

Having at Equality Again: A Reply to Boulad-Ayoub and Cooper

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1.

I am grateful to Josiane Boulad-Ayoub and Wesley Cooper for their generous treatment of my *Equality and Liberty* and for their probing criticisms.¹ They make me keenly aware that I have often not expressed myself clearly enough and they have set in motion a process of self-questioning that will extend well beyond this discussion. They drive home to me, once again, the realization of how difficult it is to get anything right in philosophy.

Since they, for the most part, raise different sorts of issues, I shall discuss their criticisms separately starting with Cooper's account.

2.

Cooper rightly sees how my two fundamental principles of justice are set out to parallel Rawls's and to present an even more egalitarian conception of justice than does Rawls. He also rightly sees that, to the extent that principles can have any decisive role here at all, it is a very central claim of mine that it is only a set of principles bearing some reasonable family resemblance to mine which would, if applied under conditions of considerable economic abundance, "ensure that people are treated with equal respect, in such a way as to promote equal self-respect and moral autonomy." (I would be happier if "to the fullest extent possible" were inserted between "promote" and "equal".) He rightly sees that for me a

1 See Josiane Boulad-Ayoub, "Un égalitarisme radical *ad usum delphini*", *Dialogue* 24/3 (Autumn 1985), 523-534, and W. E. Cooper, "'I Don't Get No Respect'", in this issue, 303-310.

fundamental reason for stressing equality of condition is that it brings with it a greater moral autonomy and a greater self-respect for more people than any alternative. Cooper, however, believes that proposition to be unproven and arguably mistaken. (It is surely contentious and so, rightly, open to argument.) In assembling considerations for his view he criticizes (1) my account of reasonability and its links with autonomy and self-respect, (2) my demand (subject to qualifications) for a rough equality wealth, (3) my account of equality and self-respect, and (4) my argument that even liberal welfare state capitalism is incompatible with full equality and autonomy. Cooper here very differently from Boulad-Ayoub thinks there is more justicizing potential for liberal welfare state capitalism than I think is at all possible.

I would, however, like to start with some other criticisms of Cooper's, which, though important, are less central to my above core claim.

1. Cooper thinks that while I rightly repudiate Rawls's distinction "between liberty, which is guaranteed by Rawls's principle, and the worth or exercizability of liberty, which is not so guaranteed," that I then go on to make "the worst possible substitute, namely, the identification of liberty and worth of liberty".

I tried to find a place in *Equality and Liberty* where I made that identification and failed. However, if I in fact did that in some passage that I have now forgotten, it would surely have been a mistake on my part to do so and for the very reasons Cooper gives. What I did argue, and what is important to my critique of Rawls, is that that distinction, so central to Rawls, cannot be sustained. If I have the legal right to vote, and thus am free to vote, but am, whenever I try to vote, prevented by thugs from voting, so that it is impossible for me to vote, it means very little, if anything, to say I am free to vote. Indeed, it is, at best, very misleading to say I am free to vote. A liberty we cannot exercise is hardly a liberty. An account which builds anything important on the putative distinction between liberty and its worth must be mistaken.²

2. In stating my second principle of justice (my, among other things, replacement for the *difference* principle), I asserted that before making an equal division of the common stock of means available to human beings at a given time, we must make allowances "for differing un-manipulated needs and preferences".³ This, Cooper avers, is not very helpful for we need to sort out the needs and preferences which are manipulated from those which are not but to do that we need, he says, a *theory* of needs and that I do not provide. I agree that it would be desirable to have a theory of needs (if we can get one) and I agree I

2 Norman Daniels, "Equal Liberty and Unequal Worth of Liberty", in *Reading Rawls* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1974), 253-281.

3 Kai Nielsen, *Equality and Liberty: A Defense of Radical Egalitarianism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allenheld, 1985), 48 and 289.

neither have one nor do I know of one I can simply appropriate. (I do not mean to suggest for a moment that we cannot get an adequate theory here.) But—and this is what is important here—I am far from convinced that without a theory we cannot sufficiently well spot a whole range of manipulated needs.⁴ Anyone who has been in the advertising business or who has at all closely studied advertising can do so. And there are, by contrast, plainly unmanipulated needs such as the need for sustenance, shelter, sex, companionship, meaningful work, and the like and there is even (*pace* the asceticism of *Equality and Liberty*, an asceticism which Cooper nicely spots) the need, in root unmanipulated, for adornment and a bit of conspicuous consumption. Those are needs which are grossly manipulated by bourgeois societies (the United States being the most horrendous example), but they are still, in varying degrees, needs felt in all societies. The need for adornment and the need to consume beyond strict necessity are needs which, while frequently manipulated, are there pan-culturally as human needs and, though they frequently are, they need not be manipulated needs. To see whether a particular cultural manifestation is or is not a manipulated need we need to see, *vis-à-vis* adornment, for example, the sort of social stimulation connected with typical acts of adornment in a given society. What I am saying *contra* Cooper is that without a *theory* we can spot and distinguish, for an important range of cases, cases of manipulated and cases of unmanipulated needs and preferences. There are in our capitalist societies a sufficient number of the former—cases that Erich Fromm was very good at describing—so that we can also readily see that in this respect our contemporary capitalist societies are out to lunch. (The conviction that that is so does not require a streak of asceticism.)

3. Cooper finds what I say about justice and desert mistaken or at least confusing. Perhaps he is right in finding my views less distinct from Rawls's than I take them to be, though it seems to me that I do spell out a more determinant subordinate place for desert than does Rawls. But it is, like Rawls's desert as legitimate expectation, a thoroughly pragmatic conception tied to the acceptance of compatibilism. (I do not see—note his third footnote—why Cooper could not see that throughout I employ a pragmatic criterion.)

Apparently Cooper wants, on the plausible assumption of a determinist world for the macro-objects that we are, something by way of freedom for the very possibility of "real desert" that is deeper than anything compatibilism could deliver. If determinism is true (and, I

4 Richard Rorty, as Jürgen Habermas well argues, overdoes his bit about getting along without theory. But in the context mentioned above in the text, and there are many like it, Rorty's attitude is sound and it need not play into the hands of conservatism. Richard Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity", 161-176, and Jürgen Habermas, "Questions and Counterquestions", 192-198, both in Richard J. Bernstein, ed., *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

argued, even very likely if it is not) any decision a worker (or anyone else) makes is the result of a causal chain stretching backwards in time beyond his life, and outward in space beyond his body, to times and places where the worker exercised no control in any sense over what was happening. Nonetheless that happening, as a causal antecedent of his decision, was part of a causal chain that determines his present doing. All of that seems to me evident enough, but I made perfectly clear in *Equality and Liberty* that, I believe, that in this very fundamental sense of "could have done otherwise", no one could do otherwise than what they do. But I also specified, in good compatibilist fashion, another sense of "could have done otherwise" that is neither artificial nor without considerable pragmatic utility and which is assertable in a perfectly determinist world. This was part of my pragmatic conception of desert which Cooper does nothing to undermine. Whether we want to say that people who deserve things in this sense are "really deserving" depends on which *persuasive* definitions we feel inclined to make.

I do, indeed, feel, as Cooper notes, a certain ambivalence here. The clashing conceptions behind these persuasive definitions pull me in both ways.⁵ However, when thinking about how to act in the world and what social policies to defend, we need to pull ourselves up short and stick with the pragmatic conception, if we would come to grips with a range of problems with which humanly speaking we need to come to grips. Worries about compatibilism should be metaphysical and thus something that cuts no ice. They are wheels that turn no machinery in trying to decide how to live.

3.

I now wish to turn to the set of criticisms by Cooper previously mentioned which most fundamentally cut against my core position in *Equality and Liberty*. Perhaps I am being block-headed here, wedded at all costs to a philosophical position, but it does seem to me that if we want a society of equals where the interests of everyone are considered and considered equally, if our aim is to approximate as closely as we can the equal well-being of all persons at the highest level of well-being that can generally be attained in optimum circumstances, closely related egalitarian aims with which I believe Cooper would be sympathetic, then it seems to me that there will have to be ways of meeting rather than acceding to, Cooper's four criticisms I listed at the beginning of section two.

I will start with the fourth criticism in the belief that there the considerations are the most straightforward and will provide the best entry into

⁵ Some fifteen years ago I tried to show something about the grounds for my ambivalence in my *Reason and Practice* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1971), 17-91. A lot of water has gone under the bridge since then, much of which I have paid scant attention to, so I am unclear how much of this ambivalence, if any, I should still continue to feel.

a consideration of the other criticisms. Cooper, as do both Rawls and Dworkin, believes that there at least can be forms of liberal welfare state capitalism that are not incompatible with a robust egalitarianism, where the interests of all the members of the community matter and matter equally, such that conditions can prevail in such capitalist societies which will make possible an equal autonomy, an autonomy that will never be fully achieved due to *non-socially* induced individual differences, but still an autonomy to which there are no institutional impediments and which remains as a heuristic ideal. I have, by contrast, argued that to have a reasonable approximation of this autonomy we need to have a democratic socialist society. Even the most liberal of capitalist societies cannot deliver the goods here. They set structural institutional roadblocks in the way and these roadblocks are endemic to capitalism.

Cooper argues, correctly enough, that where possible, and *ceteris paribus*, a just society would prevent poverty and remove the sources of alienation of the disaffected; it might also, under modern conditions, "include democratic people's control over the basic means of production", but it would also permit "the man with a bourgeois green thumb to have the fatter wallet" But this utterly ignores the extensive argumentation in *Equality and Liberty* and in G. A. Cohen's critique of Nozick that such differences of wealth, as are allowable by capitalist production relations, engender inequalities of power which in turn diminish the chances of a not inconsiderable number of people (to put it minimally) controlling their own lives and thus it tends to diminish their autonomy and that plainly undermines equal liberty.⁶ Whether or not, as I also believe, this tends to undermine self-respect, the above considerations alone, without that consideration, are sufficient for an egalitarian to be justified in opposing capitalism and it should also be sufficient for anyone, who prizes equal liberty, to turn into a robust egalitarian and thus into being an opponent of capitalism.

A state of affairs, or at least I have so argued, in which a not inconsiderable number of people are not in control of their own lives is inescapable under capitalism in any form and Cooper has done nothing to gainsay this or to show that democratic socialist alternatives would lead to an even greater diminishment of freedom. To do either he would have to meet the array of arguments directed against those contentions in *Equality and Liberty*, as well as the arguments against it deployed by Andrew Levine and G. A. Cohen.⁷ Cooper thinks that there could be "a

6 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, 1978), 246-262.

7 Andrew Levine, *Arguing for Socialism* (London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), and G. A. Cohen, "Capitalism, Freedom and the Proletariat", *New Left Review*, no. 126 (March/April 1981); G. A. Cohen, "Capitalism, Freedom and the Proletariat", in Alan Ryan, ed., *The Idea of Freedom* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1979); and G. A. Cohen, "The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12/1 (Winter 1983).

liberal welfare-state capitalist society that had eliminated poverty and could boast that its citizens were equally flourishing, despite considerable socio-economic differences". It could, as well, be a society where its citizens would have an equality in whole life prospects. Cooper is surely right about eliminating poverty, for the Scandinavian societies—all liberal welfare state capitalist societies—have done that, or at least have come close to it, but they have not done the other vital things Cooper mentions and it seems at least to be impossible that they could do so, while remaining capitalist societies, for to remain capitalist societies some must own and control at least some of the means of production and others must sell their labour as a commodity.⁸ This very condition means that some people have greater power than others and that because of this some have less autonomy. This being so there cannot be an equal flourishing among all citizens and they cannot have equal whole life prospects. This is true as long as there are private property rights in the means of production. The inequalities leading to the undermining of equal liberty are more severe if the private property rights are absolute but they obtain if there is any private ownership and control of productive property at all.

The above argument is one of the most central arguments in *Equality and Liberty*: a book designed to show that to have anything approximating either equal liberty or a rough equality, we must have both and that we can have neither in any extensive way under capitalism.

4.

In arguing as I have above, I have also argued against Cooper's rejection of my second principle of justice, a principle which requires a rough equality of wealth. However, I still have to consider the first and the third of his criticisms of my core position. There the matter is not so straightforward as I, at least, think it is with the second and fourth criticisms. These questions of how best to read and, following Donald Davidson, to charitably interpret what I say loom large. Cooper's criticisms certainly at least have a plain *prima facie* force. I need to give a reading of my claim which is (1) plausible, (2) meshes with my overall account, and (3) escapes Cooper's criticisms.

Cooper believes my rather demanding account of reasonability is faulty and this affects adversely my egalitarianism. Sticking with it, he believes, would lead to ethnocentric judgments about the injustice and irrationality of other times and other places. I agree, that if my account entailed, or even gave to understand, that, full stop, in all, or even most,

8 See the above references to Cohen plus his "Are Workers Forced to Sell their Labor Power?", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14/1 (Winter 1985), 99-105; John Exdell, "Liberty, Equality and Capitalism", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 11/3 (September 1981), 457-472; and my "On Proletarian Unfreedom", forthcoming.

previous societies social arrangements were for the most part unjust and irrational, then my account would, to understate it, be seriously defective.⁹ But Cooper misunderstands the import of what I have to say about reasonability. We might try to characterize what a perfect bicycle would be like (the best sort of bicycle for all-around purposes we could conceive of) while full well recognizing that there were lots of good and useful bikes around that do not come up to that standard. Analogously, I am trying to say what perfect reasonability could be, what a person who had those characteristics to the full would be like. It is, if you will, a heuristic ideal against which our less than fully reasonable reasonability can be measured and as an ideal toward which we can aspire. It is there where I bring in being enlightened, emancipated, well informed, free from superstition or prejudice, possessing critical insight and the like.¹⁰ I do not deny, what is obvious anyway, that people lacking those qualities can be fair-minded people who could not rightly be said to be irrational. I do not want to say that "irrational Christian Scientist" is pleonastic.

5.

What Cooper most persistently probes is what I say about equality and self-respect. Central to *Equality and Liberty* is the claim that liberty and autonomy cannot be widespread without equality for in inegalitarian societies there will be important differentials in power which will, in varying degrees, give some control over or domination over others and this will plainly limit their liberty and, though less plainly, tend to adversely affect their autonomy.¹¹ If we want a world in which liberty

9 There is in thinking about such matters a kind of, by now, standard cultural relativism that is in social science circles often rather uncritically assumed. Against older racist views in anthropology and against absolutisms, it is an effective response. The standard accounts here occur in the writings of Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict, and Melville Herskovits. For a self-conscious defense of such standard views from standard criticisms and for a few amusing potshots at what he regards as the nervousness of philosophers about relativism, see Clifford Geertz, "Anti Anti-Relativism", *The American Anthropologist* 86/2 (1984), 263-276. For, and in contrast, a powerful making-plain that conceptions of social evolution need not be either, on the one hand, unscientific or, on the other, racist or ethnocentric, see C. R. Hallpike's striking and carefully argued *The Foundations of Primitive Thought* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1979). Many anthropologists' reactions to him have been as knee jerk as many philosophers' reactions to Richard Rorty.

10 See the following articles by me: "True Needs, Rationality and Emancipation", in R. Fitzgerald, ed., *Human Needs and Politics* (Sydney, Australia: Pergamon's Publishers, 1977); "Rationality as Emancipation and Enlightenment", *International Studies in Philosophy* (1978); "Reason and Sentiment", in T. Geraets, ed., *Rationality-today* (Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa Press, 1976); and "On Rationality and Essentially Contested Concepts", *Communication and Cognition* 16/3 (1983).

11 I would now stress, in a way which is compatible with *Equality and Liberty*, but was not stressed there, that liberty and autonomy, though related, are distinct notions. See my "On Liberty and Equality: A Case for Radical Egalitarianism", *The Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 4 (1984), 138-142. See also Richard Arneson, "Mill Versus Paternalism", *Ethics* 90/4 (July 1980), 470-475; and Adina Schwartz, "Meaningful Work", *Ethics* 92/4 (July 1982), 634.

and autonomy are as pervasive as possible we will be what I have called radical egalitarians. Part of the argument here is that inequalities—with their resultant power differentials—tend to diminish liberty and, unless one is actively struggling against domination, such diminishment of liberty, where one is not self-deceived, tends to diminish one's self-respect.

Cooper believes that I am far too *a priori* about what diminishes self-respect and about how self-respect can be attained and sustained. We need to turn, he argues, to what the human sciences can show us here. I certainly applaud that and I agree that I proceeded in *Equality and Liberty* in a somewhat impressionistic manner. However, as I see it, the issue is not so flatly empirical as Cooper gives to understand. What I said about reasonability and about taking the moral point of view is more intertwined with my claims about self-respect than perhaps first meets the eye. Full moral autonomy, and not just, as Cooper believes I believe, moral autonomy, and with that the most secure and the most extensive unself-deceived self-respect, is more closely approximated the more a person approximates reasonability in the "grand" terms in which I have characterized it. There is this tight link between being autonomous and being reasonable. That "full autonomy" and "being fully reasonable" are heuristic ideals is not a valid criticism of these conceptions because we can state their truth-conditions and usefully see to what extent individuals, and more importantly societies, approximate these heuristic ideals and thus approximate conditions under which unself-deceived self-respect (a self-respect that can go with autonomy) can flourish.

It is this that is an essential part of the background for my claim, cited by Cooper, that a fundamental reason for the equality of condition that my principles of justice aim at is "that it brings moral autonomy and a greater self-respect for more people".¹² What I claim is that equality of condition, full moral autonomy and a full undeceived self-respect go together. The only exception is that such respect can go with individuals (people such as the Mandelas) who, with a good understanding of their situation, are engaged in liberation struggles.

This, Cooper argues, ignores the social/psychological realities about the diverse sources of self-respect. He argues that the empirical support is weak for the claim that "considerable differences in social status or economic wealth diminish the self-respect of those with the lesser shares". Cooper, following Walzer, points out that when we look at the rich texture of a complex society like ours we will see that there are innumerable and sustaining sources of self-respect (Cooper actually says "bases" but he appropriately puts it in scare quotes). There are "good looks, intelligence, wit, elegance, hot-bloodedness, skill at a

¹² Nielsen, *Equality and Liberty*, 267.

craft, athletic ability, logical prowess, family ties, and so on". They are all sources of self-respect.

What is at issue here is not as straightforward as at first blush it might appear to be. I did not deny, what anyway is evident, that in egalitarian societies there were not bases of self-respect that were fairly secure. What I did claim is that for many people their self-respect is threatened by the structures of domination of capitalist society and that this would be greater than it in fact is without extensive self-deception, often rooted in the ideological structures of bourgeois society, and that for most of us our self-respect is not as secure as it could be if our autonomy were in fact greater, a condition which in turn is impeded by the failure of our society to achieve classlessness.

Cooper might resist the part about self-deception, though I think it is a mistake for him to do so, for if a person secures his/her self-respect in hot-bloodedness, brute strength, good looks, wit, elegance of dress, membership in the free masons, sexual conquests and the like such a securing of self-respect is surely rooted in illusion. It could not be sustained under conditions of undistorted discourse. These are not the sort of things that well-informed, reflective, and morally sensitive people could take as the basis of self-respect.

Other sorts of things, by contrast, can and do help sustain self-respect even in the conditions of class society, I have in mind (for perhaps the most prominent examples) skill in a craft, effective doctoring, nursing, or teaching (more generally, forms of meaningful work).¹³ My point was not to deny that patent fact but to say that such people would find more sources of self-respect in an egalitarian society and with that, where they are not self-deceived, greater self-respect than in class society. They would also realize, if clear-headed about what their social world is like, that more people would have secure bases of self-respect in a classless society. Moreover, even genuine sources of self-respect, say, carpentry, doctoring, or nursing, would be greater sources of self-respect where the social structures of carpentry and medicine were developed with socialist and egalitarian rationales.

Skilled workers generally will not feel their self-respect threatened as much as people in desperate poverty without any reasonable chance for employment. But these skilled workers, if they see their condition with reasonable clarity, will feel their self-respect diminished in egalitarian societies where there are, in varying degrees, structures of domination. (If I am right in my political sociology capitalist societies must to some degree at least—Sweden less so than the U.S.A.—be such structures of domination.) Workers in such societies must sell their labour as a com-

13 It may be, at least in North American societies, that doctors and hospital management so act as to in effect work against that in nursing. But that, if it actually obtains, is an externality poisoning the practice of nursing. It does not mean that the practice does not have the potential to which I referred.

modity.¹⁴ They have little to say about what their skilled work is to be turned to, what is done with what they make and the like; they do not, even in the best of capitalist societies, in any thorough way control the conditions of their work and, since there is nothing like industrial democracy in the societies in which they live, they have little to say about industrial strategies in such societies and so the import of their work is largely out of their hands. If they are well informed, reflective, and morally sensitive, they cannot but, unless they are firmly fighting the system, feel their self-respect diminished. Even in a state socialist society, as distinct from a democratic socialist society, where (if such exist) these bureaucratic elites have little political power, there would still be considerable status inequalities.¹⁵ This would result in power asymmetries which would differentially affect the life chances of different groups (constituted by different strata) and this would tend, if ideology did not prevail, to diminish the self-respect of those comparatively disadvantaged and with lesser autonomy.¹⁶

So I want to hold fast here. Capitalist societies, even liberal welfare state capitalist societies, are class societies where typical members of the capitalist class have more power and more control over their lives and thus more autonomy than typical members of the working class, though in both cases their liberty is limited by the structure of capitalist society. (In any possible society the liberty of people would be limited in some ways, though the extent and nature of that limitation will vary greatly from society to society.¹⁷ My claim in *Equality and Liberty*—a claim Cooper has done nothing to dispute and perhaps would not want to dispute—is that there will be a more extensive liberty in a democratic socialist society than there could be in the most liberal of capitalist welfare states.)

This differential in power and autonomy, between capitalists and workers tends to diminish self-respect, where the workers are not engaged in militant class struggle, or where workers are reasonably clear-headed about their condition. If we prize a society where there is equal liberty available to all, where autonomy can flourish, and where there is

14 Cohen, "The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom", 2-23.

15 I am not suggesting that in the extant state socialist societies the bureaucratic elites do not have considerable political power, a power not enjoyed by the average citizen. I am only saying that if (perhaps counterfactually) a state socialism came to exist in which this was not so, that still, with bureaucratic elites, there would be status inequalities and that this would give them in various ways power over others (now not political power) in that society.

16 Kai Nielsen, "Capitalism, Socialism and Justice", in Tom Regan and Donald Van De Veer, eds., *And Justice For All* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), 264-286; and Nielsen, *Equality and Liberty*, 57-60.

17 G. A. Cohen, "Illusions about Private Property and Freedom", in John Mepham and David Hillel Rubin, eds., *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, vol. 4 (Sussex, England: Harvester Press, 1981), 23-239; and Rolf Dahrendorf, *Essays in the Theory of Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), 151-178.

equal respect and concern for people, we must, if we see the situation clearly, be radical egalitarians committed to the construction of a democratic socialist society.

6.

Professor Boulad-Ayoub criticizes what she takes to be key background assumptions which she thinks inform and indeed skew my radical egalitarianism. My historical materialism, she believes, is a mechanistic, overly economic materialism of the sort that Max Weber criticized so effectively and was never held by either Marx or Engels themselves and was clearly repudiated by Antonio Gramsci with his stress on the complicated causal interaction between base and superstructure. I not only suffer from that malady, according to Boulad-Ayoub, but from a malady that typically goes with the malady of economism, to wit, the malady of a mild reformist socialism leaning on a virtuous liberalism.

Perhaps I suffer from a too rigid Marxism but I am not afflicted by these two illnesses. As my "Taking Historical Materialism Seriously" makes as plain as plain can be, I do not accept a version of historical materialism which sees all the causal determination going from base to superstructure.¹⁸ I do indeed give primacy to the base but I also argue that it is essential for any plausible account of historical materialism that political and legal phenomena are seen as, depending on the historical circumstances, phenomena which either further or fetter the development of the relations of production and in those ways they cannot but have a causal effect on the development of the relations of production. There is nothing in my *Equality and Liberty* to gainsay that. There is also nothing in my *Equality and Liberty* that commits me to a reformist socialism. My stress on the need, in a quite unequivocal fashion, to bring an end to capitalism as a necessary condition for attaining classlessness and my argument that an attainment of classlessness is necessary, though perhaps not *sufficient*, for the attainment of equality and for the extensive flourishing of liberty, put me, for good or for ill, firmly in the classical tradition of revolutionary socialism.¹⁹

What Boulad-Ayoub takes to be political reticence, a reticence which, she believes, finally leads me to an acceptance of a sort of abstract or speculative reformism, is not the acceptance of such a reformism but a matter of the strategies of writing. I live and work in a philosophical

18 Kai Nielsen, "Taking Historical Materialism Seriously", *Dialogue* 23/2 (1983), 319-338; and my "Historical Materialism, Ideology and Ethics", *Studies in Soviet Thought* 29 (1985), 47-63.

19 I have tried to argue for that directly in my "On the Choice Between Reform and Revolution", in Virginia Held, Kai Nielsen, and Charles Parsons, eds., *Philosophy and Political Action* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1972), 15-51; and my "On Justifying Revolution", in P. Struhl and K. Struhl, eds., *Philosophy Now* (New York, NY: Random House, 1980), 531-540.

context in which Marxist ideas are neither well understood nor highly regarded. I also live in a context in which the terms of the debate about equality, liberty, and justice are carried on in quite un-Marxist terms. In order to gain a serious hearing in such a philosophical environment it is incumbent on me to start where that debate is. What I sought to do was to defeat right-wrong libertarianism and conservative liberalism (positions like those of Robert Nozick's and Daniel Bell's respectively) and to show, among other things, that if we find the sort of liberal egalitarian view that John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin espouse attractive then my arguments will lead us, in the search for a feasible instantiation of those values, to the firmly socialist political commitments I defend. But I seek to do this and indeed I believe I succeed in doing this with a minimum of Marxist conceptualization and methodology. I seek to lead bourgeois intellectuals—to put the matter in political terms—to what are substantially Marxist conclusions while playing the game according to their own rules.

7.

Boulad-Ayoub claims that I subordinate my first principle of justice to my second principle and come out, because of this, subordinating ethical and political rights for all to the attainment of equal well-being for all, where equal well-being is measured in purely monetary terms. (This is the normative analogue to my supposed economism.) But this is not my position. I stress in *Equality and Liberty* that, unlike Rawls with his parallel principles of justice, that my principles of justice do not stand in lexical order. They are more like W. D. Ross's *prima facie* duties. Depending on the context, one or the other will be fundamental and there will be, and indeed should be, no general rule saying in some contextless way which should take pride of place.

8.

I want to remark briefly, before I turn to more substantive matters, on four ways in which Boulad-Ayoub simply fails to understand my views. (1) At no place do I say, suggest, or do my views entail, that equality of opportunity replaces equality of condition. I make this clear in my critique of the "old egalitarianism" of Charles Frankel and Daniel Bell. I argue instead that equality of opportunity and equality of condition go together. Without a rough equality of condition there can be no equality of opportunity. (2) Far from denying it, as Boulad-Ayoub says I do, I, on the contrary, strenuously argue that the most pressing of our social inequalities result from the class structure of our society. Attaining a classless society may not be sufficient for attaining equality of condition for it is at least conceivable that status, sexual, and even racial inequalities would persist after classlessness is attained, but classlessness is

necessary for equality of condition and it is, as well, not unreasonable to expect, or at least to hope, that racial, sexual, and perhaps even status inequalities will wither away with the achievement of a classless society. (3) I do not think, as Boulad-Ayoub claims I think, that Marx thought or that it is, apart from what Marx thought, just true that man is just the ensemble of his social relations. Marx thought, and it is also true, that there are generic, perfectly universal, features of human nature as well as culturally and historically specific features of human nature.²⁰ Any even remotely adequate theory of human nature must make room for both. (4) I am not, contrary to what Boulad-Ayoub gives to understand, a historical idealist. I do not, that is, think fundamental changes can be made in a society by establishing, however convincingly, that there are deep and historically alterable injustices in society. Boulad-Ayoub asks: how can a just society evolve from the organization of present-day society? I did not try to answer that question in *Equality and Liberty*, though it does seem to me to be a much more important question than anything I did attempt to answer there. I do not, I am sorry to say, have any good answers here and I doubt very much that anyone else has either. But, if we do not take too literally the word “evolve”, I do not want to be taken to be suggesting that we cannot find answers at least to the extent that we can come to have some rather good hunches, hunches sufficient carefully hunched, to build a flexible and fallibilistic strategy around. But, as I remarked, I am most definitely not what Allen Wood calls a “historical idealist”.²¹ I do not think that my principles of social justice or anyone else’s more adequate principles or more attractively expressed principles of social justice are going to inspire legislators so that the just society will be brought about in which there will be achieved an equal well-being ethically, politically, and economically. I think such thinking is infantile. What analyses like mine can do, if they are near to the mark, is break some of the intellectual and moral impediments to the acceptance, particularly by intelligentsia, of socialism.

9.

I now want to turn to some more substantive matters raised by Boulad-Ayoub’s criticism. A central claim of mine, as I brought out in discussing Cooper’s criticisms, is that equality of condition, far from undermining liberty or burdening it or threatening it, is required for extensive liberty and for its secure flourishing. Boulad-Ayoub thinks that view of mine is mistaken. Let us see if this is so.

20 For some powerful arguments that Marx did not view man as just the ensemble of his social relations, see John McMurtry, *The Structure of Marx’s World-View* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 19-53; and Norman Geras, *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend* (London, England: New Left Books, 1983).

21 Allen Wood, *Karl Marx* (London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 12-15, 108-109, 117-122, 143-149.

The underlying aim of an equality of condition is to come as close as possible to a state of affairs where the needs of everyone are met and met equally. One way of getting at that, though it is only a first approximation, is by going for rough equality of wealth. Why do I say that it is a first approximation that needs qualification? It is inadequate because, since it is true that needs differ, it cannot be the case that an equality of wealth should give rise to an equal meeting of needs.²² To meet the needs of all, and to meet them equally, will not be to give everyone the same stock of means, the same resources. However, in practically getting at the needs of everyone, given that we have many needs in common, including, of course, basic needs, we should work with an equality of wealth. Starting from there, we can make finer discriminations as we get a better sense of what the needs of individuals are and as we have that provisional baseline established.

Why is a rough equality of wealth so important? The having of it militates against inequalities of power. And where there are inequalities of power liberty cannot flourish, for, where one set of individuals obtains power over another set of individuals, as will obtain where inequalities in wealth are at all extensive, the group with the lesser power will tend to lose in important ways control over their lives and in that central sense their liberty and autonomy will be diminished. If we want a society with extensive and secure liberty, we must have equality of condition.

It is not that I think an equal distribution of wealth will guarantee that inequalities of power will not occur or that no persons will stand in positions of privilege. Even with equal incomes there might still remain status inequalities which would carry with it some differential power and some privileges. But I do think it is reasonable to believe those differences would be slight and would over time become even slighter as the equalities in educational opportunity that would go with equality of wealth would begin to be felt.

What puzzles me in Boulad-Ayoub's criticism in this context is her failure to acknowledge that I make it as plain as anything can be, as Cooper sees, that I do not think that anything like the simultaneous reign of equality and liberty can even be approximated in capitalist societies or indeed in any class society where a class rules that is itself not a pervasive majority. A necessary condition for getting both equality and extensive liberty, I argue, is to get a classless society and trivially that is not something we can get as long as our societies are capitalist.

If what I have just argued is the case, then, for there to be much progress in the direction of equality in capitalist societies, there must be a successful challenge to capitalism. Boulad-Ayoub is correct in claim-

22 Allen Wood, "Marx and Equality", in John Mepham and David Hillel Ruben, eds., *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, vol. 4 (Sussex, England: Harvester Press, 1981), 206-207.

ing that if this challenge is to succeed it will come to a curtailing of some of the liberties of capitalists and most centrally it will bring to an end their freedom to buy and sell, including their ability to buy the labour-power of workers as a commodity in a labour market. There can be no labour market in a society that respects both equality and liberty.

Interference with people doing what they want is always at least a *prima facie* undesirable thing. But when not doing so undermines the liberty of many more people, and their more important liberties at that, then such an interference is, everything considered, justified. To attain a more extensive liberty, more fairly distributed, we have to end capitalism and that will require the curtailing, perhaps the complete bringing to an end, of the liberty to buy and sell. Though it is important to recognize that the curtailing of that liberty does not require limiting the basic liberties, namely, the civil liberties, of capitalists. More accurately, the people who were once capitalists will continue to have these liberties, though they will no longer be able to be capitalists.

My argument was that a classless society, i.e., a communist society of the future, if we can attain it, would be a society where liberty and equality would both flourish. Indeed this is the only kind of society in which they both would flourish. I never claimed that within capitalist societies, even welfare state capitalist societies, that both equality and liberty are achievable. (Cooper, recall, recognizes that and argues against me here.) What I argue instead is that, beyond a certain limited range of particular equalities, equality cannot be attained in capitalist societies and liberty only to a very limited degree and then, where it is at all extensive and autonomy supporting, principally for the elite capitalist class.

Boulad-Ayoub says that "absolute egalitarianism" must curtail liberties for the common good and that thus I cannot justifiably argue that equality and liberty require one another. If, by what Boulad-Ayoub calls "absolute egalitarianism" (itself a very unclear phrase), we mean a commitment to work towards a world where the needs of everyone are considered, and considered equally, and the aim is for everyone to be able equally to satisfy her needs, as far as this is possible, then the liberties that must be curtailed for the common good would be those individual liberties whose exercise made for a lesser need satisfaction in society and with that typically for a less extensive liberty. Suppose, to illustrate, I have a need to dominate others. The inhibiting of that need (assuming that, unchecked, I am rather good at satisfying it) will enhance liberty and a greater need satisfaction all around. Similarly, the inhibiting of the satisfaction of my need to amass wealth may make for a more extensive liberty. It is not possible for there to be a society in which everyone is at liberty to do whatever she likes.²³ Still, under conditions

23 See references in footnote 17.

of material abundance, liberties should only be limited to make for a more extensive and more fairly distributed liberty. Where we have such abundance and where we have fought through to the attainment of a classless society, then we can have a society where the needs of everyone are the object of equal societal concern. Liberty and equality are both good things. In a classless society—and indeed only in a classless society—can we have them both and in such a society, and indeed in any society, we can *only* have an extensive liberty for all if we have a not inconsiderable equality. In that vital way liberty and equality require one another and for them to be instantiated together the demise of capitalism is essential.