

ture a wider class of cases, then it's less clear that the reducibility of Bratmanian shared intentions to individual intentions is a point in his favor.

Ultimately, however, whatever the prospects for extending Bratman's theory beyond the central cases he focuses on, there is no doubt that *Shared Agency* is an enormous contribution to our understanding of social interaction. The view it presents is powerful and illuminating and will serve as a touchstone for future work in this area.

STEPHEN J. WHITE  
Northwestern University

Fishkin, Joseph. *Bottlenecks: A New Theory of Equal Opportunity*.  
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 288. \$35.00 (cloth).

Joseph Fishkin's book on equality of opportunity adds to a recent trend of contributions that cast light on hitherto underexplored aspects of this much cherished ideal. In contrast with many traditional discussions of equality of opportunity which concentrate mainly on examining what counts as equal access to given sets of options (typically, jobs and positions of authority), Fishkin's book puts into the spotlight questions concerning the nature and structure of the opportunities which are thought to be important for individuals to enjoy equally.

According to Fishkin, a society in which everyone has an equal opportunity to compete for only one valuable career, a society in which the opportunity to gain any desirable employment depends crucially on having successfully taken advantage of a single type of educational opportunity (say, that provided by an elite university), and a society in which the opportunity to access goods such as health and valuable relationships is bundled up with one's success in gaining a lucrative job, are all examples of societies which fall short of realizing the ideal of equal opportunity. By setting up a competitive opportunity structure in which winning at one competition is essential for winning at another, these societies create bottlenecks—"a narrow place in the opportunity structure through which one must pass in order to successfully pursue a wide range of valued goals" (13). Fishkin believes these societies are inimical to equality of opportunity for two related reasons.

First, none of them facilitates and supports the autonomous pursuit of valuable goals or people's flourishing in ways which they choose; yet being able to do these things is a fundamental reason we value equality of opportunity in the first place (2). None of them provides opportunity pluralism, that is, "a variety of paths one might pursue, or enterprises in which one might engage, along with some degree of disagreement about which of those are best or most valuable, so that not everyone is fighting for exactly the same scarce slots" (13). They also unfairly compromise people's capacity to flourish by allowing earlier disadvantage resulting from failure at one crucial opportunity juncture (for example, at university admission age) to be carried on to later contests (this is what Fishkin calls "the problem of the starting gate"; 65–72). Moreover, they encourage a convergence of plans of life toward a narrow dominant set of goals—in the examples above, the goal of entering an elite university, or that of obtaining a lucrative job (this is what Fishkin calls "the problem of individuality" (74–79).

Second, the opportunity structure of these societies is such that they cannot hope to come close to ensuring that access to the opportunities they offer is in fact fair. Where bottlenecks exist, the family will, predictably, be the site of inequality creation: wherever possible, parents will use the means they have at their disposal to help their children prepare for and pursue the competitive opportunities that are so necessary for doing well (127–28). Under this kind of opportunity structure, the “problem of the family,” that well-known threat to the realization of equal opportunity (48–56), is exacerbated and becomes insoluble. The consequences of this, according to Fishkin, are far-reaching, since it is impossible to disentangle that part of a person’s merits that are due to his or her social circumstances from those that are due to natural talents or effort. (Fishkin labels this problem “the problem of merit”; 56–65.) Fishkin argues that the aspiration to do so reflects a misguided view of human development, on which the role of the iterative process whereby environment, genetic endowments, and effort interact in shaping what abilities people have is not duly recognized (83–116). So, once people start off unequally, the ambition to provide them later on with equal access to various opportunities becomes unrealizable, and the early inequality will unfairly reverberate throughout their lives.

According to Fishkin, it is only by changing the opportunity structure that we can minimize the four above-mentioned problems of the family, the starting gate, merit, and individuality. His proposal—which, as he makes clear, is an “imperfect solution” (24)—is opportunity pluralism, a certain view of the kind of opportunity structure we should strive toward.

Opportunity pluralism identifies two central features which an opportunity structure should have in order to be conducive to people’s autonomy and well-being: a diversity of ends which people aim to pursue (“Plurality of Values and Goals”; 132–37) and a plurality of ways of accessing the opportunities to pursue those ends—or, in other words, fewer or less severe bottlenecks (the “Anti-Bottleneck Principle”; 144–51), where particular urgency attaches to removing or easing the bottlenecks that affect those with least opportunities (160, 191). Two further components of opportunity pluralism spell out the conditions needed to promote these two goals. These are, first, that many of the ends which people pursue not be competitive or positional and that opportunities to pursue them not be bundled up (as they are in the case of the society in which success in gaining a lucrative job is instrumental for accessing health care and relationships) (“Positional Goods and Competitive Roles”; 137–46). Second, since opportunity pluralism is more likely to be realized where there is a plurality of actors who affect and control the opportunity structure, it commits us to “Plurality of Sources of Authority” (151–56).

These are, in a very condensed form, the central and most innovative claims *Bottlenecks* makes. In the first, critical part of the book (chaps. 1 and 2), in which Fishkin identifies the problems for the realization of equality of opportunity sketched above, he also aims to cast doubt on existing theories of equality of opportunity, both those that regulate access to specific goods like jobs and positions of authority (such as the meritocratic principle, or John Rawls’s principle of fair equality of opportunity), and those that require equality along a relevant dimension in people’s overall life chances (many of the various versions of contemporary egalitarianism, such as equal opportunity for welfare, are examples). In part, these theories are said to be deficient precisely because they stumble on, and, according to

Fishkin, are unable to solve, the problems of the family, the starting gate, merit, and individuality. For example, by holding that differential access to jobs and positions of authority may be influenced by people's natural talents and effort but not by their unequal social circumstances, Rawls faces the problems of the family and the problem of merit. By allowing people's choices at a particular stage of their lives to have a deep effect not only on how well off they end up at that stage but also on what further opportunities they will have further along, egalitarian theories meet with the problem of the starting gate. More generally, existing theories of equality of opportunity fail to do justice to what Fishkin thinks is a central underlying motivation for endorsing equality of opportunity in the first place: a concern with securing the opportunity to live autonomous and good lives (2, 120). Being too focused on comparative considerations, they allegedly fail to ensure that people have *maximal* opportunity to obtain the valuable goods we think they should have access to (45). Moreover, their egalitarian aspirations could only be realized if there were a common scale along which to rank all opportunities, so as to be able to tell when different individuals' opportunity sets are exactly equal, but according to Fishkin, no such scale exists (119–21).

Some of these points have been made before in the recent literature on contemporary egalitarianism. For example, others have noticed that theories of equality of opportunity cannot rely only on comparative considerations for determining what opportunity sets people should have (Marc Fleurbaey, *Fairness, Responsibility and Welfare* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008]; Andrew Williams, "Liberty, Equality, and Property," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, ed. J. Dryzek, B. Honig, and A. Phillips [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006]). Similarly, and *pace* Fishkin's statement to the contrary, he seems to be invoking a version of the well-known harshness objection to responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism when he notes that the stakes of people's choices should not be unduly dire (68). Moreover, several of Fishkin's objections are best seen as raising challenges to theories of equal opportunity rather than as constituting reasons for abandoning them altogether. Some egalitarians could agree, for example, that equal opportunity for autonomy across a life requires that people's capacity to revise their conception of the good, and live accordingly, be protected (Paul Bou-Habib and Serena Olsaretti, "Equality of Resources and the Demands of Authenticity," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* [2012]: 1–22, doi:10.1080/13698230.2012.740792). They could also agree that Fishkin shows that the realization of the egalitarian ideal is not in the offing, but, just like Fishkin does with regard to opportunity pluralism, affirm equality as a direction of effort rather than an achievable goal.

*Bottleneck's* most valuable contribution lies in the second, more constructive part of the book (chaps. 3 and 4). There, besides presenting his positive proposal—opportunity pluralism—along the lines sketched above, Fishkin also puts it to use as a yardstick for assessing existing opportunity structures, interpreting and evaluating existing policies, and for identifying possible others. Focusing mostly on the US context, Fishkin shows how its opportunity structure contains pervasive and severe bottlenecks: there, the possession of a college degree, living in socioeconomically advantaged areas, and having a particular family background are necessary but tight pathways for accessing many valuable goods, including basic goods such as health-care provision. Fishkin also argues that opportunity pluralism provides a lens through which to understand and evaluate much of current US antidiscrimi-

nation law—the latter’s aim could be seen as that of identifying and targeting particularly severe bottlenecks—and asks what taking opportunity pluralism as an aim might entail for the structure of jobs, the system of qualifications for different jobs, and the educational system.

In my view Fishkin’s opportunity pluralism is best seen as a mid-level theory, or a “perspective” on equality of opportunity, as something which is distinct from both fundamental level norms on the one hand, and public policy proposals on the other. (For this understanding of mid-level theory, see Richard Arneson, “What Do We Owe to Poor Families?,” *Law, Ethics and Philosophy* 2 [2014]: 7–31.) In other words, opportunity pluralism is the answer Fishkin gives to the question which he rightly says egalitarians have paid too little attention to: just what kind of opportunities, and in what combination, should be made available to people, in the name of our favored ideal of equal (or fair) opportunity, if not to fully realize it, then in order to approximate it? Fishkin seems to suggest as much himself when he notes, at the very end of the book, that “the central argument of this book is really a *how* argument: It is a framework for thinking about *how* we might achieve this aim” (i.e., the aim of “open[ing] up more opportunities for people”) (255).

This is relevant for two reasons. First, Fishkin’s project—that of identifying what opportunity structure we should aim to set in place if we care about equality of opportunity—is not an alternative to, but should be seen as complementary to, the project of defending fundamental norms of equal or fair opportunity. Furthermore, opportunity pluralism, as a mid-level theory, might be compatible with, and indeed be an implication of, various possible interpretations of equal opportunity, including several which Fishkin criticizes and thinks we should reject. Most obviously, opportunity pluralism is compatible with egalitarian views that take either opportunity for autonomy or for well-being as the relevant currency, including some versions of the capability view. Fishkin might agree with this. Less obviously, there is also the possibility that a nonperfectionist version of Fishkin’s opportunity pluralism might be endorsed also by resource egalitarians, and, given some assumptions about the diversity of people’s preferences, by defenders of equality of opportunity for subjective welfare. By not explicitly framing his contribution as consisting in developing mid-level principles that various defenders of familiar conceptions of the ideal of equal opportunity could and should endorse, Fishkin misses an interesting opportunity to explore his proposal’s potential as a possible point of convergence for existing theories of equal opportunity, or at least for the most attractive versions of those theories. Exploring this possibility could buttress opportunity pluralism further, showing that it has more supporters than Fishkin suggests.

Second, if indeed opportunity pluralism rests on a fundamental principle that is different from existing views, Fishkin should have said more about that principle. Fishkin does say that he endorses “priority of opportunity” (191), and elsewhere in the book he makes clear that the opportunity in question is opportunity for well-being, where well-being is understood as Joseph Raz conceives of it, namely, as the autonomous pursuit of valuable goals (120–21). But Fishkin does not fill out the details of his view much beyond this. He does not specify, among other things, whether people’s different exercises of responsibility, including responsibility for participating in the labor market, may or should have any role in their ending up with unequal outcomes, or how large and diverse a minimally autonomy-promoting set of options for individual persons should be. Fishkin thereby leaves open thorny questions that would have to be settled if we are to know whether the view that

undergirds opportunity pluralism is substantially different from views already on offer (such as Martha Nussbaum's capability view or Richard Arneson's desert-sensitive prioritarianism).

The fact that Fishkin leaves the foundations of opportunity pluralism insufficiently worked out has another implication, this one important for the constructive part of his project. Without a more fully worked-out view that underlies opportunity pluralism, we are unable to know what the latter's determinate implications are beyond the relatively uncontroversial cases. Fishkin's observations about the maldistribution of real opportunities for well-being in a context like the United States, where the lack of a university degree stunts people's ability to access a vast range of valuable goods, including, crucially, a well-remunerated job, are well-taken. But these points (whose relevance for liberal democracies other than the United States is limited), have been made before. Fishkin could have supported more radical and novel recommendations as part and parcel of his vision of opportunity pluralism. For example, he could have argued in favor of a more radical reconfiguration of work of the kind advocated by Paul Gomberg, so as to obtain a fairer distribution of the real opportunity for meaningful work. This would be congruent with his endorsement of a perfectionist view of well-being, his view of human development, and his reservations about specialization. Fishkin could additionally, or alternatively, have defended the possibility that priority of opportunity for well-being tells in favor of supporting parenting, which, he notes, is one of the few very valuable activities which are open to everyone (see Arneson, "What Do We Owe to Poor Families?"; Anne L. Alstott, *No Exit: What Parents Owe Their Children and What Society Owes Parents* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004]). Fishkin does not consider at all whether opportunity pluralism supports subsidizing valuable unpaid work like parenting. As for Gomberg's proposal, Fishkin mentions it only to quickly set it aside in the name of efficiency (52). Yet it seems that curbing the market and compromising efficiency to some degree are necessary to further any of the four goals that constitute opportunity pluralism. The extent to which the latter is market-friendly is one of the issues in *Bottlenecks* which remain unresolved and cannot be resolved in the absence of a more fully worked-out principle of fair opportunity which Fishkin says should replace familiar ideals of equal opportunity.

SERENA OLSARETTI  
ICREA-Universitat Pompeu Fabra

*Correction: This book review was reposted on March 30, 2016 to correct the name of the author of the book being reviewed, which was misidentified in the original review. Sincere apologies to the author. An erratum will be published in the July issue.*

*Correction: This book review was reposted on June 9, 2021 to acknowledge that this project received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme (Grant Agreement Number: 648610; Grant Acronym: Family Justice).*