchlike cases, persons already have property rights over the items with which they engaged in cooperation (ex hypothesis). It would stand in severe tension to the libertarian focus on stringent property rights to interfere with persons' decisions of what to do with these objects. Any restrictions on persons' use of their property more extensive than protecting others' self-ownership are incompatible with the libertarian notion of persons as fully in charge of their own lives and self-determining. This comprises that persons can use their property in any non-rights violating way they want. Thus, requiring persons to share the burdens and benefits of their cooperation in cases like the free market

²⁹ For a different example, see Otsuka (2003), p. 18.

society thwarts a full reconciliation of equality with self-ownership.

Is there, however, another way for LLRE to avoid conflicts with self-ownership? Perhaps, altering the notion of cooperation could prove useful. As noted above, Quong's notion of cooperation is very expansive. One solution might consist in reducing the number of cases that count as cooperation. For example, persons who explicitly agree not to share the burdens and benefits of cooperation could be exempted from doing so. Under such a notion, the free market society would not be regulated by Rawlsian equality; thus, one might argue, self-ownership and equality can be fully reconciled.

However, this line of reasoning faces a crucial obstacle that points at a fundamental problem with LLRE. The obstacle is the following: The further one straitens the scope of cooperation, the further the scope of equality is narrowed, too. If fewer cases count as cooperation, then burdens and benefits will be shared less often, and consequently less equality will be realised. For instance, talented persons could simply create their own society. This would not be problematic if the scope of equality was not restricted to those cooperating. But as this is the case in LLRE, there will be no efforts to reach equality here. Thus, the two objections presented in this paper are interconnected: On an expansive notion of cooperation, some ways of living are excluded and self-ownership rights are infringed upon. On the other hand, under a restricted notion of cooperation, there will be even more inequality. As much as one tries to amend the notion of cooperation, it is impossible to reach a coherent reconciliation

between respecting persons' self-ownership and equality.³⁰

Apart from being ultimately unsuccessful, however, there is a yet more fundamental problem with adjusting the scope of equality 'until it might fit'. There is a reason to be sceptical about a theory of justice that modifies its commitments in order to yield clear and nice solutions: Reality doesn't always work as neatly. Determining the fundamental principles of justice is unlike choosing the rules of a board game.³¹ In reality, factors like persons' endowments may prevent the full reconciliation of two commitments. This doesn't warrant, however, to abandon our commitments. If we are concerned with all persons being equally well-off regardless of their cooperative relationship, then it might be wrong to shift the focus of equality away from this intuition.³²

V: Conclusion

In order to save left-libertarianism from the charge that self-ownership and egalitarianism cannot be reconciled, Quong proposes to abandon

³⁰ I am thankful to a contributor at the 'LSE-Bayreuth' Conference for drawing my attention to the interconnectedness of the objections.

³¹ This is an analogy I borrow from Otsuka's commentary on my paper. It must be noted that it is of course unpleasant (and especially so for left-libertarians) not to reach a full reconciliation. Cf. Quong (2011), pp. 67-68.

³² It may be conjectured that often what left-libertarians are concerned with isn't really equality, but rather a baseline of sufficiency for all persons. Investigating whether sufficiency can be reconciled with self-ownership might be valuable.

a luck-egalitarian conception of equality. Instead he adopts Rawlsian equality which focuses on equality in cooperation. As requirements of equality only comes into play whenever persons voluntarily cooperate, this doesn't clash with self-ownership according to Quong. However, I have offered doubts that this amounts to a satisfactory answer to 'the challenge' from both left-libertarianism's egalitarian and its libertarian perspective. Without addition, Rawlsian equality doesn't adequately account for persons excluded from cooperation. Furthermore, regulating all cases of cooperation by sharing the burdens and benefits is incompatible with self-ownership. Attempts to modify parts of the theory, e.g. by altering the notion of cooperation, also cannot provide a coherent reconciliation of equality and self-ownership

Which implications for the left-libertarian project in general can we draw from the shortcomings of Quong's proposal? We have to acknowledge that major trade-offs between self-ownership and equality are unavoidable in certain circumstances. Neither luck-egalitarian left-libertarianism nor LLRE can provide a full reconciliation of the two commitments. Yet, accepting this inconvenient conclusion can, I believe, prove very fruitful. It should encourage left-libertarians to revisit their initial intuitions. From now on, rather than desperately searching for a new specification of equality, political philosophers should discuss how to handle the unavoidable trade-offs between equality and self-ownership.

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