

SEPARATE BUT EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES? A SEDENTARIST MISTAKE

In recent theories about justice in immigration, two egalitarian theses become increasingly popular. The first is that restrictions on immigration should be compensated by development aid. In a world less unequal than ours, we often hear, rich countries' restrictions on immigration would cause less harm to poor people, and would thus be less, if at all, objectionable¹. The second thesis is that compensating restrictions on immigration is a way to further global equality of opportunity. Being born in a poor country is but a matter of bad luck, no one is responsible of one's own birth and; if luck is not be allowed to determine one's opportunities, development aid will redress material inequalities and, with them, the effects of luck.

Let us call "separate but equal opportunities" the view depicted by the conjunction of the above theses. Since it assumes that in a world of *separate* nation-states (that is, of states controlling entry to their territory²), compensation for immigration restrictions furthers global *equality of opportunity*, its aim can be described as "separate but equal opportunities", for short.

The aim of this paper is to explain why "separate but equal opportunities" is an incoherent view. The explanation has two parts. In the first part, I show that equality of opportunity is not compatible with territorial segregation. Those who think it is, are mistakenly using the word "opportunity" and confuse an opportunity with its value. From a conceptual analysis, I draw the idea that borders, whatever their nature, are not the right tools to distribute opportunities; they produce at best equal discrimination. In the second section of the paper, I try to explain why this confusion occurs. Part of the explanation is what I call "sedentarism". I argue that research on migration – whether empirical or normative – is frequently biased by a sedentarist presupposition. I define sedentarism as a researcher's preference for sedentary conduct at the expense of mobility. The first one is conceived of as an unproblematic and "normal" feature of "human nature", while the second is understood as an exceptional

¹ This idea is often expressed in public debates. For theoretical defenses of the trade-off between restrictions on immigration and development aid, see e.g. Th. Pogge, "Migration and Poverty" in Robert Goodin and Philip Pettit (eds.) *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005; E. Cavallero, "An immigration-pressure model of global distributive justice" *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2006; A. Shachar, *Birthright lottery: Citizenship and Global Inequality*, Cambridge Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 2009.

² "Separate" nation-states can be understood in two senses: separate jurisdictions without control of entry to the territory and separate jurisdictions with control of territory. Separate jurisdictions are, of course, compatible with freedom of movement as historical reality shows. For an account on the origins and construction of the exclusionary power of the states, see e.g., Plender, Richard, *International Migration Law*, Leiden, A. W. Sijthoff, 1972, esp. Ch. 1-3. Nowadays, European Union is a clear example of nation-states where separate jurisdictions are compatible with the right to freely move for their citizens.

conduct in need to be explained. Sedentarism explains many mistakes, including the assumption that segregation can engender equality of opportunity.

1. Why ‘separate but equal opportunities’ is self-contradictory

“Separate but equal opportunities” is the view that redistribution of resources between separate states can further global equality of opportunity. As such, *equality* of opportunity at a global level is a minority position, and many global justice theorists are rejecting it or are arguing in favor of a decent, rather than an equal, set of opportunities³. But the language of opportunities is widely used, thus confirming that equal opportunities approach is still dominant in the contemporary political theory⁴. Nevertheless, however popular would this ideal be, one may still ask whether equality of opportunity can be achieved in a world of separate states. Is “separate but equal opportunities” a coherent goal?

One should take this question seriously and not succumb to the rhetorical effect of the slogan “separate but equal”. Indeed, the slogan is a sad echo of the doctrine upheld by the United States Supreme Court in the 1896 decision, *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. At that time, the Court reaffirmed Louisiana’s racial law giving “equal but separate accommodations for the white and coloured races”. It maintained that separation alone neither abridges one’s privileges, immunities or property, nor denies the equal protection of the law. Fortunately, the ruling was quashed by the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Without contesting the existence of *material* equality, the Court concluded that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are “inherently unequal”, because they have detrimental effect on children, who interpret them as a sign of inferiority.

Despite the resemblance with these historical circumstances, one may still aim to check the coherence of a “separate but equal opportunities” goal. To do so, let us imagine a segregation scheme that is immune to the above criticism. Its basis is not racial, but territorial: people born in separate territories are bound to live in them for the rest of their life, but each territory provides accommodations and facilities of a strictly equal value. Such equality might have been achieved by development aid or by other means. Most importantly, equality has strengthened the feeling of membership so that, unlike African-American children, nobody in this imaginary world interprets segregation as a sign of inferiority and some even take pride in belonging to separate nations. Would segregation be a policy of equal opportunity, then?

One might answer in the affirmative: if available opportunities in each territory are of equal value and are unanimously regarded as such (i.e., no one interprets separation as a sign of inferiority), the policy must be one of equal opportunities. But to answer this way is to

³ Equality of opportunity as an ideal of global justice was most notably defended by S. Caney “Cosmopolitan Justice and Equalizing Opportunities” *Metaphilosophy*, 2001, vol. 32. n° 1-2, pp. 113-134; D. Moellendorf, *Cosmopolitan Justice*, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 2002; A. Shachar *Birthright lottery: Citizenship and Global Inequality*, Cambridge Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 2009. Gillian Brock defends a decent rather than an equal set of opportunities in her *Global Justice. A Cosmopolitan Account*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009 esp. p. 62

⁴ Equality of opportunity has been recognized as one of most popular ideals, by philosophers of different political orientations whether they endorsed this ideal themselves or not. See e.g., Schaar, John “Equality of Opportunity”, in *Nomos IX: Equality*, ed. James Pennock and John Chapman, NY, Atherton Press, 1967, p. 228; Nozick, Robert, *Anarchy State and Utopia*, London, Blacwell, 1974, p. 235; Levin, Michael, “Equality of Opportunity”, *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 31, 1983, p. 110; Moellendorf, Darrell, *Cosmopolitan Justice*, Westview Press, 2002, p. 49.

understand the question “can segregation be a policy of equal opportunity?” as simply inquiring “are the available opportunities in each territory really equal and perceived as such?” In what follows, I argue that the meaning of “opportunity” explains why these two questions are different. Two features of the concept of opportunity press us to set apart the above questions. The first is related to the distinction between opportunities and their value. The second is that opportunities are conceptually linked to actions.

1.1. What does ‘opportunity’ refer to ...

Despite considerable research on *equal* opportunities, too little has been done to clarify the meaning of an opportunity *tout court*⁵. My aim here is not to provide a definition of the word “opportunity” but to clarify some of its aspects useful to my argument. One of these aspects sheds light on the distinction between opportunities and their value. In fact, having an opportunity is in no way equivalent to possessing the wealth associated with it. On the contrary, when one has an opportunity, it implies that one lacks something that one values but can get it by doing something⁶. An opportunity refers to an *uncertain* gain. As Hansson put it, “if I am certain to receive payment to my bank account for this month’s work.... [it] would seem unnatural to say that I have an opportunity to receive my salary”⁷.

If Hansson’s intuition is right, it seems that opportunities cannot be redistributed by merely redistributing wealth through development aid. Money redistribution is neither a necessary, nor a sufficient, condition for the distribution of opportunities. Why is this so?

Giving someone the money or the value of an opportunity is compatible with depriving that person of an opportunity. If I were to apply for a job for which I am perfectly qualified, but you refused to consider applications from women, you would deprive me of a job opportunity; this would still be the case if you offered to pay me the entire amount of money I would have earned. In this sense, redistributing the value of opportunities is not a sufficient condition for distributing opportunities. But receiving money is not a necessary condition for having an opportunity, either. If your hiring procedure was irrefragable, but I had changed my mind

⁵ The recent revival of equality of opportunity research is owed to authors like Richard Arneson, Gerald A. Cohen, Amartya Sen, James Fishkin, and John Roemer, among others. Since the debate has been focused on the concept of equality and its relation to responsibility, this literature lacks, except for Arneson’s writings, a clear definition of the word “opportunity”. For literature defining the concept of opportunity, see note 6 below.

⁶ For some definitions found in literature, see D.A. Lloyd Thomas, “Competitive Equality of Opportunity”, *Mind*, Vol. 86, No. 343, 1977, pp. 388-404 (“One has an opportunity to do something or to have something provided that one can do it or have it if one chooses. One has no opportunity to do something or to have something if one cannot do it or have it even if one wishes” at p. 388); Peter Western, “The Concept of Equal Opportunity”, *Ethics*, vol. 95, 1985, pp. 837-850 (identifying three elements of the concept of opportunity: an agent, a goal and a relationship between them); S. J. D. Green, “Is Equality of Opportunity a False Ideal for Society?” *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 1988 pp. 1-27 (“An opportunity is a chance of getting something if one seeks it. It is about the presence or absence of obstacles limiting what an agent may do or have if he wishes” at p. 4); Alan H. Goldman, “The justification of equal opportunity”, in *Equal Opportunity*, Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jeffrey Paul and John Ahrens, Blackwell, 1987, pp. 88-103 (“An opportunity is a chance to attain some goal or to obtain some benefit. More precisely, it is the lack of some obstacle or obstacles to the attainment of some goal” at p. 88); Richard Arneson, 1989, “Equality and Equality of Opportunity for welfare”, *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 56, No. 1, pp. 77-93 (“An opportunity is a chance of getting something if one seeks it” at p. 85)

⁷ Sven Ove Hansson, “What Are Opportunities and Why Should They Be Equal?” *Social Choice and Welfare*, vol. 22, 2004, p. 306

and did not come to the interview, I had had a genuine opportunity even if I derived no money from it. Having an opportunity is having only a chance to get something valuable. Since money can buy many valuable things, including the means to access opportunities, it often stands in as a measure of the level of opportunity. But opportunities are not synonymous with money.

The distinction between opportunities and their value suggests that the proper *distribuendum* of an equal opportunity policy is neither money, nor the value of opportunities, but opportunities themselves. Though, the distribution of opportunities, unlike that of garden plots, cannot be limited by boundaries.

To see why boundaries cannot equalize opportunities, let us imagine a policy dividing professions: half of them being set aside for women and half for men, so that no woman is entitled to exercise a profession reserved for men, and *vice versa*. The distribution is equal in all respects: remuneration levels in each category are the same (i.e., the best job for men is as highly-paid as the best job for women and this holds for any wage level), distribution profiles of jobs within each group are the same (i.e., there are as many men as women occupying well-paid jobs, a proportion strictly observed for lower-paid jobs), and the symbolic value of jobs is equivalent (jobs for men have as much social dignity as jobs for women). Shall we call this professional segregation an equal opportunity policy? One would more appropriately call it a policy of *equal discrimination*: men and women are equally discriminated when they are given separate, though equal, opportunities.

Why are equal opportunity and equal discrimination different policies? To answer this question, let us move on to the second feature of the concept of opportunity: opportunities are conceptually linked to *actions*. As a matter of fact, English language dictionaries define an opportunity as “a favourable juncture of circumstances” and, more precisely, as “an occasion or situation which makes it possible to do something that you want to do or have to do, or the possibility of doing something”⁸. Therefore, opportunities are *circumstances*, favourable circumstances, but the way they favour us is not the same as the way digestion and nutriment's absorption favour good health. They are favourable, *provided* that we *choose to act* and to transform them according to our ends⁹. The fact that opportunities are linked to actions is recorded by the word's grammar: one cannot have an opportunity period; “opportunity” is an unsaturated expression, it is always an opportunity *to* do something. By its link to action, an opportunity becomes a favourable juncture, not of circumstances but of circumstances *and* choices to act. The conceptual link between opportunities and actions is recognized by luck-egalitarianism, which provides the equality of opportunity with a philosophical justification based on the distinction between choice and circumstances. But how does the link to action explain that equal opportunity differs from an equal discrimination policy?

⁸ The definitions come, respectively from the Merriam Webster Online <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/opportunity> and from Cambridge English Dictionary <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/opportunity>.

⁹ Economists and social choice theorists are neglecting the action aspect when they define opportunities as “sets of options”. This account is incomplete unless options are not defined in terms of choices between actions. Thus, having to choose between two goods (e.g. red and green apples) does not necessarily imply having an opportunity, while a set of two options-actions with respect to a single good (taking or not taking one apple) can mean having an opportunity.

1.2. ... and how it is related to politics?

There are at least two consequences of noticing that opportunities are linked to actions and objectives. The first is that one cannot decide if two opportunities are of equal value without considering the agent's ends. Suppose a man's objective is to work as a lawyer, but according to the imagined policy above, only women can be lawyers. To claim that giving him the possibility to work as an accountant (an equally worthy and well-paid job) is to give him an equal *opportunity* is to assume that he was looking for whatever job secures him a specific level of welfare. Of course, the man could have defined his professional goal in a broader-grained way and, in this case, equal discrimination and equal opportunity policies have similar effects on him. But, if he had not, he would be astonished to learn that he has been given, and not deprived of, a job opportunity. Opportunities are not “*naturally* substitutable”¹⁰. They are substitutable precisely inasmuch as the individuals' objectives are¹¹. The fact that opportunities are distributable by opening access and removing obstacles, and not by boundaries, is why we may not confound equal discrimination with equal opportunity.

The second consequence of linking opportunities to actions is that it helps us to understand why “separate but equal... opportunities” results in an incoherent political agenda. Both segregation scenarios described above limit available opportunities according to individual circumstances of birth (birthplace in the first case, sex in the second). What is so wrong with dividing opportunities according to the circumstances of birth? Perhaps the fact that no matter how favourable the opportunities a person encounters throughout her life, and no matter how much effort she is willing to make, *nothing* can be done to go beyond the bounds set at birth. Yet, this is just the opposite of equality of opportunity.

In a sense, any philosophy of opportunity is built on a Promethean ideal. Its core idea is that individuals should (be able to) act and transform circumstances according to their objectives. This idea is widely shared by people of different political preferences. On the right, conservatives emphasise everyone's responsibility for one's own wealth, thus suggesting that everyone acted, or should have acted, to convert opportunities into wealth. On the left, luck egalitarians stress that unfavourable and unchosen past circumstances impose unfair disadvantages, which make people less able to manipulate present circumstances as they wish. Hopefully, no one denies that nobody is responsible for the circumstances of one's own birth. So, if opportunities are about transforming circumstances according to one's objectives, how can one claim that a policy which separates people at birth, and confines them to circumstances they could not have chosen, is a policy inspired by a philosophy of opportunity? The doctrine of “separate but equal opportunities” always results in an incoherent agenda.

To better represent the difference between (equal) discrimination and equality of opportunity, I suggest ranking policies depending on the degree to which they allow individuals to

¹⁰ This argument is meant to refute David Miller's claim that “cultural understandings” explain why “football pitches and tennis courts are naturally substitutable as falling under the general rubric of sporting facilities, whereas schools and churches are just different kinds of things, such that you cannot compensate people for not having access to one by giving them access to the other” (cf. Miller, David “Against Global Egalitarianism”, *Journal of Ethics*, vol. 9, n° 1-2, 2005, p. 62).

¹¹ Assumptions about substitutability can be used to classify political theories: the more a theory presupposes that opportunities are substitutable, the more illiberal it is.

transform circumstances according to their objectives. At one end of the spectrum, nothing can be done to go beyond birth circumstances: it is the extreme form of a discriminatory policy. As we advance on this continuum, discrimination weakens as the imposed limits become less insurmountable (like a policy conditioning access to jobs based on marital status, which is discriminatory but not insurmountable)¹², up to a point where policies can be properly considered to offer equal opportunity. At this point, there is a formal or minimal equality of opportunity since, as Rawls put it, « all [individuals] have *at least* the same legal rights of access to all advantaged social positions »¹³. Beyond this point, there are policies which increasingly facilitate access to opportunities (by providing supplementary means, such as education, welfare, etc.).

To sum up, if equality of opportunity minimally requires opening *all* positions to *all* individuals, then segregation cannot be compatible with it. In other words, “separate but equal opportunities” scheme is self-contradictory. Those who believe that a compensation for territorial segregation promotes equality of opportunity misunderstand the concept of opportunity. But why does this misunderstanding occur?

2. Sedentarist mistakes

In the previous section, I argued that restrictions on immigration cannot promote equality of opportunity: believing that it can, is confounding an opportunity with its value. But why is one tempted to believe that mere value of opportunities trumps freedom of movement? In this section, I explain that by a bias that I call “sedentarism”.

2.1. What is sedentarism...

Sedentarism¹⁴ is the view according to which sedentary conduct has more value than mobility; in a social choice, sedentarism will favour preferences of sedentary people over those of mobile ones. Covertly dominating social sciences and overtly defended in political theory, sedentarism is not value neutral.

In political theory, mobility and migration are depicted as an “abnormal” conduct, uncharacteristic for “human beings” and explicable mainly by catastrophes. Thus according to Walzer,

“human beings move about a great deal but not because they love to move. They are most of them inclined to stay where they are, unless their life is very difficult there.”¹⁵

Since mobility is rarely viewed as a genuine choice, preferences that are satisfied though mobility appear eccentric and lacking a real purpose:

“Persecution, oppression and lack of economic opportunity are surely the principal migration incentives. (...) An individual might seek to migrate in order to get as far away from his family as possible, to master a

¹² The example comes from Peter Western, who once remarked that “the marital obstacle differs from insurmountable obstacles like race, color, and sex because marriage in America is a legal status that a person himself may change”, cf. “The Concept of Equal Opportunity”, *Ethics*, vol. 95, 1985, p. 840.

¹³ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 62 (my emphasis).

¹⁴ I coined this term in my analysis of brain drain ethics “L'éthique du débat sur la fuite des cerveaux”, *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, No. 25, vol. 1, 2009, pp. 119-135.

¹⁵ Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: a defense of pluralism and equality*, Basic Books, 1983, p. 38.

foreign language or to live in a country where people take siestas. *For simplicity, I will assume that such preferences can be expected not to favour one country over another*".¹⁶

Ideal world is often depicted as sedentary and unchanging. As an author put it:

"Imagine a world in which there are no significant political and wealth variations among bounded membership units. (...) In such a world, nothing is to be gained by tampering with the existing membership structures. In this imaginary and fully stable world system, *there is no motivation for change and migration*"¹⁷

Sedentarism is dominant in social sciences. Sedentary conduct is often supposed to be the "normal" condition, while migration always needs an explanation. Migrants are classified, sedentary people aren't. Migrants' motivation is analysed, their conduct is described, not that of sedentary people. Even when sedentary conduct is overtly suboptimal (as when for instance, an employment area doesn't drain people from a neighbouring unemployment area), few studies try to explain it. Most research focuses on 3% of global population who migrate – a rate estimated as high – and few studies enquire about the sedentary conduct of the remaining population, especially when half of humanity is living in extreme poverty. In sum, there is great asymmetry between the number of studies trying to find out the causes and motivations of the people's movement and the number of studies trying to explain sedentary, though suboptimal, conduct¹⁸.

Moreover, most research evaluates the costs imposed by those who move to those who stay, while the opposite is rare. In migration studies, questions such as how skilled departure affects people left behind, how migrants' arrival alters job market, wages, redistributive policies, opinion and culture at destination – are recurrent. Too few studies are estimating the costs imposed by those who stay on those who (would) move. Questions such as how passports affect people's wealth, education, careers and family life, how borders decrease global GDP – are understudied¹⁹.

2.2. ... and what kind of mistakes it leads to?

Sedentarism bias may lead to logically invalid reasoning which is often combined with morally arbitrary conclusions. I will give two examples of each.

First of all, invalid arguments. A widespread logical fallacy is hasty generalization. The sedentarist bias which it comes from can be the difficulty of figuring out movement as a choice. Thus, the reasoning goes often from the observation that presently, *most* people's movement at the international level is forced by persecution and poverty, to the conclusion

¹⁶ Eric Cavallero, "An immigration-pressure model of global distributive justice" *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2006, p. 105 (my emphasis).

¹⁷ Shachar *Birthright*, p. 5 (my emphasis).

¹⁸ For an exception, see Hammar, Tomas and Tamas, Kristof "Why do People Go or Stay"; Fischer, Peter A., Martin, Reiner and Straubhaar, Thomas "Should I Stay or Should I go?" in *International Migration, Immobility and Development. Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, Hammar, Tomas, Brochman, Grete, Tamas Kristof and Faist, Thomas (eds.), Oxford, NY, Berg, 1997, pp. 1-20 and 49-89; Fischer, Peter A., Holm, Einar, Malmberg, Gunnar and Straubhaar, Thomas, "Why do People Stay? Insider Advantages and Immobility" HWW Discussion Paper 112, Hamburg Institute of International Economics, 2000

<http://www.econstor.eu/dspace/bitstream/10419/19439/1/112.pdf>

¹⁹ Michael Clement

that *all movement* comes about from (coercion by) persecution and poverty²⁰. This reasoning is presupposed by claims according to which in a less unequal world, motivation for change and movement would disappear. Hasty generalisation leads also to reduce the claims made upon rich countries to admit more needy foreigners to claims about redistribution. As Thomas Pogge put it, “if this [persuading rich countries to admit more needy foreigners] is a worthy cause, it is so in virtue of the protection it affords to persons who are very badly off”²¹. Such positions neglect that needy people have rights other than those related to their economic condition.

A second common form of the sedentarist mistake is a deontic version of the fallacy of the inverse of the following form: since poverty causes migration and reducing poverty is a worthy goal, then reducing migration must be a worthy goal²². For instance, Eric Cavallero argued that if poverty causes migration and if rich countries should fund development of poor ones, then “funding should aim at a near-term target of immigration-pressure equilibrium”²³. In each case, premises about inequality and forced migration are converted in a conclusion about migration. Acknowledging that mobility can be a choice (even for the poor) would have avoided the sedentarist mistake.

Let us turn to normative conclusions derived from sedentarist premises. The first example is given by the common view according to which in a world less unequal than ours, restrictions on immigration would be less, if at all, objectionable. This conclusion neglect that people, including the poorest ones, have interests other than those derived from their economic condition and they would be *harmed* by the restrictions on freedom of movement. One can argue that preventing people who live in separate nation-states from moving and meeting each other is a *serious violation* of individual rights. As a matter of fact, restrictions on movement harm not only poor countries’ citizens, and have not only socio-economic effects. Since mobility conditions a wide range, if not all, of our actions, restrictions on mobility result in limitations on freedom that go far beyond economic aspects. Preventing people – just because they are citizens of different countries – from visiting or receiving friends in their homes, marrying people of their choice or developing new relationships is a serious violation of their fundamental liberties. Generally, we would describe any political regime which deprives people, even a minority, of such civil liberties as highly oppressive. However, when it comes to the international level, we tend to have more clemency with such rights’ violations and forget that freedom of association and the rights to fund a family and to lead a meaningful life are still recognized as universal human rights. Therefore, insofar as it imposes restrictions on movement, the “gate-keeping” function of citizenship harms both outsiders and insiders²⁴. And contrary to the commonplace, closed borders do not harm only outsiders from poor

²⁰ To see why it is a mistake, compare it to the reasoning “most people who eat are forced by hunger, then eating is about hunger’s coercion”.

²¹ Pogge, Thomas, “Migration and Poverty” in Robert Goodin and Philip Pettit (eds.) *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, p. 713.

²² Compare to “political oppression generated a new literary style; struggling political oppression is a worthy cause, then struggling the new literary style is a worthy cause”.

²³ Cavallero, Eric, “An immigration-pressure...” p. 97.

²⁴ For a similar argument, see Hillel Steiner, “Hard Borders, Compensation and Classical Liberalism” and Loren Lomasky, “Toward a Liberal Theory of National Boundaries”, in *Boundaries and Justice. Diverse Ethical Perspectives*, David Miller and Sohail Hashmi (eds.), Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2001, pp. 55-88.

countries: *poor and rich countries' insiders and outsiders* have their fundamental freedoms curtailed.

The second example of questionable normative conclusions is the abandonment of liberal neutrality. Let us assume that the sedentarist view is correct: the ideal world is one where “there is no motivation for change and migration” and where only a very small minority of people would move “for idiosyncratic reasons”²⁵. Could a liberal approve of the fact that the remaining majority imposes its preferences for immobility to everyone? A liberal mind committed to the ideals of neutrality and persuaded that it should refrain from exercising political power without people’s consent, would prevent a majority, however large, from forcefully imposing its sedentary preferences on others who are willing to move. It would do on the basis of neutrality ideal and would simply emphasise that this majority violates those individuals’ rights. And wealth alone cannot change their harm into freedom, just as golden bars do not make cages a liberty symbol. To avoid the possibility of such harm, a liberal would disconnect separate nation-states from the power to control movement and entry into the land.

To sum up, the idea that redistributing wealth or the mere value of opportunities makes restrictions on immigration unproblematic is based on sedentarist assumptions according to which mobility does not characterise human nature. Sedentarism is dominant in social sciences and it leads, in political theory, both to logical fallacies and questionably normative conclusions.

3. Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that “separate but equal opportunities” is an incoherent idea, based on sedentarist presuppositions. Compensating restrictions on immigration, in a world of separate nation-states, is not a way to promote global equality of opportunity since opportunities are distinct from their values and cannot be distributed by borders. Borders create, at best, equal discrimination, not equal opportunity. One should not use political power to decrease other’s freedom, based on one’s own sedentarist view about human nature.

²⁵ Brian Barry, “The Quest for consistency: A skeptical view” in Brian Barry and Robert E. Goodin, eds. *Free Movement: Ethical Issues in the Transnational Migration of People and of Money*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992 pp. 279