

PRELIMINARY DISTINCTIONS. Why support economic equality, the equal of distribution of economic assets? In large part, this is because it underlies other types of equality, political, legal, and social. Interestingly, these three can't be institutionally defined. But there is a 'consensus' that the urgency of economic equality would be much less, had it not been a key factor in other kinds of (in)equalities.

There may be other reasons, too, for the instrumental value of economic equality. What of its intrinsic value? There is a communitarian and an individualistic arguments. The communitarian argument defends it as a social ideal, the right condition for the members of society to exist together. The individualistic argument defends it as a correct satisfaction of the interests of different individuals. Nagel will address the individualistic argument.

DIVERGING VIEWS ON EQUALITY. Two sources of opposition to egalitarianism are utilitarianism and the libertarian doctrine of natural rights. The subject of their dispute is the 'claim to consideration'. Each interprets it differently:

Egalitarianism The worst off, i.e. those with more 'urgent' claims, have priority.

Utilitarianism The better off may have priority, if enforcing their claims results in higher utility overall (generally, some higher value).

Libertarianism Infringement on individual liberty may rule out claims to considerations, including those of the worst off.

As Nagel notes, these views are not so radically opposed to each other, as to make the discussion impossible. They are species of the 'enlightened' ethics, in that they attempt to 'give equal weight to each person's point of view'. They disagree, of course, on what counts as giving equal weight, and on what constitutes that point of view. One of their radical opponents is an 'aristocratic' ethicist Nagel mentioned earlier. Such an ethicist would regard inequalities as embedded in natural hierarchies actually existing in the world. Another opponent may be a 'conservative' ethicist that would eschew the very attempt to reform the society on some abstract and general rational principle.

Remark 1. Plato and Aquinas, each in his own way, would count as aristocratic ethicists. Hegel might count as a conservative ethicist. Frankfurt's critique of egalitarianism (to be discussed later) is, I suppose, still within the enlightened ethical framework.

An utilitarian may argue that he accommodates the idea of equality in his doctrine, in that *each* individual's interests are counted in the process of aggregation where the result is delivered based on the majority principle. We do not regard any individual's interests as intrinsically more valuable than other individual's interests (hence, we reject the aristocratic ethic).

Yet, to echo Rawls' complaint, what we aggregate is essentially the interests *themselves*, not the persons. If, say, a person has few interests, his vote *will* count for less in our majoritarian aggregation, compared to the vote of a person who has many well-developed interests. On the face of it, this is an offence against equality, so far as we are concerned in the equality of persons, not the equality of interests.

Remark 2. Nagel gives an especially neat formulation of Rawls' complaint, I think.

Libertarianism also presents itself as a friend of equality, so far as he makes *each* person a limited veto on the proposed policy. The veto is exercised when either a right is violated at all, or when the violation passes a certain threshold. Importantly, then, libertarianism rejects aggregation and instead opts for unanimity characteristic of veto procedures.

But there is another, somewhat paradoxical consequence, too. The libertarian doesn't have the conception of a right to 'do' or to 'have' something. His rights are designed to 'protect' individuals 'from' outside interference, not to 'expand' or develop him in some way. This means that a wide area of life is left unregulated. Hence, the libertarian envisages an extremely limited state. Any state regulations unrelated to the protection of basic rights and liberties will be suspended in the air: they won't have any moral justification at all. In particular, any coercion attached to the more expansive policies will be unjustified.

EGALITARIANISM. An egalitarian is concerned with the equality of outcomes. His focus on outcomes allies him with the utilitarian. Unlike the utilitarian, he demands unanimity, not aggregation. In this he is allied with the libertarian. Unlike the libertarian, his conception of what has to be regulated is expansive. In this, again, he is allied with the utilitarian. 116-7

In detail, the egalitarian suggests that interests will be arranged according to their urgency. More urgent interests will be satisfied first, no matter how many individuals may have non-urgent interests. In this we are approaching unanimity with its characteristic veto power. The more worse off will have a veto on the proposed policies that fail to respect their urgent interests. Of course, unanimity might not actually be achieved (and herein is a contrast with libertarianism), since there may be conflicts between urgent interests of different individuals. 117

However in practice different policy proposals may be evaluated, the essential point remains, and it is that the worse off with their more urgent interests get the priority and potential veto power. 118

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