

IN DEFENSE OF EQUALITY

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I Equality and Justice

Think about "Latin-America -one-day" (henceforth LA). Suppose that at the beginning all resources were distributed according to some principle of justice. Suppose that, as a result of various inarguably voluntary exchanges also foreseen by justice - for example, exchanges between those who want to work and save and those who want to consume and loaf about - the resources initially equally distributed end up in the hands of a few. Suppose, finally, that LA - as a result of the voluntary exchanges mentioned above - turns out to be a society with two classes: One of few prosperous citizens and a huge underclass. Is there something to complain about?

The answer is complex. From one point of view, more precisely, from the point of view of each citizen of LA, there is nothing to complain about and none to whom to complain. Everyone initially received their fair share, and the subsequent changes are also considered just - they were the product of voluntary decisions. Those who worked and saved have more than those who spent and loafed about, but the loafers cannot complain to the diligent that they have been treated unjustly.

Now, does the fact that none can claim to have been treated unjustly, nor that anyone in particular has behaved unjustly toward him, exhaust all moral claims? In other words, is justice the only morally relevant aspect of society?

Many think it is. If a society is just, the discussion is over. Everything else is irrelevant. This conviction explains why authors such as Raz and Frankfurt don't believe in equality.

But is it true that the only source of moral unfulfillment is unjust treatment? That is the essence of the question.

The instinctive response to this question is yes. If a society is just, all is said and done. This conclusion relies on the way we usually justify the social order. Let us see. Usually, we see justification (i.e. defense and evaluation) of the social order as an individual undertaking, meaning that it should be accomplished by considering the viewpoints of all the individuals involved. Thus, for instance, contractualists assert that society or a social arrangement is justified when none, from his own point of view, can reasonably reject it.

Now, if our individual points of view were the only perspective from which to justify the social order, then opinions about justice would be our only morally relevant opinions. After all, from our individual points of view we can only reject those social arrangements which are unacceptable to each one of us, and justice is, by definition, a feature of social arrangements which consist above all in not being unacceptable to any one of us.

Given that from the individual point of view justice and injustice is all we see, if we want to defend the normative autonomy of equality, we first need to find a way to identify and justify moral opinions which do not adopt each one of our individual viewpoints. Is this possible? Can one justify actions or evaluate the state of the world from a point of view which is not individual?

There are cases in which it seems one can form opinions using a different point of view than an individual one.

Imagine a tragic situation, that is, of a situation in which even when you do the right thing you feel that something bad has happened as a result of what you have done. (Let us call this feeling, as it is usually done, *Amoral residue*).

If your individual point of view were the only possible point of view, you would not be able to explain the feeling in question. Having done the right thing should erase the *Amoral residue*, even if you accept that from someone else's point of view there may be legitimate reasons for complaint. These reasons for complaint cannot explain the *Amoral residue* that you may feel, since from your point of view you just did the right thing.

If we accept the existence of an collective point of view different from and impossible to reduce to that of each one of us, everything changes. This perspective allows us to see *Amoral residue* as a symptom of the fact that, despite the righteousness of your actions, it would have been better if we -as oppose to merely you but with you included- did something entirely different such that something entirely different had happened.¹

I think that the collective point of view, from which we can explain the "moral residue" of tragic situations, lends generality. My feeling is that equality, like other values, can be defended from this collective point of view. If this is true, the fact that we cannot complain about the injustice of a society or a situation doesn't imply that we have nothing morally relevant to say about it (specifically, that the society or situation is unequal).

II Economic Equality

What are the requirements for economic equality?

¹There is also a different explanation. We could claim that the "moral residue" stems from our ability to see things from the point of view of those affected by our (righteous) actions. Thus, although from our point of view we have done what we should have done - we have done the right thing - the fact that we have affected the victim - which is obviously relevant from his point of view, which we can adopt - explains "moral residue." I admit that this explanation makes some sense. But it seems to me that it cant explain everything that needs explaining. If "moral residue" is the result of our ability to adopt someone else's point of view, why doesn't it disappear when our action is right, which means that we have already taken other people's point of view into account?

Most modern theories don't revolve around economic equality at all.. They are actually theories of distribution, which advocate the distribution of economic resources towards the goal of achieving equality in some other domain.. For example, Arneson claims that resources should be distributed in a way that allows everyone an equal opportunity to achieve equal well-being. Others, such as Van Parijs, think that economic distribution is vital towards achieving what he calls *Areal freedom*, a combination of legal rights and resources which allow one to reach one's goals. Still others, like Sen, agree that resources should be distributed to provide an equal opportunity to develop our unequal capabilities.

Dworkin would seem to be the exception. Dworkin appears to be interested in the *Equality of Resources*, which is the name of his theory of equality. However, appearances can be deceiving.

According to Dworkin, one of the central ideas of liberalism is that each one of us has a special responsibility to lead his own life. We are all equal, in the sense that we all deserve equal consideration and respect, but each person must do what it takes to make his life better.

This principle, which gives form to his theory of equality, requires us to suppose that resources be initially equally distributed, i.e. at that point none can be guilty of having more or less than others. But it also requires us to accept that all following inequalities, no matter how big they are, stem from decisions for which we are personally responsible.

In short, Dworkin is not an economic egalitarian. What really interests him is not the way in which resources should be distributed, but the way in which our responsibility affects our fate. His goal is not quantitative equality but rather the elimination of differences which do not arise from decisions we have made (or decisions we could have made, given what we are or what we could be after the appropriate amount of reflection).

Why aren't Dworkin, Arneson, Van Parijs and Sen economic egalitarians? Put simply, they believe that equality in this area - economic resources - is less important than equality in other areas. Are they right? No, but we shall leave that for section IV where I will discuss how important economic equality is compared to equalities of well-being, real freedom, capabilities and resources.

For now, suppose that economic equality is important. What does it require?

Some reinterpret this question as a question about the requirements for citizens' treatment as equals (as opposed to egalitarian treatment). We should resist taking this step. If we did we would run the risk of missing the question of equality, hitting instead the question of justice, which is precisely the question of treatment as equals. If we are genuinely interested in economic equality we should just ask, *When do we distribute equally?*

I believe there are two alternatives. The first is what I will call "equal distribution". If we choose this alternative, equality will be reached if, for example, A, B, and C have the same number each of automobiles, computers, summer houses and televisions. The second alternative is the one I will call "egalitarian distribution". If we choose this alternative we can substitute A's lesser number of automobiles with a greater number of televisions and/or computers and/or summer houses.

Whether one of these alternatives is better depends upon how we define the category "economic resources". Is it a category of commensurable goods which can be substituted for each other, or, on the other hand, are the goods immeasurable and impossible to reduce to a common denominator?

If economic resources are commensurable, as I believe they are, we should prefer "egalitarian distribution" to "equal distribution". When is a distribution egalitarian? That depends on the criteria of commensurability and the proper substitution of one economic good for another. My favorite formula, inspired by Ackerman's criteria of the "non-dominated equality" in the distribution of genetic resources, is as follows: A distribution of resources is egalitarian if we give each person X amount of goods, as long as there is always someone who prefers another's X amount of goods to his own.

III In Defense of Equality

In the first section, I maintained that the defense of equality requires us to admit a collective point of view from which to form justifying moral opinions. This statement is quite ambiguous. From this perspective, the defense of equality can end up going in more than one direction. Let us consider the two most interesting directions:

First, we could value equality as a consequence of our consideration for each person individually conceived. In this case, we would view those people whom we wish to make equal from the collective point of view and we would want equality for them because of our desire that each individual have the best life possible.

If equality were desired for such reasons, it would be a personal value. Therefore, the problem of inequality would be related to each subject's personal situation, and would certainly come down to the fact that some people have very little, or less than they should.

Now, if this is the reason we value equality, we should be willing to accept the idea that, as long as it's impossible for everyone to have as much as him anyway, some individual may end up with more than an equal share. In other words, if our appreciation of equality originates in our consideration for each individual, then we can't object to a situation in which everyone has the maximum amount possible, whatever the inequalities involved.

But on the other hand, we could value equality for interpersonal reasons. In this case, our egalitarianism would originate in our belief that certain types of interpersonal relations which are usually associated with equality are desirable. We aspire to equality, essentially,

because it brings about certain modes of collective behavior. Thus equality in this case is an interpersonal virtue.

If we value equality for such interpersonal reasons, we are opposed to inequality in all cases, even when inequality would allow some to have more without taking away from others. We do not resist inequality because it means that some have less, like those who value equality as a personal value because of their consideration for each individual. Rather, we resist inequality because it means that some have less *than others*, even if the only way for everyone to have the same amount is for everyone to have less.

Of these two ways to defend or value equality, which one is right?

The first defense, I believe, would tend to be adopted by those who are primarily concerned with justice and less willing to accept equality as a value in and of itself. As I said in the first section, justice is a value that we can justify from an individual point of view. If one's primary viewpoint is the individual viewpoint, this defense of equality feels more comfortable, since one believes that equality's worth comes from the worth each one of us finds in our equal portion.

The second defense of equality would be more appealing for those more prepared to adopt a less individualistic point of view. Thus, from the collective point of view, one can see that the worth of equality rests not in what each of us can do with an equal portion, but in the worth of the relationships between people with equal portions.

I count among those who firmly believe that the collective point of view is a valid perspective from which to form moral opinions and to render moral judgments. Therefore I will accept here that we value equality for interpersonal reasons. What are the consequences?

There's one very interesting result: Equality's worth would be variable. It would depend upon the nature of the relationship between those we are trying to make equal, what the worth of this relationship is and how equality contributes to the relationship.

IV The Right Question

Think of a marriage. We value the relationship between spouses because it allows us to transcend our egos and to form a community of well-being. Spouses can identify with each other vicariously on a level that is very difficult for us to achieve in other relationships, and this opportunity is something we find valuable.

Now, is equality a marital value? Does it contribute to the relationship? Yes it does. But to ask something more subtle, what sort of equality best contributes to the marital relationship? Economic equality, equality of well-being, or equality of resources? This is the essence of the question and the best way to deliberate about equality.

Undoubtedly, if both spouses had the same amount of resources at their disposition, that is to say, if there were economic equality between them, they could neither present themselves to third parties nor conceive of themselves in private as dominator and dominated, or superior and inferior. But if a marital relationship is defined by vicarious identification with one's partner, economic equality can't be the best kind of equality. Its contribution to the relationship between husband and wife can only be marginal. In a best case scenario, it can guarantee the absence of domination, but at the cost of impeding vicarious identification with the other. (If the two spouses want to live vicariously through each other, economic equality is more of an obstacle than a help). Equality of capability, equality of well-being and equality of real liberty seem like better candidates. They seem to contribute more to the relationship of spouses.

The discussion of marriage - and the idea of equality as an interpersonal virtue - suggests that we can't ask ourselves, as I did in the last section and as we usually do in our contemporary debate, about the importance of economic equality compared to other equalities. Since equality's worth is variable - it varies according to the nature of the relationship between those we wish to make equal and according to its contribution to that relationship - it just so happens that in certain relationships one kind of equality (i.e. economic equality) is better than another (i.e. equality of well-being), while in other relationships, just the opposite is true.

V

The Value of Different Equalities

How important is economic equality? But for the sake of clarity I should reformulate this question. I should ask: How important is economic equality compared to other kinds of equalities in one kind of relationship or another?

Since what primarily interests us is the importance of economic equality compared to other kinds of equality in a democratic society, I should ask: How important is economic equality compared to other kinds of equalities in the relationships that characterize citizenship in a democratic society?

Let us start by contemplating the relationship between the citizens of a democratic society. This task is not easy, since this relationship is normatively loaded. It depends upon our conception of what makes a democratic society.

I agree with Rawls that democratic societies should be thought of neither as associations nor as communities. They are not associations because they do not have substantial common objectives of the type associations have. Neither are they communities, since cannot be defined by reference to a specific idea of the good or to any moral or philosophical doctrine subscribed to by their citizens (PL pag. 41).

But after this double rejection, I part company with Rawls. In contrast to him, I don't believe that democratic societies should be thought of as a scheme of cooperation between free and equal citizens who aspire to bring about justice in its principal institutions. This, I believe, is a moral community. My vision of a democratic society is more procedural and, in one sense,

more superficial. Democratic societies should be thought of, first and foremost, as cooperative ventures of self-government between individuals who cannot identify vicariously with each others' interests, but, in spite of this, are able to act within the framework of their political duties and therefore to carry out their roles in their society's political life. According to this idea, which as I already mentioned is more procedural and superficial than that of Rawls, the aspiration for justice is an accompanying, or perhaps even a universally concomitant feature, but not the defining feature of democratic societies. (Maybe it is for the constitutional democracies, as L. Sager believes, but they are not what concerns us here).

Assuming that democratic societies are cooperative ventures of self-government, what is the nature of the relationship between citizens of a democratic state? Primarily, this relationship is characterized by equal respect. What does that mean? That nobody can consider themselves or others superior or inferior to the effects of the cooperative venture of self-government. What does that imply? Basically, that everyone should consider themselves as legitimate sources of valid arguments about how the common project should be managed, with equal power to decide what they should undertake collectively.

Are equality of resources, equality of well-being, equality of Areal liberty@ and/or equality of capabilities consistent with the equal respect which should characterize the relationship between citizens of a democratic state?

Let us start with equality of capabilities. If capability is a combination of Afunctions@ that a person can carry out, the realization of equality of capabilities would require us to make intrusive judgements about the capabilities of each person. In effect, in order to make A and B equal in their respective capabilities we would need to know if A and B have equal potential to develop equal functions, which would obviously require a detailed analysis of what each is capable of doing.

Now, the previously mentioned investigation, like all intrusive research, would make it difficult for us to preserve equal respect for all. Surely those we see as subjects with lesser chances of developing equal functions - subjects that can do less things - will be seen as inferior, not only in terms of functions and capabilities, but also as participants in the cooperative venture of self-government. This is due to our difficulties - as a society - in limiting our judgements of superiority or inferiority strictly to the area of capability, without transplanting them to the political realm.

Now think of equality of well-being.. In order to guarantee a distribution of resources that grants all citizens equal well-being, would we have to do intrusive research? Rather intrusive, yes. We would, at least, have to report the level of well-being we had already reached. This task is difficult since we don't know of an objective standard with which to measure, and make interpersonal comparisons of, well-being. But suppose that in a report on each person's well-being, we included the worth that each attached to his own well-being, measured by his own conception of how valuable well-being itself is. But this seems to work poorly. The problem is that once known, this information would also make it hard to maintain our conviction that everyone deserves equal respect. It would be difficult to see A and B as equals in the

cooperative venture of self-government if we know that A's and B's lives have different worth in their own eyes.

Anyway, there's another problem affecting equality of well-being. As equality of well-being depends upon subjective evaluations, there are no grounds for complaint when an improper treatment of a citizen (deserving of equal respect) does not bring about a decrease in his well-being. Equality of well-being cannot serve as an adequate platform for criticism when A, in spite of being treated with less than adequate respect - for example he is not considered as a valid source of arguments - doesn't believe that such treatment has damaged his well-being and the value he assigns to his life in the least. In sum, the problem with equality of well-being is, as Anderson has said, that it lets private fulfillment compensate for disadvantages imposed by the public sphere, whatever the political consequences of the latter.

What about equality of **Real freedom**? Equality of "real freedom" requires us to identify the degree of each one's realization of his own plan of life. Thus, it would seem that this conception of equality doesn't have to be founded upon judgements as intrusive as those required by equality of well-being.

Possibly, if in order to identify who is unequally treated we had to fill out a report on each one's level of real freedom, it would suffice to describe how much of each person's life plan he has been able to realize, without alluding to the worth he attaches (or we attach) to the realization of that plan and thus to his or her life. In other words, equality of **Real freedom** requires that we identify citizens with different levels of realization. That in itself does not imply inferiority or superiority. Neither we nor the citizen in question would need to consider himself as less deserving of equal respect. In short, equality of "real freedom" seems to circumvent the problems that affect equality of capabilities and equality of well-being.

It could be that the above is correct. But equality of real freedom shares the second problem of equality of well-being. It lets public disadvantages be compensated by private fulfillment. Basically, if A is treated with less than adequate respect and such treatment does not affect his realization of his own idea of the good - suppose that A is a hermit - he will not complain about unequal freedom, just as he would not complain about unequal well-being.

Finally, we come to equality of resources, which, due to the special consideration that our destiny should only be influenced by that for which we can be held responsible, I will call from here on **Equality of responsibility**.

This is the most difficult case. Equality of responsibility requires us to make intrusive judgements. This is the only way to find out what has resulted from our decisions and what has resulted from our talents and other circumstances over which we have no control. But these judgements are less intrusive than those needed to achieve equality of capabilities, equality of real freedom and equality of well-being.

In fact, in order to make us all equally responsible we only need to find out which part of what we have is the result of morally unacceptable considerations. This, in contrast to

research into our well-being, our real freedom and our capabilities, does not require the pronouncing of judgements over each one of us but only judgements about the circumstances in which we had to lead our lives.

If intrusiveness were the only thing that counted, that is to say, if intrusiveness were the principal enemy of the equal treatment which should characterize the citizens of a democratic society, equality of responsibility would be preferable to all the preceding equalities.

But it is not. There are reasons, powerful reasons I believe, that suggest that we resist equality of responsibility, the most important reason being that equality of responsibility is completely insensitive to its results.

For those who advocate equality of responsibility, the relevant priority is how the results are produced, but not which results are produced. The problem with this focus is that it makes equality of responsibility, to whatever its extent, compatible with many other inequalities.

Think of A, a person in miserable conditions who is responsible for his own situation. That is, imagine that A is where he is because of his own risky and irresponsible decisions (a voluntary slave?). Imagine that A has to spend all his time barely earning his subsistence. Additionally, imagine that A, due to his appearance, cannot present a dignified image in public nor, due to his struggle for survival, can he gather information.

From the point of view of equality of responsibility, we can find nothing objectable about the situation. This would remain true even when A, due to his appearance and lack of information, had completely lost his ability to participate equally in the cooperative venture of self-government. But if we can not count on equality to object to this sort of results, what do we want equality for?

If equality's worth is determined by its contribution to the existence of the relationship between the citizens of a democratic society, equality of responsibility, insofar as it allows for inequalities which do not contribute to that relationship, cannot be the right kind of equality.

What about economic equality, that is, the distribution that leaves each individual with a collection of economic goods, as long as someone exists who prefers that collection to his own?

This type of equality does not require intrusive judgements regarding the worth of each person's life. Neither is it based upon subjective criteria which permit private fulfillment to compensate for public disadvantages. Finally, economic equality, in giving the same amount to everyone, expresses the idea that everyone deserves the same respect in a way that no other conception of equality does. For these three reasons, economic equality is the best idea of equality with which to distribute resources among citizens of a democratic state.

VI

Equality and Justice Revisited

We know what economic equality requires, we know why we value equality and why economic equality is more important than other kinds of equality in achieving a democratic society. The missing piece is the relationship between justice and economic equality.

The most fruitful way to explore this relationship is to compare the normative dimension of the individual point of view - from which we can justify justice - with the normative dimension of the collective point of view - from which we can defend equality.

If the individual point of view had normative priority, as many believe, justice would always displace equality. If the situation were inverse, meaning, if the collective point of view had priority, as not many believe, equality would always displace justice.

My feeling is that the individual point of view should be a priority. If it comes at the cost of doing the right thing, we should refrain from minimizing the bad things that happen in tragic situations. For the same reasons, we should refrain from aiming for equality if we can only achieve it by sacrificing justice.

Now, we shouldn't think that just because it must take a secondary role, that equality loses its normative worth, that is, its ability to guide our actions or to serve as a criterium to evaluate events and situations. Thus, on the one hand, the value of equality can help us explain why LA even if just, is not an ideal society: It's not egalitarian. On the other hand, equality can help us decide between different social arrangements which may be equally just but not equally egalitarian

Perhaps you think I'm joking. If the above were all we could expect from equality, you could say that the normativity of equality is insignificant -negligible-, at least in comparison with justice. However, there's no reason to rush. Keep in mind that the two functions I identified in the preceding paragraph - explanation and subsidiary regulation - are the only functions of equality in just societies. But there has never existed nor does there exist a just society. Therefore, equality's normative scope must be determined by the role it plays in unjust societies.

What normative role does equality have in unjust societies?

Let us start by emphasizing a feature of the ideal of equality in comparison with justice.

Justice is a demanding ideal, information-wise. If you adopt a theory of justice according to which the current distribution of resources is the just product of voluntary decisions over which we have adequate control, you have to carry out a complicated analysis of data to figure out which society is just and which is not. Thus, you must distinguish between those parts of a citizen's resources which were created by his family circumstances, his social position, his innate talents (and perhaps his luck, too) and those parts which were created by his own efforts.

Economic equality, on the other hand, is simple in the area of information. It only requires that we know how to add, in order to determine who has more than others. (The

criterium for achieving equality that I described in section III - egalitarian distribution - requires, in addition, a common denominator of resources which helps bring about compensations between citizens).

Why is informational difficulty relevant in identifying the normative role of equality vis a vis the normative role of justice when a society is unjust?

Let me start by saying that in my understanding, informational difficulty is crucial.

You surely know that it's impossible to change a society building only upon our motivation to behave morally. Nagel put it well: We do not change en masse because of personal conversion. In fact, social change is only feasible if there are institutional practices which penetrate and reconstruct our preferences and individual attitudes in order to make them more consistent with moral requirements.

Given the dependence of social change on institutions, ideals incapable of pervading an institution need to be supplemented and made more institutionally compatible before change can be effected. Otherwise, the ideas tend to become utopian and as such, morally and politically wrong.

Now, equality -given its informational ease- is one ideal that can supplement justice. If so, in situations where justice has not yet been realized, equality can be seen as the saving ingredient, that - when mixed perfectly with justice - can reduce our difficulties in bringing justice about.

(It is interesting to point out that an optimal combination between equality and justice could be defended for two reasons. First, for making it possible for the two virtues to coexist, and second, for making the realization of each one of them possible. Since justice can not be realized unless supplemented, the restrictions imposed by the supplementary virtue could be defended as justice-seeking. The same happens with the restrictions imposed by justice upon equality. Equality is also a social virtue that needs to be supplemented in order to strengthen the stability of egalitarian institutions. Therefore, justice could be defended as equality-seeking.)

Obviously enough, if equality is an ingredient that prevents justice from falling into utopia in unjust societies, we would have already expanded the normative role of equality. But there are other reasons that also recommend equality's expansion.

The first stems from justice's informational difficulty vis a vis equality's informational ease. Given that equality is less demanding in the area of information-gathering, there are less chances of error if we aim toward equality than if we aim toward informationally difficult justice. (It's easier to know when a society is equal than when it is just). I am not suggesting here that sometimes we should aim at the easier target even when we know that it is the wrong one. Equality is not a wrong target at all. If so, the fact that equality is easier to aim at than justice should be something that counts in favor of equality's scope.

The second reason in favor of equality's scope is more complex and is related to the value of democracy. Suppose you believe, as I do, that democracy, like justice and equality, has value per se. If this is so, you must also believe that it is better for society to progress toward the best combination of equality and justice in a democratic, rather than an undemocratic, way.

Now, if you believe that democratic progress is the best, you should be more enthusiastic about the scope of equality vis a vis the scope of justice. This is so because equality always contributes to democracy - contributes to consolidate the mutual respect which characterizes the relationship between citizens of a democratic society - whereas justice does not necessarily do so.

Let me move back to the best combination of equality and justice. Continuing with the culinary metaphor, let me present the following question: How can we mix justice with equality in a coherent recipe which preserves the value of each ingredient as much as possible?

In one possible combination, we would consider equality the prime social virtue by defect. In contrast to those unequal advantages originating in social class or family circumstance, which should be unacceptable, we would permit advantages produced by differences in personal effort, as long as such unequal advantages are gained only in the context of institutions working successfully to better the situation of all (or all those who are worse off). I hardly believe it's necessary to point out that this combination is very reminiscent of Rawls.

The second possible combination involves equality as the prime social virtue, according to which we should distribute certain types of goods - those we think satisfy basic needs - while allowing justice distribute all the other types of goods. Perhaps this combination could be seen as a product of Scanlon's ideas.

These two alternatives would create two different societies. The first combination, for example, would not guarantee a social minimum. However, it might be more egalitarian than the first, because it would permit less inequalities. In the first society, it would be difficult to have more than an egalitarian share, since those who want to justify the inequalities which privilege them must constantly help better the situation of all (or all those who are worse off).

The second combination, in contrast to the first, would guarantee a social minimum. In a society where some resources are distributed according to needs, everyone would have enough to start with. But this society would permit many inequalities in the distribution of goods (more than the first combination), because in a society governed by this second combination, one can have more than others without being required to help them in any way. It's enough to simply make more of an effort.

But despite the fact that the first alternative would permit fewer inequalities than the second, the truth is that both would permit inequalities of great magnitude. Because in a society organized according to the first combination, one person could have much more than the others if this inequality, no matter how big it was, brought benefits to the others. In a society organized according to the second combination, there would be equality of the most basic resources. But

from that point on, one could look out for one's own interests, and thus accumulate as many resources as possible without any limit.

The fact that inequalities of such great magnitude may arise makes it inadvisable to adopt either of the two alternatives. These inequalities undermine the very existence of a democratic relationship between citizens, which, as I have mentioned before, is the reason we value equality in the first place.

A third combination could elaborate upon the above. In the third combination, we could add a social maximum. In this way, we could reduce the magnitude of the inequalities that result from the two preceding alternatives. The social maximum would make sure that no one had a much greater amount than anyone else, even if that greater amount might have benefited all (or all those who are worse off) or even if it might have resulted from personal effort after everyone's basic needs had already been met.

I find this third combination, which was suggested to me by M. Allegre at NYU (he is planning to write a dissertation based on this idea), very attractive. It may be too far inclined toward equality (a lot of respect for equality and little for justice). But I do not consider that a big problem. When given a choice, we should grant equality a sort of prerogative over justice. Why? For the two reasons I mentioned above in order to explain out equality's normative role: If we agree both that we are less likely to err when aiming at equality and that equality and democracy are virtues that run in the same direction whereas justice does not, we should allow for a combination of equality and justice that is more egalitarian than just.

VII

Equality and Liberty

What is the relationship between liberty and equality? I will only say a few words on the subject.

Berlin divided philosophers, philosophic theories and human beings in general into those who catalogued everything under one consistent vision, and those who believed that there were many visions, many goals and many inexpressible essences. Referring to Archilochus, he described the first group as hedgehogs and the second as foxes.

In my dealings with the relationship between equality and justice, I have been a fox. In contrast to many hedgehogs, I've claimed that both values have independent worth. My referral to democracy in the last section was also typical of the same animal. Therefore it should not surprise you if I continue to be a fox.

What would a fox think of the relationship between equality and liberty?

Surely, something different from the hedgehogs, for whom liberty and equality are compatible ideas. The foxes look at the question with different eyes. For them, the ideals of equality and liberty are prone to reciprocal confrontation.

Now, besides seeing a potential confrontation, why do foxes believe that equality and liberty are conflicting virtues?

Quite simply, because foxes see liberty as a virtue which resists distribution while they see equality and justice as eminently distributive.