

# Arguing for Equality

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## I

It is often argued that equality and liberty frequently conflict, that we must make trade-offs between equality and liberty and, particularly if we prize the having of a free and democratic society, that we will not try to achieve an equality of condition between human beings. By contrast, I shall argue that for there to be a free society there must be an extensive equality of condition. It is also the case — or so I shall argue — that to represent perspicuously that equality of condition we should articulate egalitarian principles of justice that are even more egalitarian than those of either John Rawls or Ronald Dworkin. It is in the articulation of such principles and such a conception of equality of condition that the core of my radical egalitarianism is to be found.

Until rather recently, when a new spirit of meanness has come to reign in the name of economic rationality, there has been in the capitalist democracies a rather widespread belief that equality is a good thing, though this has been accompanied by a considerable unclarity as to what this equality should come to. We might start to smoke this out if we ask how much equality is enough. In societies such as ours, now, though surely not at all times in the past, we believe, even if we are anti-egalitarians, in *moral* equality. We believe, that is, that the life of everyone matters and matters equally. We are quite aware that people are of rather different moral and intellectual capacities and that they make quite variable inputs into their societies, yet all of that notwithstanding, we take it to be the case that people are of equal moral worth. This comes to a commitment to an equal protection of people's rights and to a belief that the satisfaction of their interests matters and matters equally. We need rather special reasons for putting the interests of one person ahead of another. There can, of course, be such special reasons. On a lifeboat we may give priority to some of the interests of the one person who can navigate because by doing so the interests of everyone (where 'everyone' is taken collectively) will be enhanced. We might, to keep him from delirium, give him more rations than someone else and that might conceivably mean that he might survive when the other person or persons might not. Still, we sometimes must make such hard choices. The situations where we must do so are situations where, starting out from an equal consideration of interests, we come to acknowledge that certain harsh conditions obtain where the interests of everyone cannot be equally

met, and where, if we do not make such special arrangements, the interests of everyone will be at considerable risk. In such contexts, in the collective interests of everyone involved, we must make some hard choices. It is a hard saying but a true one that numbers count. But that does not mean that anyone is simply morally expendable. If, in a particular circumstance, the interests of someone must be overridden that does not mean that, morally speaking, we can start out by simply ignoring his interests. Overriding his interests is something which is *prima facie* wrong. We must show that overriding his interests in some particular situation is a moral necessity.

Radical egalitarians, along with many others, believe in *moral* equality, but that for radical egalitarians, as well as for liberal egalitarians, such as John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin, is not enough. What we must aim at, and this can only be reasonably achieved in conditions of material abundance, is an equality of whole life prospects for everyone, where that is not read simply as the right to compete for scarce positions of advantage but where there is brought into being social structures that would provide everyone equally, as far as possible, with the resources and the social conditions to satisfy their needs as fully as possible in a way that is compatible with everyone else doing likewise. Beyond that, as a heuristic ideal for a society of wondrous abundance, we should seek to provide everyone equally, as far as possible, with the resources and social conditions to satisfy each one's wants as fully as possible compatible with everyone receiving the same treatment. In seeking to establish an equality of condition, we start with basic needs, move out to other needs and finally move to wants as the productive power of the society increases. The ideal to aim at, perhaps only as a heuristic, is a world in which there is the full and equal meeting of the needs and wants of everyone. (If there is no way of ascertaining either then we should stick with equal resources hoping that will give us what we would want if we could ascertain it.) It is when we have that much equality that we finally have enough equality. It is a yardstick by which we can measure the approximation to moral adequacy in our actual societies and see the direction in which we should try to go as the social wealth in the society increases or more accurately as the capacity for greater social wealth increases with the development of the forces of production.

## II

I think in arguing as I have there is no avoiding an appeal to considered judgments. But this is not an appeal to 'intuitions' neat, for we can and should get them into wide reflective equilibrium.<sup>1</sup> We can, that is, get our varied considered judgments into patterns of coherence, squaring particular moral judgments with more general moral

judgments, moral principles, moral theories and background social theories (including, of course, empirically validated social theories). We would do well, in establishing such coherence patterns, to start with the formal principle of justice that we must treat like cases alike. It does not, of course, tell us *what* are like cases but we will, no matter who we are, if we have any sense at all, want a life in which our needs are satisfied and in which we can live as we wish. We plainly do differ in many ways, but we do not differ in wanting our needs satisfied or differ in desiring to be able to live as we wish. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, where questions of desert, entitlement and the like do not impinge, it is only fair that all of us should have our needs equally considered and that we should all be able to do as we wish in a way that is compatible with others doing likewise. From the formal principle of justice and a few key facts about us, we can get to the claim that we should go for the equality of condition I have characterized. That is, *ceteris paribus*, our basic needs should all be equally satisfied and our other needs and wants, as far as is feasible, should also be satisfied as far as that is compatible with the needs of everyone being similarly met. Where needs conflict with wants needs come first and where basic needs conflict with non-basic needs the basic needs trump the non-basic needs. Where these priority relations are being observed, we should seek the bringing about of those social structures that make possible the satisfaction of the most extensive system, where everyone is considered, of compatible needs (basic and non-basic) and wants that it is possible to achieve.

Such a conception of equality takes distinctive principles of justice. I think the following is a perspicuous way of stating them.

- (1) Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties and opportunities (including equal opportunities for meaningful work, for self-determination and political and economic participation) compatible with a similar treatment of all. (This principle gives expression to a commitment to attain and/or sustain equal moral autonomy and equal self-respect.)
- (2) After provisions are made for common social (community) values, for capital overhead to preserve the society's productive capacity, allowances made for differing unmanipulated needs and preferences, and due weight is given to the just entitlements of individuals, the income and wealth (the common stock of



means) is to be so divided that each person will have a right to an equal share. The necessary burdens requisite to enhance human well being are also to be equally shared, subject, of course, to limitations by differing abilities and differing situations. (Here I refer to different natural environments and the like and not to class position and the like.)

These principles of egalitarian justice specify, in a very general way, rights people have and duties they have under conditions of very considerable productive abundance. We have a right to certain basic liberties and opportunities and we have, subject to certain limitations spelled out in the second principle, a right to an equal share of the income and wealth in the world. Similarly, again subject to the qualifications specified in the second principle, we have a duty to do our equal share in shouldering the burdens necessary to protect society at large from ills and to enhance the well-being of people in society.

### III

I have been operating with the deep underlying principle that everyone's life matters and indeed that everyone's life matters equally. It is a trivial corollary of this that the protection of everyone's genuine interests is of equal importance. I do not know how to prove such a deep underlying moral principle, a principle shared in common by a liberal egalitarian account of morality such as Rawls' or Dworkin's and a socialist one such as my own. Neither the aristocratic morality of an Aristotle nor the elitist meritocratic morality of Nietzsche would accept it. They accepted the formal principle of justice but they both thought that there were quite different kinds of human beings and that, as Nietzsche put it, it would be the very termination of justice to treat unequals as if they were equals. People, they believed, were plainly not of equal moral worth.

Something can be said by way of response by pointing out that elitists ignore the depth of socialization of people. They ignore how much different environments and different circumstances produce different people. Still, when all this has been said, and thoroughly taken to heart, it remains the case that there are people in similar circumstances and sometimes even of similar genetic makeup (such as twins) who act in very different ways and who have very different moral sensitivities. Some, through their deliberate choices, contribute far more to their society than others, and some take much more, while giving less than others, and it seems to many at least only fair to reward such people in different ways. I think, except as a pragmatic matter, we will be less inclined to do that when we fully take to heart the facts of

genetic roulette.<sup>2</sup> But that aside, my second principle of justice does allow, within severely circumscribed limits space for different individual entitlements. Still, faced with a Nietzschean elitist who, even with the above clarifications, refuses to accept the equal moral worth of all human beings, there is little that is not question begging that we can say. Here we may have hit variable bedrock considered judgments and it may even be the case that there are different core considered judgments that coherently go into different reflective equilibria.

Egalitarians, to go to an even deeper level, will have a pro-attitude of impartial caring for all people, the least of us as well as the greatest of us. It is not evident that we can argue or reason a person into such an attitude, or even into seeing such an attitude to be appropriate, if she doesn't already have it. The *Weltgeist* in our societies, at least as a public stance, favors it but the *Weltgeist* has been different in the past and may change again. What we can say is this: it is very difficult, to put it minimally, for the elitist to make out a case for the intrinsic or inherent moral superiority of one person over another and there are the vital social facts, cutting against elitism, of different enculturation and environment as well as the fact that it hardly even makes sense to say that we are responsible for our genetic inheritance.

#### IV

For those of us who are prepared to accept something like the method of wide reflective equilibrium and who have roughly modernist attitudes, there will be an acceptance of *moral* equality. Given such an acceptance, it is not unlikely that we would accept something like the principle that everyone's life matters and that everyone's life matters equally. From there we can move, by tolerably natural steps, and, I hope, not invalid steps, to my principles of radical egalitarian justice and to my substantive reading of equality of condition.

Both liberal egalitarians and radical egalitarians will accept the principle that everyone's life matters and matters equally. The principal difference between them comes over an interpretation of what this would come to and over what institutional and structural arrangements are necessary for anything like egalitarian conditions of life to be a genuine possibility. Radical egalitarians will stress the need for a rough equality of social wealth as necessary for an equality of condition. It is this, and not envy or a compulsive desire that everything be divided up exactly equally, that is part of the justification for such a stress on equality of wealth. Though it is also the case that the result of reflection on what fairness comes to here, particularly when we reflect on whole life prospects, also provides us with a rationale for such an emphasis on equality of wealth. More instrumentally, and perhaps more securely, there is, as a further rationale for such an egal-



itarian belief, the belief that a rough equality of social wealth is essential to avoid those hierarchies of power that give a few control over the lives of many others and will in turn lead to privileges and the like which will make the whole life prospects of a not inconsiderable number of people very different indeed. Even within a liberal capitalist welfare state, to say nothing of a state run on monetarist policies, there is no way of attaining anything like that. Socialism is a necessary but perhaps not a sufficient, condition for attaining equality of condition.

I have, among other things, tried to state the conditions which would make stably possible human flourishing, including conditions supporting the sustaining of self-respect for everyone. (Like Rawls, I give self-respect a very central place in my firmament of values.) It is, however, natural to query would not such an equality of condition undermine self-respect in another way? People would not be rewarded for excelling, there would, some might say, be no recognition, in my conception of things, of genuine contributions to society. Those who enrich our social and cultural life would be unrewarded and unacknowledged.

My reply is that not all rewards or acknowledgement of merit need be monetary awards or rewards in terms of what in effect is greater power over the lives of others. The latter is plainly morally offensive in a democratic society and, in a society of great material abundance, which is the only kind of society in which my principles are meant to be more than heuristic ideals, principles of marginal utility, where wealth is disassociated from power (assuming for the moment that is possible), will undermine the prime value of greater financial reward. But, it is important to recognize, these are not the only kind of rewards there are. There is the reward of more interesting work in a more interesting environment; there is the reward of the public recognition of ability and the respect shown by one's fellows that goes with accomplishment.

The very idea of what it is to be an egalitarian, liberal or radical, commits one to a moral point of view in which the interests of all the members of the human community matter and matter equally. But where there is not something reasonably approximating an equality of result or condition, it cannot be the case that the members of the human community are being so treated such that their interests matter equally. Without that equality of condition some will come to have power and control over others and the very possibility of equal human flourishing will be undermined. Moreover, without an equality of condition we cannot have free societies where there is any extensive flourishing of liberty. What we will have instead is liberty for a few at the expense of a very diminished liberty for the many.<sup>3</sup>

## V

There is an objection to what I have said that is both natural and not without considerable force. It could go as follows:

The theory and its underlying principles are set out so briefly, in such general terms, and with such an important proviso (abundance of resources) that they might turn out to mean anything at all. For example, the second principle of justice says, in part, "After provisions are made for common social values. . . and due weight is given to the just entitlements of individuals", each person has a right to an equal share in what is left. But, what, the objection runs, if the common social values reward productivity with income, so that workers in high productivity industries earn a lot and craftsmen earn only a little? What if the just entitlements of individuals are considered to be so strong as to override the residual claim to equal distribution? That principle could, in practice, turn out to support almost any system of ownership and distribution at all.

My two principles, if they are not to suffer from such a debilitating indeterminacy, must be given a determinate reading in an egalitarian environment or cultural ambience. If that determination is not done clearly and in some detail and if that environment is not morally attractive or cannot be made so by reflective discussion then such principles of justice will be revealed to be at best useless platitudes. Indeed, in defense of their use, something stronger would have to be said and to be made out, namely that this morally attractive view would have to be shown not to be just one morally attractive view among others but that, when various moral views were compared, it would be seen to be the most attractive view. This, of course, would take a not inconsiderable amount of showing. What I have argued in the previous sections is meant to be a start. I think if we begin with a common conception of *moral* equality, a conception that even such severely modernist anti-egalitarians as Robert Nozick and Antony Flew accept, as well as contemporary elitist perfectionists, and we couple this with a firm acceptance of a principle of formal justice (treat like cases alike), we can move, step by step, in a plausible manner, to a more substantial equality and with that we can move, as a partial specification of that equality, to my principles of radical egalitarian justice.

If we start with the belief that the life of everyone matters and matters equally such that whatever natural rights we have (if indeed there



are any such rights) require equal protection for all of us and that, as well, and relatedly, the satisfaction of the interests of all human beings matters and matters equally, then, under conditions of abundance, we will not reward productively with greater income. That commitment to productivity, where people are clear about the implications of moral equality, will not be one of their common social values. It will only have positive instrumental value where we need, under conditions of scarcity, to develop the forces of production.

Where conditions of reasonable abundance obtain, it would not be possible for an egalitarian to take it as one of the common social values of such a society that workers in high productivity industries earn a lot and craftsmen earn only a little. In a society of non-abundance struggling to attain abundance by increasing its social wealth such rewards for productivity might have to be given. But this would be a temporary expedient in the struggle to make the springs of social wealth flow more fully. Such rewards for productivity could never be the hallmark of a just society functioning under optimum conditions. All sorts of contingencies, quite unlinked to natural abilities, place some in jobs that are productive and some in jobs that are less productive. Even if we allow scope for considerations of desert, as I believe within severely circumscribed limits we should, there need be no greater desert (schedule of meritocratic rewards) for the worker in high productivity industries, e.g. the worker in computer industries over the highly skilled cabinet maker or shoemaker. There is no need and no justification for such discriminations to be made where we start from a base of moral equality and we live under conditions of considerable abundance.

Similar things need to be said about my critic's point concerning entitlements. Whatever we might want to say about individual ownership of productive property (means of production), there will, in both capitalist and communist societies, be private ownership of individual property, e.g. things like houses and cars. In a society of abundance but where all the same conditions were becoming rather crowded, I might have come to own, before conditions of extensive crowding and (let us agree) by some principles of just acquisition, three family houses: one in the city, one on the beach and another in the mountains. This would, indeed, be very pleasant for me, and under conditions of extensive abundance where such things would be generally available for those who would avail themselves of them, there would certainly be nothing untoward about it. But, if in this otherwise abundant society, not a few wanting rather more expansive living conditions were actually stuck in small apartments, then my entitlement to three such residences would be overridden. I have an entitlement here all right — I justly acquired them — but under certain conditions, for an egalitarian, such entitlements, which are in place,



are rightly overridden. Such entitlements are entitlements which hold *ceterus paribus*. But here *ceterus* is not *paribus*. But the principle itself is not going to tell me when *ceterus* is *paribus* or else there would be no need for such a qualifier in the first place.

Where we start from a basis of moral equality which would commit one to treating the interests of everyone as equally deserving of respect, we could not but, under the above circumstances, override those entitlements: entitlements which *prima facie* must be respected. Even contemporary anti-egalitarians accept moral equality but then it is difficult for me to understand how they could not but favor overriding such entitlements in those circumstances. There could be no social value for an egalitarian which would allow, for what is properly distributable at all, such strong entitlements: entitlements that would override claims to equal distribution which are essential for that equality of condition which in turn is essential for attaining a world of moral equality where the life of everyone matters and matters equally.<sup>4</sup>

## VI

There is another objection by way of a query to my account which comes trippingly on the tongue. What exactly, or even inexactly, is the connection between my two principles of justice and my radical egalitarianism? The connection is this: the root conception that makes the radical egalitarian an egalitarian is the belief that everyone's life matters and everyone's life matters equally. When our perspective is an agent-neutral one, which is the decisively crucial perspective of a moral point of view here, the interests of all the members of the human community matter and matter equally. But if such a conception is to have any possibility of coming to be a reality (have a stable social exemplification) certain institutional arrangements, backed by certain norms, must come into place. It is here where my two principles of justice become relevant. The second calls for a rough equality of wealth. If that does not obtain there is little likelihood that there will be institutional structures in place that will support the egalitarian belief that everyone's life matters and matters equally. Without such a rough equality of wealth, power hierarchies will develop in societies which will give a few extensive control over the lives of many. Many people will have much less autonomy (control over their lives) than they would have with a greater equality of wealth. With such differential autonomy, it cannot be the case that everyone's life can matter equally in a social accounting of things (the agent-neutral perspective again). If we really believe that everyone's life matters and everyone's life matters equally, we must go for at least something like the equality of condition expressed in my second principle of justice.

The first principle is even more clearly linked with the idea that everyone's life matters and everyone's life matters equally. Given some reasonable security and moderate abundance, one of the things people will come to care about, and indeed care about very deeply, is control over their own lives. They will care, that is, about their autonomy. They will care, and come to care more acutely, about rational self-direction the more security and a reasonable amount of social wealth become realities in their society. They will want to understand themselves and their world and they will want to be in control of their own lives. Where people are starving such talk is at best hollow and at worst obscene. But starting with a minimal security, and as social wealth and security increase, concern for autonomy becomes increasingly important.

Such matters will be terribly important for all of us individually, or at least it would be terribly important for all of us individually, if we would reflect with tolerable care about our lives. If we start from the basis of moral equality, we will be very concerned to protect and enhance as much as possible everyone's autonomy and we will take this concern to be something that should be manifest in the society for all of us equally. This does not mean that in some active way each person will be equally concerned with everyone. If everyone were to show such a catholic expression of individual concern, it is very unlikely that there will be much concern shown for very many people. What we do mean to be claiming instead is that social structures should be maintained which function to protect and enhance the autonomy of everyone equally as far as that is possible. It is this condition for which my first principle of justice is an action guide.

Still someone might say that at best the above set of arguments shows that there is a close link between my principles of justice and moral equality, but not a close link between my principles of justice and my radical egalitarianism. I find this remark puzzling, for it just seems to me that my two principles are a partial expression of what I intend by 'radical egalitarianism'. They, that is, encapsulate an important part of it and put it in the imperative mode. My radical egalitarianism in its conception of an equality of condition requires, in societies of productive abundance, a rough equality of wealth and with that no individual will have, in any institutionalized way, and in any uncontrolled and non-consensual way, greater power than any other individual such that a class or stratum could persist with power to control or dominate others, making conditions for the possibility of equal autonomy impossible. It is just in such a conception that my radical egalitarianism differs most fundamentally from liberal egalitarianism.



## VII

My claim that to have a free society — a society where liberty flourishes — we must have a society reasonably approximating an equality of condition will strike not a few people as implausible. The received wisdom is that in a free society we must make trade-offs between freedom and equality and that a society which was thoroughly egalitarian would undermine freedom. We can see that this is so, it is claimed, if we reflect on an institution like marriage. Suppose both A and B want to marry C but that they live in a monogamous society such that A and B cannot both simultaneously marry C. If C marries A then A and B cannot be in an equality of condition. But in a society which at all values freedom we must allow individual choice here and with it an inevitable inequality of result. Indeed, in a monogamous society, whether it respects individual choice or not, there must be an inequality of result in such a situation. But here the distinctive structures of the inequality will be the result of people making individual choices.

There is something very strange here. To talk about equality or inequality here is zany. No egalitarian — or at least no egalitarian of any note — ever thought to talk about equality here or to relate such matters to equality of condition. It was various political, legal and civil equalities that were first demanded, then, with the increased development of the productive forces and an increased democratization of society, things like equal health care, equal educational opportunities and equal social benefits generally, along with the acceptance of burdens, equally to be shared, necessary for the common good, became further demands or at least were set forth as ideals to be achieved when the springs of social wealth came to flow even more freely and fully. And finally economic equality, that is demands for a democratic control of the means of production, came on stream. But things like 'equality in marriage partners' never came on the horizon. Indeed, such a conceptualization does not even have any clear sense.

Still, it is not implausible to counter, if C marries A then A gets what A wants while B does not, so clearly there is not an equality of condition between A and B. But it is at an equality of condition that radical egalitarianism aims. The marriage thing shows, the argument goes, that it either cannot be attained at all or that it cannot be attained in a way which is even remotely acceptable to those who respect freedom of choice.<sup>5</sup> If the latter is so, then, after all, to protect liberty, we must make some trade-offs with equality. To achieve equality of condition here would come to an undermining of liberty and would not show respect for persons.

In morality 'ought implies can'. We cannot rightly or even coherently tell someone that they ought to do something unless they can do



it. What I think needs to be said, to counter the above objection, is that we cannot possibly achieve equality of condition here. So that to say that we ought to try to do so makes no sense. There is no possibility of these 'egalitarian marriage arrangements' coming into being and thus their becoming destructive of liberty makes no sense. Should we cut C in half and A could marry one half and B the other? C cannot be divided like a pie. Or perhaps A should marry C for ten years and B should then marry C for the next ten years or, since they might take the order to be important, perhaps they should draw straws for who is to get the first ten years. (If that sounds obscene it is because it is obscene.) There are a number of other permutations and combinations possible, but they are all plainly equally unacceptable, if people's considered judgements are to be given any weight. Neither A, B nor C would think that any of these various possible arrangements made for the attainment of an equality of condition and they would, given our actual moral sensitivities, in other ways be unhappily held. The short of it is that there no achieving an equality of condition here. Such talk just barely makes sense and that is at least one of the reasons why the 'attaining of such equalities' has never been on the egalitarian agenda. (Perhaps it makes *conceptual* sense but not *moral* sense? If that is so, do not such considerations, after all, count against egalitarianism?)

It perhaps should be said again, in the face of anti-egalitarian intransigence here, that the equality of condition sought is not such that it would lead to human uniformity — not everyone wants to paint, play hockey, philosophize or be a cabinet maker, not would all of these things be fulfilling for everyone.<sup>6</sup> What equality of condition aims at is setting the conditions, perhaps mainly by making equal resources available, such that it would be possible for everyone, if they were capable of it, to enjoy an equally worthwhile and satisfying life or at least a life in which, for all of them, as far as possible, their needs would be met and met equally, even where they are not the same needs, and, after that, where their needs are met, their wants are to be met as well and met equally where this is possible. There is the hope here to approximate an equality of well-being where that equality is not purchased by lowering the well-being of some, capable of a greater well being, to compensate those capable of less, but to seek to develop social structures which would help each person to attain the most complete well-being of which that person is capable, compatible with everyone, in the respect being considered, being treated in the same manner.

## VIII

It is indeed difficult to give a satisfactory conceptualization of the notions of equality of well-being or equality of condition.<sup>7</sup> I think

here in talking of these conceptions a very important point is made by Richard Norman which may be of practical moral import, given the difficulty in getting a satisfactory conceptualization of these notions. Though the idea of equality of well-being, Norman remarks, may be "the underlying ethical principle of egalitarianism, it is not what egalitarians have in practice directly aimed at."<sup>8</sup> Rather, egalitarians "have aimed at creating the *social* conditions which would *enable* people to enjoy worthwhile lives".<sup>9</sup> They realize that there can "be no guarantee that everyone will in fact achieve equal well-being, and indeed the expectation must be that this will never entirely happen, but what we can do is create the kind of society in which there will be no impediments to equal well-being, other than the accidents and vagaries of individual temperaments and inclinations".<sup>10</sup> And to achieve these things, it is essential that we come to have equality of social power, equality of wealth and equality in education — all matters captured by my principles of justice.

If, as J.S. Mill and Isaiah Berlin believe, we, as human beings, have as one of our deepest needs, the need to have some assured private sphere — say, freedom with respect to religious belief or sexual preference — with which no one can rightly coercively interfere, then an egalitarianism aimed at equality of well-being or equality of condition would seek for all of us, and equally, to protect the right to such privacy.

## IX

Still, some would argue that in maintaining, as I would, an interdependence of liberty and equality — you can't have a free society without it being an egalitarian society as well — I fail to understand that a necessary if not a sufficient condition for people being free is that they cannot in these assured private spheres be compelled by others to act in certain ways. Insofar as people are coerced, they are indeed unfree. But to keep egalitarian patterns people will have to be coerced into doing certain things and however desirable it may be that those things be done, they, in being so compelled, are not acting freely. So it cannot be the case that a free society and an equal society coincide. To sustain equality we must in certain situations coercively interfere with people doing what they want.

However, a free society is not a society in which people without restriction can do what they want but a society in which people can do what they want without violating the rights of others: without invading that assured private space in which people can do what they will.<sup>11</sup> Clear instantiations of that private space are things such as being able to vote, not to have to go to church or synagogue if you do not want to, to marry whomever you please as long as that person will



marry you, to immigrate, to express your political views and the like. But the having of such rights will not upset patterns protecting equality of condition. On the contrary, its being the case that everyone has these rights is part of what it is to achieve equality of condition.

There will, however, be trouble if the assured private space is extended to private property, particularly private productive property. Suppose one person has a large tract of land in a society in which many people are landless and desperately in need of land to keep body and soul together. Here is at least a *prima facie* case for redistribution. But if the having of private property is a part of that assured private sphere, which must remain inviolate, then it looks as if, after all, we must make trade-offs between liberty and equality. But it is thoroughly problematic whether the right to private property should be part of such an assured private sphere like freedom of speech. Not all rights have equal stringency. There are, in short, rights and rights, e.g. the right to bodily integrity is one thing, the unlimited right to acquire consumer durables is another and private productive property still is another.

Still, if we have a right to private individual property at all, there remains, in such circumstance, some trade-offs to be made between liberty and equality in overriding such a right in certain circumstances. This, I think, the radical egalitarian has to concede. What he can and should add is that this only qualifies his thesis about the interdependence of liberty and equality. The loss of liberty here is not the loss of any basic liberties — strategic vital liberties that are crucial for people to be able to live self-directed lives — and it is at least arguable that in such instances the trade-off in a loss of liberty is not just with equality but a trade-off of a lesser liberty, both in type of liberty and extent of liberty, for a greater liberty. If a huge tract of private property is taken from a landowner and redistributed to peasants, freedom, everything considered, is plainly increased for more people come to have greater control over their lives.

However, what about Hume's point that, if we carry out such redistributions, given our "different degrees of art, care and industry," the equality of condition in the society in question will be rendered unstable and that, to prevent such an undermining of equality, the state will have to impose "the most rigorous inquisition. . .to watch every inequality on its first appearance. . .[and] to punish and redress it" in such a manner that the state "authority must soon degenerate into tyranny".<sup>12</sup> But this would not be so where people were generally already strongly committed to equality, where they had struggled hard — indeed fought — to attain an egalitarian social order and wanted to protect this hard won achievement.<sup>13</sup> They would not have to use the state apparatus to enforce an egalitarian social order, to ram it down the throats of an unwilling people, for it is something



toward which they already have firm pro-attitudes. They would at most have to use the state apparatus, in a perfectly democratic manner, to make adjustments to which the vast majority of the citizens were already committed. That a few people in the society would not have such pro-attitudes would not require a reign of unfreedom to protect the commitment to equality. Furthermore, a redistribution of land, against the wishes of the few who would resist this, is not an invasion into an inviolate private sphere as is a redistribution of husbands, wives, kidneys or a refusal of the right to immigrate.

## X

Let me return to a point powerfully argued by Richard Norman — a point I mentioned earlier in passing.<sup>14</sup> What radical egalitarians have aimed at is the creating of social conditions which would enable people to enjoy equally worthwhile lives, where the conditions to be brought into existence would be such that they all could live, if they had the will to do so, very worthwhile lives.<sup>15</sup> People are too different and there are too many strictly personal unforeseeable circumstances, for it to be very likely, even in the best of worlds, that everyone will in fact achieve equal well-being. That is pure utopia. But what we can perhaps do, and what radical egalitarians regard as deeply desirable to do, is to “create the kind of society in which there will be no impediments to equal well-being other than the accidents and vagaries of individual temperaments and inclinations”.<sup>16</sup> The social conditions we need to create to make this real are conditions where there is an equality of social power, a rough equality of wealth and equality in education. What it is also necessary to recognize is that these equalities are principally valuable because they are strategic in attaining what my first principle of justice specifies as a prime desideratum, namely equality of liberty (if you will, conditions for equal autonomy). What we want is a world in which all people capable of self-direction have, and have equally, control over their own lives. In their concern with equality of social power their concern has been with the structural features of a society which reproduces a world in which there are clear class divisions giving rise to class oppression, gender divisions giving rise to sexual oppression and racial divisions giving rise to racial oppression.<sup>17</sup>

Class oppression is a key element in the inequality of structural power relations. Where one class has control of the relations of production, as the capitalist class does in capitalist societies, and where another class, without control of the means of production, or at least the major means of production, must sell its labour-power as a commodity on the market in a situation in which capitalists and workers are unequal partners in the bargaining, we have a situation in which

the structural power relations are unequal and in which capitalists dominate and exploit workers.<sup>18</sup> Such relations of production give one class pervasive power over the other. Moreover, as Norman points out, it isn't just that, with such control of the relations of production, capitalists gain control over the economic life of the society, more than that, though they indeed do that, the power of capitalists over workers extends in myriad ways to the life of the society as a whole. They dominate the culture industry, educational structures, health services, and the like. Such relations of production, in fine, make for great structural inequalities of power. Liberal egalitarians, such as Rawls and Dworkin, set aside — effectively ignore — such questions about structural inequalities of power generated by capitalist relations of production. But with such inequalities of power equal liberty and anything approaching equal well-being or any equality of condition is quite impossible. Radical egalitarians, by contrast, place such matters centre stage and argue that there can be no equality of social power without radically changed relations of production: relations of production which would “consist in the common ownership and popular control of the means of production”.<sup>19</sup> And this, of course, means socialism.

The morally most important inequalities of wealth are just those inequalities in ownership and control of the means of production that we have been talking about. But, as well, though less importantly, there are inequalities in wealth as means of consumption. When such inequalities are considerable (as they plainly are in our societies), it will be much more difficult to approximate an equality of well-being and certainly with such disparities in wealth it will, “to understate the matter, make it more difficult for some than for others to enjoy a worthwhile life”.<sup>20</sup> Not everyone, given individual differences, will live equally worthwhile lives. But a rough equality of wealth would help toward putting everyone “equally in a position to live such a life, while leaving them free to utilize the opportunities in whatever way they see fit”.<sup>21</sup>

In stressing equality of wealth, we must be careful not just to talk about equality of monetary income, for two people could have equal incomes and still be in a very unequal condition if one needed very expensive medical care that swallowed up much of his income while the other did not. (I am thinking here of countries like the United States and South Africa that do not have national health insurance.) That is why I spoke initially of meeting basic needs for everyone first, then progressing to less basic needs and finally, when all the needs (basic and non-basic) are met, turning to an equal consideration of everyone's wants. Perhaps the way of getting most equitably at a satisfaction of wants, after needs are met, is to meet them by instituting equality of incomes after allowances are made for the equal satisfac-

tion of needs.

Equality in education is also a central element in attaining equality of condition and equal liberty for all. It is not just the having of equality of educational opportunity, though it is the having of that. For, left just like that, such equality of opportunity in a hierarchical competitive system — what Daniel Bell calls a credentials society — is simply the equal opportunity to compete to be unequal. By contrast, for an egalitarian, such equal opportunity would be used to help provide an equal opportunity to live a worthwhile life.<sup>23</sup> The thing is to arrange social conditions — including educational conditions — so that everyone has the opportunity to live a worthwhile life.

We need to recognize (returning to a more general stance), as Norman has stressed, that “power, wealth and education are basic sources of liberty”.<sup>24</sup> Egalitarians, prizing liberty and equality, take the most important equalities to be equality of social power, of wealth and of educational provision. The first principle of justice I enunciated, as well as Rawls’s first principle of justice, could not be satisfied without such equalities obtaining.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 20-21, 48-51 and his “The Independence of Moral Theory,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 48 (1974-75), pp. 5-22. See the following articles by Norman Daniels “Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 76 (1979), “Moral Theory and the Plasticity of Persons,” *The Monist*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 1979), “Some Methods of Ethics and Linguistics,” *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 37 (1980), “Reflective Equilibrium and Archimedean Points,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 1980) and “Two Approaches to Theory Acceptance in Ethics” in David Copp and David Zimmerman (eds.), *Morality, Reason and Truth* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985), pp. 120-140. See also Jane English, “Ethics and Science,” *Proceedings of the XVI International Congress of Philosophy* (1980); Kai Nielsen, “Considered Judgments Again,” *Human Studies*, Vol. 5 (1982), p. 109-118; Kai Nielsen, “On Needing a Moral Theory,” *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (April 1982); and Kai Nielsen, *Equality and Liberty: A Defense of Radical Egalitarianism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985), pp. 13-41.
- <sup>2</sup> Stuart Hampshire, “A New Philosophy of the Just Society,” *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 24 (February 1972), pp. 36-39.
- <sup>3</sup> These themes are further developed in my *Equality and Liberty*.
- <sup>4</sup> Perhaps argument would break out about my using the qualifier ‘what is properly distributable at all’.
- <sup>5</sup> Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1974), pp. 167-169.



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- <sup>6</sup> For how Marx went astray here see G.A. Cohen, "Reconsidering Historical Materialism" in J.R. Pennock and J.W. Chapman (eds.), *Marxism, Nomos, XXVI* (1983), pp. 227-251.
- <sup>7</sup> For some difficulties here see Amartya Sen, "Equality of What?" in Sterling M. McMurrin (ed.), *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1980), pp. 197-220 and Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality?" *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Summer 1981), pp. 185-246 and *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Fall 1981), pp. 283-345.
- <sup>8</sup> Richard Norman, "Does Equality Destroy Liberty?" in Keith Graham (ed.), *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 97.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> G.A. Cohen, "Robert Nozick and Wilt Chamberlain: How Patterns Preserve Liberty" in John Arthur and William Shaw (eds.), *Justice and Economic Distribution* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), pp. 246-261 and G.A. Cohen, "Freedom, Justice and Capitalism," *New Left Review*, No. 126 (March/April 1981).
- <sup>12</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* in L.A. Selby-Bigge (ed.), *Hume's Enquiries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), p. 194.
- <sup>13</sup> G.A. Cohen, "Robert Nozick and Wilt Chamberlain: How Patterns Preserve Liberty," pp. 244-262.
- <sup>14</sup> Richard Norman, *op. cit.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> G.A. Cohen, "The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter 1983), pp. 2-33 and G.A. Cohen, "The Labor Theory of Value and the Concept of Exploitation" in Marshall Cohen, et. al. (eds.), *Marx, Justice and History* (Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 135-157.
- <sup>19</sup> Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200. See also Bruce M. Landesman, "Egalitarianism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XIII, No. 1 (March 1983), pp. 27-56; John Exdell, "Liberty, Equality and Capitalism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (September 1981), pp. 457-472; Martin Sklar, "Liberty and Equality and Socialism," *Socialist Revolution*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1977); and Kai Nielsen, "Capitalism, Socialism and Justice" in Tom Regan and Donald Van De Veer (eds.), *And Justice For All* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1982), pp. 264-286.