

How should we distribute education? Individual versus collective property of educational capital in property-owning democracy and liberal socialism

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Abstract

Our aim in this article is to compare the merits and limits of liberal socialism and of property-owning democracy through the specific case of the distribution of educational capital. To do this, we will compare two educational systems: the Pay It Forward (PIF) system and the Free and Universal Education (FUE) system. We argue that the analysis of these two educational systems highlight in a concrete way some fundamental differences between liberal socialism and property-owning democracy, regarding the justification of individual common assets, the justification of the principle of reciprocity, and our understanding of the predistribution versus redistribution debate. Based on the analysis of both education systems, we overall provide arguments in favor of liberal socialist institutions in general and the PIF educational system in particular.

Our argument is organized in six points: in the first section, following Meade (1993), we expose the reasons explaining why the management of educational capital is crucial to foster social justice in contemporary societies and is at least as important as other forms of capital. In the second section, we compare two educative systems, respectively called Free and Universal Education and Pay It Forward. In the third section, we suggest that they correctly embody two systems promoted by John Rawls (1999): respectively property-owning democracy and liberal socialism. In the following three sections we provide three justifications for arguing that the Pay It Forward educational system is a socialist educative system genuinely more prone to favor social justice, based on the individual common assets argument, the reciprocity argument, and from a predistributive perspective.