

RADICAL EGALITARIAN JUSTICE: JUSTICE AS EQUALITY

Let me say first crudely and oversimply what I want to do. I want to explicate and defend an egalitarian conception of justice both in production and in distribution that is even more egalitarian than John Rawls's conception of justice. In the course of arguing for this I shall argue that such a conception of justice requires, if it is to be anything other than an ideal which turns no machinery, a socialist organization of society. I am well aware that there are a host of very diverse objections that will immediately spring to mind. I shall try to make tolerably clear what I am claiming and why I want to claim it and I shall try to go some way toward at least considering, and, I hope, in some degree meeting, some of the most salient of these objections.

I shall first give four formulations of such a radical egalitarian conception of justice, formulations which, if there is anything like a concept of social justice, capture something of it, though it is more likely that such a way of putting things is not very helpful and what we have here are four conceptualizations of social justice which together articulate what the Left takes social justice to be. I shall follow that with a statement of what I take to be the two most fundamental principles of radical egalitarian justice.

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Four Conceptions of Radical Egalitarian Justice

(1) Justice in society as a whole ought to be understood as requiring that each person be treated with equal respect irrespective of desert and that each person be entitled to self-respect irrespective of desert.¹

(2) Justice in society as a whole ought to be understood as requiring that each person be so treated such that we approach, as close as we

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can, to a condition where everyone will be equal in satisfaction and in such distress as is necessary for achieving our commonly accepted ends.²

(3) Justice in society as a whole ought to be understood as a complete equality of the overall level of benefits and burdens of each member of that society.³

(4) Justice in society as a whole ought to be understood as a structuring of the institutions of society so that each person can, to the fullest extent compatible with all other people doing likewise, satisfy her/his genuine needs.

These conceptualizations are, of course, vague and in various ways indeterminate. What counts as 'genuine needs', 'fullest extent', 'complete equality of overall level of benefits', 'as close as we can', 'equal respect' and the like? Much depends on how these notions function and in what kind of a theory they are placed. However, I will not pursue these matters here. I take it, however, that these conceptualizations will help us locate social justice on the conceptual and moral map.

The stress and intent of these egalitarian understandings of the concept of social justice is on the equal treatment of all people in various crucial respects. The emphasis is in attaining social justice, some central equality of condition for everyone. Some egalitarians stress some prized condition such as self-respect or a good life; others, more mundanely, but at least as crucially, stress an overall equal sharing of the various good things and bad things of the society. And such talk of needs postulates a common condition of life that is to be the common property of everyone.

When egalitarians speak of equality they should be understood as asserting that everyone is to be treated equally in certain respects, namely, that there are certain conditions of life that should be theirs. What they should be understood as saying is that all human beings are to be treated equally in respects $F_1, F_2, F_3, \dots, F_n$, where the predicate variable will range over the conditions of life which are thought to be things that all people should have. This is to say that each person has an equal right to them, but it is not to say, or to give to understand, that each person is to have identical or uniform amounts of them. Talking about identical or uniform amounts has no clear sense for respect, self-respect, satisfaction of needs, or attaining the best life of which a person is capable. The equality of condition to be coherently sought is that they all have $F_1, F_2, F_3, \dots, F_n$. Not that

they must all have them equally, since for some F's this does not even make sense. Everyone has a right to respect and to an equal respect in that none can be treated as second-class people, but this does not mean that in treating them with respect you treat them in an identical way. In treating with equal respect a baby, a young person, or an enfeebled old man out of his mind on his death-bed, we do not treat them equally, that is, identically or uniformly, but with some kind of not very clearly defined proportional equality.⁴ (It is difficult to say what we mean here but we know how to work with the notion.) Similarly, in treating an Andaman Islander and a Bostonian with respect, we do not treat them identically, for what counts as treating someone with respect will not always be the same.

I want now to turn to a statement and elucidation of my egalitarian principles of justice. They are principles of just distribution, and it is important to recognize at the outset that they do not follow from any of my specifications of the concept of social justice. Someone might accept one of those specifications and reject my principles, and someone might accept my principles and reject any or all of those specifications or indeed believe that there is no coherent concept of social justice at all and believe that there are only different conceptualizations of justice that different theorists with different aims propound. But there is, I believe, an elective affinity between my principles and the egalitarian understanding of what the concept specified above involves. I think that if one does take justice in this egalitarian way one will find it reasonable to accept my principles.

I state my principles in a way parallel to Rawls's for ease of comparison. I will briefly compare them with his principles and show why I think an egalitarian or someone committed to Dworkin's underlying belief about the moral equality of persons, as both Rawls and I are, should opt for something closer to my principles than to Rawls's.⁵

Principles of Egalitarian Justice

- (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 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 and allowances are made for differing unmanipulated needs and preferences, 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 well-being are also to be equally shared, subject, of course, to limitations by differing abilities and differing situations (natural environment, not class position).

Principles of Justice as Fairness

- (1) Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.
- (2) Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.⁶

I shall start with a comparison of Rawls's principles and my own, setting out a brief criticism of Rawls's principles as I go along. (I shall be brief here as I have given that criticism at greater length elsewhere.)⁷ We both, as a glance at our respective first principles of justice makes clear, have an equal liberty principle, though I do not claim the strict priority for mine over my second principle that Rawls does for his. Over the statement of the equal liberty principle, there is no serious difference between us; and I am plainly indebted to Rawls here. The advantage of my principle is that it makes more explicit what is involved in such a commitment to equal liberty than does Rawls's principle. They both give expression to the importance of moral autonomy and to the equality of self-respect, and they both acknowledge the underlying importance of a commitment to a social order where there is an equal concern and respect for all persons. This must show itself in seeing humankind as a community in which we view ourselves as "a republic of equals." This, at the very least, requires an acceptance of each other's moral autonomy and indeed equal moral autonomy. There can be no popes or dictators, no bosses and bossed; any authority that obtains must be rooted in at least some form of hypothetical consent. ("What one would choose if one were . . ."). The crucial thing about my first principle is its insistence that

in a through-and-through just society we must all, if we are not children, mentally defective or senile, be in a position to control the design of our own lives and we must in our collective decisions have the right to an equal say. (The devices for doing this, of course, are numerous and the difficulties in its implementation are staggering. It is here that demanding, concrete socio-political-economic thinking is essential.)

The sharp differences between Rawls and myself come over our second principles of justice. My claim is that, given our mutual commitment to equal self-respect and equal moral autonomy, in conditions of moderate scarcity (conditions similar to those in most of North America, Japan, and much of Europe) equal self-respect and equal moral autonomy require something like my second principle for their attainability. There are circumstances where Rawls's second principle is satisfiable where equal liberty and equal self-respect are not obtainable. In short, I shall argue, his first and second principles clash. Rawls would respond, of course, that, given the lexical priority of the first principle over the second, this just couldn't obtain. But he, on his interpretation of the second principle, allows inequalities which undermine any effective application of the equal liberty principle.

Rawls would argue against a radical egalitarianism such as my own by claiming that "an equal division of all primary goods is irrational in view of the possibility of bettering everyone's circumstances by accepting certain inequalities."⁸ The difference principle tells us that if the worst off will be better off—better off in monetary terms—they should accept the inequality. Justice and rationality conspire to require it. The rub, however, is in Rawls's understanding of 'better off' or 'improving the position' of the worst off. He cashes these notions in purely monetary terms. This prompts the response that either this is too narrow a notion of being 'better off' or of 'improving your position', or we are not justified in believing that rational agents, who have a tolerably adequate conception of fairness, will always give first priority to being 'better off' or 'improving their position'. They might very well, in conditions of moderate scarcity, recognize other things to be of greater value. Concerning these alternatives, it is well to remark, as Wittgenstein might, "Say what you will, it still doesn't alter the substance of the matter." Either 'being better off' is being construed too narrowly by Rawls or it does not always have first priority in deliberations about what is desirable. Indeed Rawls's own notion of the good of self-respect provides us with a jarring concep-

tion of what can, in circumstances such as ours, be a conflicting assessment of what is most desirable. Self-respect is for Rawls the most important primary good and it is something which is to be shared equally. In situations of moderate scarcity (relative abundance), we cannot, in Rawls's system, trade off a lesser self-respect for more of the other primary goods. But the disparities in power, authority, and autonomy that obtain, even in welfare state capitalism, and are not only allowed but justified by the difference principle, undermine, for the worst off, and indeed for many others as well, their self-respect. Certainly it does not make for a climate of equal self-respect.

Rawls recognizes this as an "unwelcome complication" and tries to show that self-respect need not be undermined or even diminished by the disparities in power and authority allowable in his system by the difference principle. But he concedes that if they did so undermine self-respect the difference principle should be altered.⁹ He argues that a well-ordered society, in which his difference principle is in operation, would not be a society in which these inequalities in power, authority and the ability to direct your own life, would, for the worst off, and the strata which are near relatives to them, be particularly visible, hence their self-respect would not be diminished.¹⁰ There would be, as Rawls puts it, a "plurality of associations in a well-ordered society, with their own secure internal life. . . ." ¹¹ The more disadvantaged strata will have their various peer groups in which they will find positions that they regard as relevant to their aspirations. These various associations, Rawls remarks, will "tend to divide into . . . many noncomparing groups," where "the discrepancies between these divisions" will not attract "the kind of attention which unsettles the lives of those less well-placed."¹² This itself is a tendentious sociological description of life in contemporary class societies. It is in particular very innocent about the nature of work in those societies. Such a view of things could hardly withstand reflection on the facts about work in the twentieth century brought out, for example, in Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.

However, even if that were not so and even if Rawl's account here is in some way "telling it like it is," it still reflects an incredible elitism and paternalism. People are to be kept in ignorance and are to moderate their own aspirations and to accept their station and its duties with their respective roles—roles which often will not bear comparing, if self-respect is to be retained. However, they can, if they are so deceived, retain self-respect and society will not be destabilized by their agitation. They will not make comparisons and will

unreflectively accept their social roles. Here we not only have elitism and paternalism, we have the ghost of aristocratic justice. Rawls's 'realism' here has driven him into what in effect, though I am sure not in intention, is a crass apology for the bourgeois order.

However, Rawls does not retreat here for he sees it as the only acceptable way in which self-respect can be preserved. The equality of self-respect must be preserved or achieved in this way, for we cannot rationally go for a levelling of wealth and status—an alternative way of achieving equal self-respect—because it would be irrational to undermine the incentive value of those limited inequalities of wealth which will produce more goods for all including the worst off. But that appeal, even if the motivational hypothesis behind it is true, begs the question. Some would say—and there are conflicting elements in Rawls's theory which would support them—"Better a greater equality in self-respect than more goods." Even if—indeed particularly if—that claim is made by the worst off in conditions of moderate scarcity (relative abundance), that claim, as far as anything Rawls has shown, is not irrational, or even less rational, than his worst off chaps sticking with the difference principle. (Even with the links stressed by Rawls between self-respect and liberty and given the priority of liberty, this is also what he should say. Indeed, given Rawls's and Dworkin's own deeply embedded belief that there should be equal respect and concern across persons, it would seem here that the response, "Better a greater equality in self-respect than more goods" would be, morally speaking, more appropriate, though, for reasons that Bertolt Brecht has made unforgettable, we must never forget that we are, in making such a claim, talking about conditions of relative abundance.)

Rawls might counter that he was not talking about our societies but, operating from within his ideal theory, about an 'ideal type' called a well-ordered society, where, by definition, there would not be such disparities in authority and power and effective control over one's life. But he also claims that his account is meant (a) to be applicable in the real world and (b) even there to some forms of capitalism. But my point was that his difference principle sanctions inequalities that are harmful to the sense of self-respect of people in the worse off strata of any capitalist society, actual or realistically possible. They simply, if they are being rational, must accept as justified, disparities in power, wealth, and authority which are harmful to them. Indeed these disparities attack their self-respect through undermining their moral autonomy; in such social condi-

tions, men do not have effective control over their own lives. Thus his difference principle, in a way my second more egalitarian principle is not, is in conflict with his first principle and, given Rawls's doctrine of the priority of liberty, should be abandoned.

Rawls tries to square his two principles and provide moral and conceptual space for both liberty and socio-economic inequalities by distinguishing between liberty and the *worth* of liberty. Norman Daniels, in an impressive series of both internal and external criticisms, has, I believe, demolished that defense.¹³ So I shall be brief and stick with the simplest and most direct points. Even allowing the coherence and nonarbitrariness of the distinction, it will not help to say that the socio-economic disparities affect the *worth* of liberty but not liberty itself, for a liberty that cannot be exercised is of no value; and, indeed, it is in reality no liberty at all. What is the sense of having something, even assuming it makes sense to say here that you have it, which you cannot exercise? A 'liberty' that we cannot effectively exercise, particularly because of some powerful *external* constraints, is hardly a liberty. Certainly it is of little value. If I have a right to vote but am never allowed to vote, I certainly do not have much of a right. Moreover, a rational contractor, or indeed any thoroughly rational person not bamboozled by ideology, would judge it rational to choose an equal *worth* of liberty, if he judged it rational to choose equal basic liberties. To will the end is to will the necessary means to the end. It is hardly reasonable to opt for equal liberty and then opt for a difference principle which accepts an unequal worth of liberty which, in turn, makes the equal liberty principle inoperable, that is, which makes it impossible for people actually to achieve equal liberty.

I want now to return to Rawls's arguments that equal self-respect in class societies can be achieved when inequalities remain invisible or at least invisible to those who are on the deprived side of the inequality. This hardly accords with Rawls's insistence that the principles of justice are "principles that rational persons with true general beliefs would acknowledge in the original position."¹⁴ As Keat and Miller aptly remark, "a theory is not acceptable if the stability of a society based upon it depends upon the members of that society not knowing its principles and the way in which it is organized."¹⁵ There is, they continue, something morally distressing—they actually say abhorrent—about a theory of justice relying on "the worse-off members of society continuing not to compare their position with that of the better off. This narrowing of reference groups, and the concomitant lowering of expectations, is

something which should be a main object of criticism for any theory of justice which claims, as Rawls's does, to be 'democratic' and 'egalitarian'.¹⁶

My above arguments—as well as the arguments of Keats and Miller and Daniels—should push Rawls, if they are near their mark, in a more egalitarian direction. Specifically, they should require either an abandonment or an extensive modification of his second principle. If the preservation of self-respect is regarded as a conception at the heart of any theory of social justice and is taken, as Rawls would take it, to be directly relevant to questions about the just distribution of primary goods, then it seems that we would be forced to adopt more egalitarian principles of just distribution than Rawls adopts.

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However, to go in a more egalitarian direction, is not, of course, necessarily to accept my principles. There are no doubt other alternatives. I shall now directly examine my egalitarian principles, starting with an elucidation of my own second principle and then proceeding to a consideration of some of the criticisms that would naturally be made of it.

What is now at issue is my second principle.

After provisions are made for common social (community) values, for capital overhead to preserve the society's productive capacity and allowances are made for differing unmanipulated needs and preferences, 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 well being are also to be equally shared, subject, of course, to limitations by differing abilities and different situations (natural environment, not class position).

A central intent of this principle is to try to reduce inequalities in primary or basic social goods and goods that are the source of or ground for distinctions that give one person power or control over another. All status distinctions should be viewed with suspicion. Everyone should be treated equally as moral persons and, in spite of what will often be rather different moral conduct, everyone should be viewed as having equal moral worth.

The second principle is meant as a tool for attaining a state of affairs

where there are no considerable differences in life prospects between different groups of people because some have a far greater income, power, authority, or privilege than others. My second principle tries to distribute the benefits and burdens so that they are, as far as is compatible with people having different abilities, equally shared. It does not say that all wealth should be divided equally, like equally dividing up a pie. Unlike such pie dividing, part of the social product must be used for things that are of collective value, for example, hospitals, schools, roads, clean air, recreation facilities, and the like. And part of it must be used to protect future generations. Another part must be used to preserve the society's productive capacity so that there will be a continuous and adequate supply of goods to be divided. However, all of us—especially those of us who live in an economically authoritarianly controlled capitalist society primarily geared to production for profit and capital accumulation and only secondarily to meeting needs—must be aware of becoming captivated or entrapped by productivism. We need democratically controlled decisions about what is to be produced, who is to produce it and how much is to be produced. The underlying rationale must be to meet (as fully as possible, as equally as possible, and while allowing for different needs) the needs of all the people. Care must be taken, particularly in the period of transition out of a capitalist society, that the needs referred to are needs people would acknowledge if they were fully aware of the various hidden persuaders operating on them. And the satisfaction of a given person's needs must, as far as possible, be compatible with other people being able to similarly so satisfy their needs.

A similar attitude should be taken toward preferences. People at different ages, in different climates, with different needs and preferences will, in certain respects, need different treatment. However, they all must start with a baseline in which their basic needs are met—needs that they will have in common. (Again what exactly they are and how this is to be ascertained is something which needs careful examination.)

Rawls's notion of primary goods captures something of what they are. What more is required will be a matter of dispute and will vary culturally and historically. However, there is enough of a core here to give us a basis for consensus; and, given an egalitarian understanding of the concept of social justice, there will be a tendency to expand what counts as basic needs. Beyond that, the differing preferences and needs should, as far as possible, be equally satisfied, though what

is involved in the rider “as far as possible” is not altogether evident. But it is only fair to give them all a voice. No compossible need should be denied satisfaction where the person with the need wants it satisfied and is well-informed and would continue to want it satisfied even after rational deliberation. Furthermore, giving all people a voice has other worthwhile features. It is evident enough that people are different. These differences are sometimes the source of conflict. Attaching the importance to them that some people do, can, in certain circumstances, be ethnocentric and chauvinistic. But it is also true that these differences are often the source of human enrichment. Both fairness and human flourishing are served by the stress on giving equal play to the satisfaction of all desires that are compossible.

So my second principle of justice is not the same as a principle which directs that a pie be equally divided, though it is like it in its underlying intent, namely, that fairness starts with a presumption of equality and only modifies a strict equal division of whatever is to be divided in order to remain faithful to the underlying intent of equal treatment. For example, both children aren't given skates; one is given skates, which is what she wants, and the other is given snowshoes, which is what she wants. Thus both, by being in a way treated differently, are treated with equal concern for the satisfaction of their preferences. Treating people like this catches a central part of our most elemental sense of what fair treatment comes to.

It should also be noted that my second principle says that each person, subject to the above qualifications, has a right to an equal share. But this does not mean that all or even most people will exercise that right or will feel that they should do so. This is generally true of rights. I have a right to run for office and to make a submission to a federal regulatory agency concerning the running of the CBC. But I have yet even to dream of exercising either of those rights, though I would be very aggrieved if they were taken away, and, in not exercising them, I have done nothing untoward. People, if they are rational, will exercise their rights to shares in primary goods, since having them is necessary to achieving anything else they want, but they will not necessarily demand equal shares and they will surely be very unlikely to demand equal shares of all the goods of the world. People's wants and needs are simply too different for that. I have, or rather should have, an equal right to have fish pudding or a share in the world's stock of bubble gum. *Ceteris paribus*, I have an equal right to as much of either as anyone else, but, not wanting or liking either, I will not demand my equal share.

When needs are at issue something even stronger should be said. If I need a blood transfusion, I have, *ceteris paribus*, an equal right to blood as anyone else. But I must actually need it before I have a right to an equal share or, indeed, to any blood plasma at all. Moreover, people who need blood have an equal right to the amount they require, compatible with others who are also in need having the same treatment; but, before they can have blood at all, they must need it. My wanting it does not give me a right to any of the common stock, let alone an equal share. And, even for the people actually getting the blood, a fair share would probably not be an equal share. Their needs here would probably be too different.

How does justice as equality work where it is impossible to give equal shares? Consider the equal right to have a blood transfusion. Suppose at a given time two people in a remote community both need an immediate transfusion to survive, and suppose it is impossible to give them both a transfusion at that time. There is no way of getting blood of the requisite type and there is no way of dividing up the available plasma and giving them each half or something like that. In order to live, each person needs the whole supply. There can be no equal division here. Still are not some distributions just and others unjust? If there are no relevant differences between the people needing the plasma, the only just thing to do is to follow some procedure like flipping a coin. But there almost always are relevant differences and then we are in a somewhat different ball game.

It might be thought that, even more generally in such a situation, the radical egalitarian should say: "In such a situation a coin should be tossed," but suppose the two people involved were quite similar in all relevant respects except that A had been a frequent donor of blood and B had never given blood. There is certainly a temptation to bring in desert and say that A is entitled to it and B is not. A had done his fair share in a cooperative situation and B had not, so it is only fair that A gets it. (We think of justice not only as equality but also as reciprocity.) Since 'ought' implies 'can', and since we cannot divide the blood equally, it does not violate my second principle or the conception of justice as equality to so distribute the plasma.

I would not say that to do so is unjust, but also, given my reservations about the whole category of desert, I would hesitate to say that justice requires it. But the central thing to see here is that such a distribution according to desert does not violate my second principle or run counter to justice as equality.

Suppose the individuals involved were A¹ and B¹. They are

alike in all relevant respects except that A^1 is a young woman who has three children and who would soon be back in good health after the transfusion, and that B^1 is a woman ninety years of age, severely mentally enfeebled, without dependents and who would most probably die within the year anyway. It seems to me that the right thing to do under the circumstances is to give the plasma to A^1 . Again it does not violate my second principle for an equal division is rationally impossible. But it is not correct to say A^1 deserves it more than B^1 or even, in a straightforward way, needs it more. However, we can relevantly say, because of the children and people who would be affected by the children, that more needs would be satisfied if A^1 gets it than B^1 . This is bringing in utilitarian reasoning here, but, whatever we would generally say about utilitarianism as a complete moral theory, it seems to me perfectly appropriate to use such reasoning here. We could also say—and notice the role universalizability and role reversal play here—that, after all, B^1 had lived her life to the full, was now quite incapable of having the experiences and satisfactions that we normally can be expected to prize and indeed will soon not have any experiences at all, while A^1 , by contrast, has much of the fullness of her life before her. Fairness here, since we have to make such a horrible choice, would seem to require that we give the plasma to A^1 or, if ‘fairness’ is not the correct notion here, a certain conception of rightness seems to dictate that, everything considered, that is the right thing to do.

Let me briefly consider a final pair A^2 and B^2 . Again they are alike in very respect except that A^2 is the community’s only doctor while B^2 is an unemployable hopeless drunk. Both are firm bachelors and they are both middle-aged. B^2 is not likely to change his ways or A^2 to abandon what is a competently and conscientiously done practice. Here it seems to me we again quite rightly appeal to social utility—to the overall good of the community—and give the plasma to A^2 . Even if, since after all he is the only doctor, A^2 makes the decision himself in his favour, it is still a decision that can be impartially sustained. Again my second principle has not been violated since an equal division is impossible.

I think that all three of those cases—most particularly the last two with their utilitarian rationale—might be resisted because of the feeling that they, after all, violate not my second principle, but, more generally, justice as equality in not giving equal treatment to persons. B , B^1 and B^2 are simply treated as expendable in a utilitarian calculation. They are treated merely as means.

This response seems to me to be mistaken. B, B¹ and B² are not being ignored. If the roles were reversed and they had the features of the A they are paired with, then they would get the plasma. They are not being treated differently as *individuals*. We start from a baseline of equality. If there were none of these differences between them, and if there were no other relevant differences, there would be no grounds to choose between them. We could not, from a moral point of view, simply favor A because he was A. Just as human beings, as moral persons or persons who can become capable of moral agency, we do not distinguish between them. We must treat them equally. In the limiting case, where they are only spatiotemporally distinct, this commitment to equality of treatment is seen most clearly. Morality turns into favoritism and privilege when this commitment is broken or ignored. *Within* morality there is no bypassing it; that is fixed by the very language-game of morality (by what the concept is, if you don't like that idiom).

3

I want to turn now to what is plainly a perfectly natural criticism of my radical egalitarianism. Milbailo Marković in his *The Contemporary Marx*, while defending a socialist egalitarianism, argues against what he calls “radical egalitarianism.”¹⁷ He points out, quite rightly, that

Marx was quite well aware of natural differences among individuals and of the fact that these will increase in importance when institutions that favour social discrimination and inequality disappear. He is very far from conceiving communism as a rigid egalitarian society in which all individuals would be equally paid and cultivate a uniform style of life.¹⁸

Marković then adds—again correctly and importantly—that Marx's conception of equality is focussed on “the demand to abolish class exploitation, that is to abolish capital and wage labour, in the last instance to overcome commodity production and the market as the basic regulator of production.”¹⁹ The sensible demand for an equality of condition, he argues, is the demand for the abolition of classes and differentiation by social status. But what, at the end of a historical process, this classless society would look like, Marković remarks, was left by Marx “in a very vague, general form, susceptible of all kinds of interpretation, misunderstanding and controversy.”²⁰

Marković tries to say something a little more precise about this and, at the same time, to distance more clearly his egalitarianism from what he calls radical egalitarianism. He points out that in every society—including the future classless society—“there will be differences among individuals in their abilities, character, gifts, and so forth.”²¹ Radical egalitarianism, as he understands it, would impose a uniformity which is “incompatible with the aspiration for individual self-realization that remains the very basic objective of all humanist thought, including a Marxist humanism.”²² Such radical egalitarianism, he claims, is destructive of individual freedom: “The realization of different individual potential capacities . . . is incompatible with conditions of life that are the same for all.”²³ It is, Marković argues, utterly wrong-headed and contrary to Marx to think that even in a classless society there will not be some inequalities in the way of there being differentiations, not of rank, but of social role and natural capacity. These will continue to exist, for they arise naturally out of different abilities and proclivities. It is impossible to avoid them. But, even if it were not, it would be undesirable to do so. What we must avoid, however, are inequalities which involve any form of domination or economic exploitation, though we must also realize that in a classless society there will remain different social roles. There will remain, and valuably, differentiation and inequality in kind of role; what must be overcome or avoided in a perfectly just society is this differentiation in social role becoming or remaining as well a form of social stratification (an inequality in rank) and particularly a stratification (endemic to complex class societies) involving a political or economic hierarchy.²⁴ Differing social roles have in the past brought with them privileged status and, with that, power, wealth and domination. But this, he argues, need not continue to be so with a socialist organization of society, though something of the length of time it takes can be seen from the present (1977–79) class struggles in China.²⁵

Marković departs from Marx and Engels in claiming that the abolition of class differences, while necessary for the achievement of equality, is not in itself sufficient. Social stratification (inequalities in rank) on the basis of different social roles is very persistent and has affected hitherto both socialist and capitalist societies. Various kinds of managers, technocrats, and intelligentsia, given the role they play in social life, gain status, prestige, and power. There is a tendency for them to become new elites with a very considerable power in their hands. An egalitarian society would not only be classless, it would

also be without social stratification. But it would not be a society without differentiation on the basis of social roles, and it would have people who, as Bakunin put it, would have a kind of natural authority on the basis of sensitivity and understanding and (if this doesn't come to the same thing) on the basis of their moral and intellectual qualities. This would not be a source of political power or control over people; they would, in Marković's terms, only be an "elite of spirit, of moral authority, of taste."²⁶ Any other kind of elite is as unacceptable to an egalitarian as is class society or elitist political and economic control. But this egalitarianism, Marković continues, is quite distinct from a rigid radical egalitarianism which, in "the distribution of goods," would insist on "strict equality of share" and would advocate "conditions of life that are the same for all." In a fully developed classless, unstratified society—the communist society of the future—goods are not distributed according to equality or on the basis of work (some form of merit or entitlement) but according to need.²⁸

It should be evident enough that Marković and I are at cross-purposes here. We use the term 'radical egalitarianism' in different ways and for our own purposes, but labels apart, our egalitarianism is substantially very similar. I stress, in a way he does not, equal division of wealth with adjustments for differences in need and non-socio-economic circumstance and I am a little more nervous than he is, recalling the cultural role of charismatic figures, about even his 'elites of the spirit'; but I do not deny that there can be such people and, when they are genuine and flanked by entrenched democratic institutions of a socialist sort, they are desirable elites. But the last difference in particular is very minor. On the major issues a glance at my two radical egalitarian principles should make it evident that I do not want to reduce people to a uniform sameness of condition, such that they all get the same things, do the same things, have the same interests and in general behave in the same way. That is not what my conception of equal wealth aims at or would result in. I stress the importance of recognizing differences in need and stress that they must be catered to by an equal distribution principle. This is built into the formulation of my second principle. I also stress that, where we have full abundance, need should be a criterion of distribution, though surely not the sole criterion. I only claim that, once allowances are made for human differences and the like, in a world of moderate scarcity, each individual should have a right to an equal share.

What I am *most* concerned to avoid, and I expect Marković is too,

is not income differentials but inequality in whole life prospects between members of different classes and strata. With such differences, there exists control, domination and privilege by one group over another, which make the lives of some groups quite arbitrarily better and more autonomous than those of other groups. Since this is so, there must be, to achieve social justice, a levelling such that a society will come into existence that has neither classes nor strata. This I call a *statusless* society. Essential for their being such a society—not the whole of it but something without which the rest is impossible—is an equality in political and economic power. It is essential for equal autonomy and equal autonomy in turn provides the rational basis for equal self-respect. This in turn is necessary if there is to obtain a situation in which there is an equal moral concern for and respect of all human beings.

However, I also argue, in a way Marković does not, that in a socialist reconstruction of society, where the society is one of relative abundance and tending toward classlessness, the underlying general conception should be that of everyone having an equal share.

We should start with this presumption, a presumption showing an equal concern for all human beings, and a belief—rooted in that equal concern—that there should be an equality of the overall level of benefits and burdens. Departures from that initial presumption must be justified first on the basis of differing genuine needs and differing situations (where differences in rank do not count as being in a different situation) and secondly on differing preferences where the first two are satisfied or irrelevant. This, as I have already shown, in a very literal sense, is not to treat everyone the same and it avoids what I believe is one of the most persistent criticisms of radical egalitarianism, namely that it advocates, or would result in, a grey, uniform world of sameness where human freedom, creativeness, and diversity would be destroyed.

NOTES

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2. Ted Honderich, *Three Essays on Political Violence* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1976), pp. 37–44.
3. Christopher Ake, "Justice as Equality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 5, no. 1 (Fall, 1975): 69–89.

4. Sidney Hook, *Revelation, Reform and Social Justice*, (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1975) pp. 269–287.
5. Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977) pp. 150–83; Kai Nielsen, “Class and Justice,” in *Justice and Economic Distribution*, ed. John Arthur and William Shaw (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1978), pp. 225–245.
6. These are, of course, Rawls’s principles of justice. See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) p. 302.
7. Kai Nielsen “Class and Justice” in *Justice and Economic Distribution*, “On the Very Possibility of a Classless Society,” *Political Theory*, 6, No. 2 (1978): 191–208 and “The Priority of Liberty Examined,” *The Indian Political Science Review*, 11, no. 1 (1977): 48–59.
8. Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, p. 546.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 535.
11. Ibid., p. 536.
12. Ibid., pp. 536–7.
13. Norman Daniels, “Equal Liberty and Unequal Worth of Liberty,” *Reading Rawls*, ed. Norman Daniels (New York, NY: Basic Books Inc., 1975), pp. 253–81.
14. Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, p. 547.
15. Russell Keat and David Miller, “Understanding Justice,” *Political Theory*, 2, No. 1 (1974): 24.
16. Ibid.
17. Mihailo Marković, *The Contemporary Marx*, (Nottingham, England: Spokesman Books, 1974), chapter 7.
18. Ibid., p. 130.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 131.
21. Ibid., p. 132.
22. Ibid., p. 132.
23. Ibid., p. 137.
24. Ibid., p. 132.
25. Charles Bettelheim, “The Great Leap Backward,” *Monthly Review* (July–August, 1978): 57–130.
26. Marković, *Contemporary Marx*, p. 133.
27. Ibid., p. 137.
28. Ibid.

Kai Nielsen

Department of Philosophy
The University of Calgary