Unjust Equalities

Andreas Albertsen and Soren Midtgaard
Department of Political Science, Aarhus University
aba@ps.au.dk

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Unjust Equalities[1]

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Abstract: An influential way of formulating luck egalitarianism does not tell us whether equalities that do not reflect people's equivalent exercises of responsibility are bad with regard to inequality. This equivocation gives rise to two competing versions of luck egalitarianism—*asymmetrical* and *symmetrical* luck egalitarianism. According to the former, only inequalities due to luck are unjust, not necessarily equalities with the same pedigree. The latter view, in contrast, affirms the badness of equalities as well as inequalities in so far as they are due to luck. The symmetrical view, we argue, is by far the most compelling both on internal luck egalitarian grounds and in the light of the external rightist emphasis on choice and responsible to which luck egalitarianism may partly be seen as a response. Our main case for the symmetrical view is that when some people, against a background of equal opportunities, decline to exercise their responsibilities to the same degree of others, they cannot justifiably call for equalizing measures being put in place. Indeed, such measures would be positively unfair. The symmetrical view, appropriately, rejects compensation in such cases, whereas the asymmetrical view, implausibly, enjoins it. We also examine two objections to our argument. First, that our view fails to qualify as a genuinely egalitarian view; it collapses instead the value of equality into desert. Second, that the opposing asymmetrical view, in contrast to the symmetrical view, can draw support from its compatibility with sufficientarian concerns. Both objections are rebutted. We conclude that luck egalitarians are best served by endorsing the symmetrical luck-neutralizing stance.

Key words luck egalitarianism • unjust equalities • sufficientarianism • desert • Shlomi Segall

Words 7.321

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> [F]lat, indiscriminate equality is not just a weak political value, or one that is easily overridden by other values. It is no value at all: there is nothing to be said for a world in which those who choose leisure, though they could work, are rewarded with the produce of the industrious (Dworkin 2000, p. 2. Emphasis added)

I. Introduction

Derek Parfit has stated the Principle of Equality in a way that has been influential among egalitarians, especially those of so-called 'luck egalitarian' persuasion. This Principle claims that:

(1) "[I]t is bad if, through no fault of theirs, some people are worse off than others" (Parfit 1984, p. 26) or "[i]t is in itself bad if some people are worse off than others" ["through no fault or choice of theirs"] (Parfit 1998, p. 3 n. 5; cf. Arneson 1989, p. 86; Cohen 1989, p. 916; Rakowski 1991, p. 74; Roemer 1996, p. 179; Temkin 1993, p. 17).

This formulation requires specification in several regards (e.g., Hurley 2003, chap. 6; Lippert-Rasmussen 1999, p. 478; 2011a, sec. 4.1–4.2; Vallentyne 2002; 2003, pp. 169, 172, 175–178; 2008). Of special concern to the matters discussed in this paper is how egalitarians should evaluate *equal* distributions,[2] where some deserve to be worse off than others. The principle does not tell us, *inter alia*, how to evaluate such distributions: according to it, the latter might, or might not, be bad with regard to inequality.[3]

[2] In the paper, we use 'equal' in at least two central senses. First, we apply it in the flat or 'equal treatment' sense, implying an equal distribution of some benefit or burden. Second, we refer to 'a right to be treated as an equal' or to treatment in accordance with some notion of worth. See Dworkin 1977, p. 227. Cf. Aristotle's distinction between proportionate and arithmetical equality (1980, bk. V). The sense at stake in different parts of the argument should be clear from the context; otherwise, it is specified.

[3] This is an implication of the absence of an 'only if'. See Lippert-Rasmussen 1999, p. 478.

Some egalitarians are convinced that such equalities—equalities which do not reflect people's equivalent exercises of responsibility—should not be evaluated favorably by egalitarians. We refer to these as *symmetrical* egalitarians in that they propose to treat inequalities and equalities due to (brute) luck in a parallel fashion. The following formulations are proposals as to how their view may be formulated:

(2) "It is in itself bad with regard to inequality if, and only if, people's comparative positions reflect something other than their comparative exercises of responsibility" (Lippert-Rasmussen 1999, p. 478).

(3) "[I]nequalities are justified only insofar as they reflect differential exercises of responsibility, and equalities only insofar as they reflect equivalent such exercises" (Knight 2009, p. 230).

(4) "People's advantages are unjustly unequal (or unjustly equal) when the inequality (or equality) reflects unequal access to advantage [luck], as opposed to patterns of choice against a background of equality of access" (Cohen 1989, p. 920; cf. 2006, p.444).

Other egalitarians are unconvinced that egalitarians should object to such equalities and hence resist amendments of the Principle of Equality such as those proposed by formulations (2)–(4). (We refer to these as *asymmetrical* egalitarians reflecting the fact that they propose to treat luck-generated equalities and inequalities differently, only objecting to the latter on the ground of fairness.) [4] In explicit opposition to such alterations of the original formulation, Shlomi Segall, in his recent book on luck egalitarianism and health, proposes the following formulation:

[4] Other ways of describing the contrast we are addressing in this paper include Segall's distinction between the *responsibility* and the *non-responsibility* view (Segall 2011, p. 509) and Lippert-Rasmussen's between *maximal* and *minimal* luck egalitarianism (Lippert-Rasmussen 2011b, p. 180).

(5) "*It is unjust for individuals to be worse off than others due to outcomes that it would have been unreasonable to expect them to avoid* " (Segall 2010, p. 13. Emphasis in the original).

Accordingly, he emphasizes that luck egalitarianism is "agnostic about the justice or injustice of any *equality*" (Segall 2010, p. 18. Emphasis in the original) or is "silent on" the justice or injustice of equalities in spite of differential exercises of responsibility (Segall 2010, p. 65). Elsewhere, he claims that luck egalitarianism "denies that there is anything unjust about equality …" (Segall 2010, p. 18).[5] Which of the views he endorses is unimportant to the matters pursued in this paper—the interesting contrast runs between one of these views as opposed to a view affirming the badness of equalities that does not reflect people's equivalent exercises of responsibility.

The conflict has to our knowledge only been explored in some depth by Segall, but the equivocation in the central formulations of the luck egalitarian view generating the opposing views has been noted by others (e.g., Knight 2011, 73; Lippert-Rasmussen, 1999; 2011b, p. 180)

The present paper presents a case for the symmetrical view. This view, we argue, is by far the most compelling both on internal luck egalitarian grounds and in the light of the external rightist emphasis on choice and responsible to which luck egalitarianism may partly be seen as a response. Our main case for the symmetrical view is that when some people, against a background of equal opportunities, decline to exercise their responsibilities to the same degree of others, they cannot justifiably call for equalizing measures being put in place. Indeed, such measures would be positively unfair. The symmetrical view, appropriately, rejects compensation in such cases, whereas the asymmetrical view, implausibly, enjoins it. We also examine two objections to our argument. First, that our view fails to qualify as a genuinely egalitarian view; it collapses instead the value of

[5] In order to reflect this stronger claim, Segall's formulation should read something like: (5*) It is bad with regard to inequality if, and only if, people are worse off than others due to outcomes it would have been unreasonable to expect them to avoid.

equality into desert. Second, that the opposing asymmetrical view, in contrast to the symmetrical view, can draw support from its compatibility with sufficientarian concerns. Both objections are rebutted. We conclude that luck egalitarians are best served by endorsing the symmetrical luck-neutralizing stance.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section II sets the stage by briefly elaborating on the distinction between the symmetrical and the asymmetrical view in continuation of the points made in the present section. Furthermore, it addresses some preliminary issues of importance to the argument that follows. This argument is presented in section III. The two counter-arguments in defense of the asymmetrical view are presented and canvassed (and finally rebutted) in sections IV and V respectively. Section VI concludes.

II. Symmetrical and asymmetrical egalitarianism

Egalitarians, we submit, should be concerned with the assessment of at least the following four situations (cf. formulation (2) above):

(A) Non-Arbitrary Equality: Equality reflecting people's choices or equivalent exercises of responsibility;[6]

(B) Non-Arbitrary Inequality: Inequality reflecting people's choices or different exercises of responsibility;

[6] The terms 'responsibility' and 'choice' are often used interchangeably in the luck egalitarian literature, and we do so to (cf. formulations (1) and (4) above, and see Cohen 1989, p. 933). However, it bears notice that a person may be responsibility for a certain outcome although he has not deliberately chosen it (as in negligence). Furthermore, the choices in virtue of which luck egalitarians standardly believe it is acceptable that people are worse off than others are genuine or perfectly voluntary choices. We do not propose a specific account of what it takes for a choice to be genuine (our argument, it seems, is compatible with different ways of spelling this out).

(C) Arbitrary Equality: Equality reflecting something other than people's choices or equivalent exercises of responsibility, say, brute luck;

(D) Arbitrary Inequality: Inequality reflecting something other than people's choices or different exercises of responsibility, say, brute luck. [7]

Segall's version of egalitarianism (see (5) above) is not, as far as we can see, conceptually confused. It implies that (D) is bad and is agnostic or (alternatively)[8] denies the badness of (A)–(C). We will argue, however, that the most compelling egalitarian view is to hold that (D) and (C) are bad, whilst (A) and (B) are not bad. The kernel of conflict between symmetrical and asymmetrical luck egalitarianism is of course how to evaluate (C).

The two views diverge with respect to a number of cases, including the following case featuring prominently in Segall's argument:

> Prudent and Lazy are two survivors on a desert … island. While Lazy lies on the beach, Prudent goes fishing and returns with a fish that she then proceeds to grill and enjoy on her own. Their respective levels of welfare are now, let us say, 10 for Lazy (hungry but rested), and 20 for Prudent. LE [luck egalitarianism] and desert agree that there is nothing unjust in this unequal state of affairs ... Imagine now that a nice big fish washes up alongside Lazy, who, recall, is simply lying there. This turn of events generates a new distribution …, where now both Lazy and Prudent have 20 units of welfare … Is there anything unjust about the new distribution …? Desert tells us that there is … LE on my formulation, does not entail that view, and properly so, I maintain. It denies that there is anything unjust about equality, including the equality that now obtains between Prudent and Lazy. More generally, LE is agnostic about the justice or injustice of any *equality* (Segall 2010, pp. 17–18. Emphasis in the original).

The arbitrary equality in the new distribution—that is, equality generated by differential brute luck—should not then, Segall thinks, bother egalitarians. We disagree. According to our view, the effects of differential brute luck should consistently be neutralized, implying in this scenario that

[7] As suggested by the formulations (C) and (D) we conceive of brute luck in the thin sense, that is, as what is not due to choice or exercises of responsibility (cf. Hurley 2003, p. 107)

[8] See note 5.

the welfare level of each should be improved by 5 (leaving Lazy with 15 and Prudent with 25). In the converse case in which an instance of brute luck benefits Prudent (Lazy, say, remaining at 10, whilst Prudent achieves 30), Segall's view implies that it should be neutralized (leaving Lazy with 15 and Prudent with 25) in that otherwise Lazy would be worse off than Prudent due to an outcome it would not have been reasonable to expect him to avoid (or through no fault or choice of his own). Our view concurs.

Segall's main cases concern arbitrary equality of the kind just described. That is, cases in which the situation of two persons, having exercised their responsibility in differential ways, is equalized by a stroke of brute good luck accruing to Lazy. However, his view appears to have a wider reach, indeed encompassing every kind of equal distribution not reflecting people's equal exercises of responsibility. This includes, for example, as suggested by another case discussed by Segall, situations in which equality is brought about by people being rewarded similarly despite having exercises their responsibility differently (i.e., not having made an equivalent effort) (Segall 2010, pp. 18-19). It also includes cases in which equality between Lazy and Crazy is achieved by redistributing resources from the latter to the former.

We follow Segall in conceiving of the equalities at issue between the two views to be outcome equalities in the 'ultimate currency' or in what ultimately matters to people from an egalitarian point of view, be that given by resourcism or welfarism or by some third conception of the appropriate egalitarian metric (Segall 2010, p. 17; 2012, pp. 507-508; personal communication). In this way, eventual differences in labour burdens may be seen as being fully compensated for in the appropriate metric. This allows us to focus on the key issues of contention between the asymmetrical and symmetrical view, namely equality in the appropriate egalitarian metric in the

presence of differential effort or exercises of responsibility.[9] Furthermore, the inequalities that are eradicated or removed in various ways are consistently non-arbitrary inequalities, or cleanly generated inequalities—that is, inequalities generated on the basis of a situation in which people face equivalent opportunities or equally good choice situations, thus reflecting choice or option-luck (Lippert-Rasmussen 2011b, p. 181; Williams 2004, p. 134).[10]

III. Rebuttal of the asymmetrical view

Our rebuttal of the asymmetrical view is inspired by the fairness intuition highlighted by G.A. Cohen in his response to Susan Hurley (Cohen 2006). According to this, luck egalitarians ought to object to inequalities as well as equalities reflecting (differential) luck, and do so *for the reason of fairness* (or justice). Luck is here counter-posed to choices or exercises of responsibility (Cohen

[9] Speaking of 'equality' in this way is of course slightly misleading on certain notions of egalitarian justice, including the one we defend, in that the appropriate metric includes considerations of effort and responsibility. Still, referring to equality in this 'flat' sense facilitates discussion of the core issue at stake between the asymmetrical and symmetrical view (see further note 2).

[10] One might, as conditions for inequalities being cleanly generated or for matters of brute luck being successfully transformed into matters of option luck, include conditions such as those defended by Michael Otsuka. For example, one might require that among the array of options people face should be '*a reasonable alternative to gambling whose outcome is certain (or at least nearly so)*' (Otsuka 2004, 153. Emphasis original. Note omitted). This would still leave a non-trivial number of cleanly generated inequalities with respect to which the asymmetrical and symmetrical view would differ concerning the justice of equalisation. Note that although the phrase 'cleanly generated' may indicate that in addition to there not being anything wrong with these inequalities, it would also be wrong to eradicate them, nothing of the kind necessarily follows. One might, as Segall do, deny the badness of inequalities generated by choice or option-luck, whilst at the same time denying the badness of cancelling such inequalities (bringing about equalities in the presence of differential exercises of responsibility). To be sure, we think that there are fundamental objections to this view of an egalitarian nature, but the availability and interest of this view we do not deny.

2006, pp. 443-444; cf. 2008, p. 7). While the fairness-intuition thus stated arguably provides an apt way of describing the symmetrical view, it does not, of course, amount to an argument for it; the fairness intuition at stake needs to be spelled out and defended if it is to support our view. We try to do so below.

The profound unfairness of equality in the presence of differential exercises of responsibility is that it amounts to asking some to bear the costs of others' voluntary choices. When a person could easily have avoided a disadvantage or an inequality, it is unclear on what grounds he could plausibly call for compensation. And it is not only that refraining from compensating this person would not be unfair; it would seem positively unfair to do so in that it countenances exploitative cost displacement. Why this is so, is nicely brought out in Will Kymlicka's example of the tennis-player and the gardener (Kymlicka 2002, pp. 72-74).[11] They are equal in terms of personal and impersonal resources and face options that are equally good, offering them 'varying amounts and kinds of work, leisure, and income' (Kymlicka 2002, p. 73). The tennis-player opts for a leisure-intensive package, the gardener for one rich in income. Absent interventions in the market, the bundle of impersonal goods possessed by the gardener will in time clearly surpass the bundle possessed by the tennis-player. In this case, Kymlicka plausibly argues, equalizing (or distribution according to the difference principle) does not amount to treating people as equals or with equal concern and respect:

> Rather than removing a disadvantage, the difference principle simply makes her [the gardener] subsidize his [the tennis player] expensive desire for leisure. She has to pay for the cost of her choices—i.e. she forgoes leisure in order to get more income. But he does not have to pay for the costs of his choice—i.e. he does not forego income in order to get

[11] The case is an adaption of Dworkin's Adrian-Bruce case (Dworkin 2000: 83-85).

more leisure. He expects and Rawls's theory requires that she pay for the cost of her own choices, and also subsidize his choice. That does not promote equality, it undermines it (Kymlicka 2002, p. 73).[12]

The unfairness of equalizing measures when people could have avoided the inequalities in question (i.e. of equality against the background of differential exercises of responsibility) is also forcefully pointed out in Cohen's treatment of the issue of chosen expensive tastes. Commenting on people who are bad converters of resources into welfare (i.e. have expensive tastes) 'because they are negligent or feckless in a morally culpable way: they buy their food at Fortnum's because they cannot be bothered to walk up to the Berwick Street market', he claims:

Now there seems to me to be an egalitarian objection to a policy of ensuing that the Fortnum's customer's welfare level is as high as everybody else's. It seems to me that, when other people pay for his readily avoidable wastefulness, there is, *pro tanto*, an exploitative distribution of burden which egalitarians should condemn (Cohen 1989, p. 911).

Echoing Rawls' stance on expensive preferences,[13] Cohen further claims that:

People with expensive tastes could have chosen otherwise, and if and when they press for compensation, others are entitled to insist that they themselves bear the cost "of their lack of foresight or self-discipline" (Cohen 1989, p. 913).

The central luck egalitarian fairness intuition expressed in the above quotes that we appeal to in support of the symmetrical view and to the detriment of the asymmetrical view is something like this: *persons cannot reasonably demand compensation for inequalities or disadvantages that they*

[12] Some readers may question the applicability of this central luck egalitarian intuition to cases such as Segall's lead case that is not overtly redistributive in direction of equality, but in which equality is brought about by a stroke of good brute luck befalling Lazy. However, note first, as stated above, the applicability of Segall's view is arguably broader than the mentioned lead case, including cases in which equality is restored by, for example, taxing Crazy. Second, in both case equality is due to something other than choice or exercises of responsibility, that is, luck. Third, Crazy is in a relevant sense asked to fund Lazy's optional choices—he is so in the sense of being asked to forego the benefits that would accrue to him in virtue of a policy of equalizing matters of brute luck, so that equality will be restored between him and Lazy.

[13] A stance that seems notoriously at odds with his invocation of the difference principle; a tension in Rawls' work that luck egalitarians have been apt to exploit.

could easily avoid (i.e. inequalities being generated on the basis of they having faced an array of options that is equally good as that faced by others). Granting them such compensation would be unfair or unjust, in virtue of allowing some people to extend the costs of their choices to others.[14]

A significant advantage of the symmetrical luck egalitarian view we have defended in this section is, we believe, that it meets head-on, and on arguably genuinely egalitarian grounds, a central rightist charge directed against flat or simple non-responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism. This objection is directed precisely against measures of equalization irrespective of people's differential exercises of responsibility. Consider, for example, R.A. Musgrave's objection to John Rawls' difference principle (which would seem to apply *a fortiori* to flat equalizing measures):

> Implementation of maximin thus leads to a redistributive system that, among individuals with equal earning ability, favors those with a high preference for leisure. It is to the advantage of recluses, saints, and (non-consulting) scholars who earn but little and hence will not have to contribute greatly to redistribution (Musgrave 1974, p. 632).

The symmetrical view answers this objection squarely by affirming that *equal treatment*, in the sense of extending the same amount of resources or income to the ants and the grasshoppers, would imply not *treating them as equals*.[15] By doing so it delivers on the task often ascribed to contemporary egalitarianism, namely to incorporate 'within it the most powerful idea in the arsenal of the anti-egalitarian right: the idea of choice and responsibility' (Cohen 1989, p. 933) or to respond in appropriate ways to responsibility-sensitive 'reactive attitudes' (Scheffler 1992; Strawson 1974, chap. 1).

Asymmetrical egalitarianism, in contrast, is virtually impotent with respect to the mentioned objection. It gives the game away by granting that equality against the background of differential exercises of responsibility might, or might not, be bad, or even positively affirming that

[14] The avoidability-motif integral to this view loom large in what Cohen has later referred to as the flagship-statement of his 1989 article (see Cohen 2004).

[15] See note 2.

it is not. In this way it not only abandons rightist reactive attitudes, which might be considered a bearable cost, it depart from what egalitarians should on reflection endorse, namely that their resistance against luck is equally applicable to equalities as it is to their more familiar target of criticism, that is, luck-based inequalities.

IV. The egalitarian credentials of symmetrical egalitarianism: does symmetrical egalitarianism collapse the value of equality into the value of desert?

The view we have so far defended in this paper gives a prominent role to responsibility or to desert assuming that this tracks responsibility. In this way, it may appear particularly vulnerable to a charge made by Segall against a view of the kind we endorse. He submits that such a view conflates equality with desert (Segall 2010, pp. 16-18). The asymmetrical view, in contrast, may be seen as representing the value of 'equality' in virtue of it being agnostic regarding the badness of equality against the background of differential exercises of responsibility or positively denying the badness of this state of affairs. For the following reasons we claim that the symmetrical egalitarian view is a genuinely egalitarian view, and that it does not collapse the value of equality into desert or other values.

First, a basic condition for a view to count as egalitarian seems to be that the theory or principle is concerned with relativities. Consider Derek Parfit to this effect: 'Egalitarians are concerned with *relativities*: with how each person's level compares with the level of other people' (Parfit 1998, p. 13. Emphasis original; cf. Holtug 2010; Knight 2009, pp. 89-96). Now the symmetrical view seems obviously comparative in requiring that people's comparative positions should reflect nothing but their comparative exercises of responsibility (cf. (2) in sec. I).

Second, one may demand of a theory of equality that it must favor certain patterns of distributions or certain outcomes over others. In Susan Hurley's formulation:

To count as egalitarian, a doctrine must, for some X, favor relatively more equal patterns of distribution of X over relatively less equal patterns of X, other things equal. It must, that is, count relative equality in the pattern of distribution in some dimension as pro tanto a good thing, even if it can be outweighed by other values (Hurley 2003, p. 147. Cf. Holtug 2010, p. 174).

Taking the relevant X to be some *ex post* measure of people's relative standing (e.g., in terms of resources or welfare), the symmetrical view may be regarded at being in direct violation of the constraint in question in that they do not necessarily prefer a more egalitarian distribution to a less egalitarian (they do not if the people that are rendered equal *ex post* have in fact exercised their responsibility differently); in fact, they positively prefer the inegalitarian distribution in this case. Asymmetrical egalitarianism, on the other hand, has no such implication in that it denies that the equality in question is bad (cf. Hurley 2003, pp. 150–152, 172).

However, it is in fact not clear that our view is inconsistent with Hurley's constraint—even when it is construed in terms of outcomes (as opposed to opportunities) as we construed it above. According to the symmetrical view, equality ought to obtain in the absence of differential exercises of responsibility (cf. Cohen 2006, pp. 443-444). Hence, we may say that outcome equality (be that resource or welfare equality or something else) is pro tanto valuable, but is outweighed by considerations of responsibility (once people exercise their responsibilities differentially, our view recommends deviation from equality).[16]

On an *ex ante* construal of equality it is even less clear that symmetrical egalitarianism should fail to qualify as a view of equality.[17] The inequalities that symmetrical egalitarians want to preserve are, as we stressed above (in sec. II), cleanly generated, that is, they do not reflect that

[16] Cf. the idea of 'restricted equality' mentioned by Kagan (1999, p. 306) and Olsaretti (2002, p. 391). We have in mind a version of this view in which desert tracks responsibility (see Olsaretti 2002, p. 393 note 17). We owe the idea of pressing this response against Hurley's objection to one of the reviewers.

[17] We owe this point to one of the reviewers.

people have not enjoyed option-sets that are equally good; and the fact (or requirement) that people have enjoyed such sets constitutes a crucial element of the symmetrical view (in the absence of such sets resulting equalities would not be due to choice or option-luck). It seems clear then, in virtue of the latter fact of the view, that it satisfies Hurley's condition (interpreted as focused on or at least encompassing an *ex ante* conception of equality).

Third, on the symmetrical view, equality, even of a flat kind, plausibly contributes to the goodness of outcomes in the following sense. In cases where desert is indifferent between benefitting A and B and the former is worse off that the latter, equality kicks in boosting A's claim (Olsaretti 2002, p. 395). Fourth, irrespective of whether equality on the symmetrical view contributes to the goodness of outcomes, equality may be seen as underpinning the baseline or default egalitarian view integral to the symmetrical view (cf. Lippert-Rasmussen 2005, pp. 254-255). According to the baseline view, before people become differently deserving they have a claim to an equal amount of well-being (a baseline against which people may then become more or less deserving—variations that ought to be reflected in their level of well-being). This default may be endorsed on the ground that people in such circumstances are equally *deserving* (Kagan 1999); but as Olsaretti (Olsaretti 2002, pp. 396-397) has convincingly shown this is not the only, and perhaps not the most plausible, reason for endorsing the baseline in question. We may, alternatively, say that prior to becoming differentially deserving 'no one deserves anything at all, that is, desert is inapplicable, and, when desert is inapplicable and does not justify inequalities, we should go for equality' (Olsaretti 2002, p. 396).[18]

[18] We recognize that there is much more to be said about the relation between 'equality' and 'desert'. See e.g. Kagan (2012).

V. The sufficientarian compatibility argument for the asymmetrical view

Another reason for favoring the asymmetrical view over the symmetrical view we endorse might be that the former in contrast to the latter is compatible with sufficientarian considerations. One might think such compatibility desirable in the light of the so-called abandonment or harshness objection to luck egalitarian views. We believe that Segall himself alludes to some such reason for his view.[19] The harshness charge, in brief, is that the luck egalitarian view apparently proposes an implausibly unrelenting stance towards people who, by virtue of their own reckless or imprudent behavior, experience serious shortfalls (Anderson 1999, pp. 295–296: Fleurbaey 1995, p. 40). This may concern, e.g., uninsured persons partaking in high-risk activities (e.g., free-style motocross or off-piste skiing) who get injured or those who gamble with their financial means and lose. Seemingly, the liberal response and *a fortiori* the liberal luck egalitarian response is that these people 'asked for it' and must now 'pay the price' (Feinberg 1986, pp. 140–141). They have no grievances towards others in the case that they abstain from helping them—it is even possible that the liberal position positively requires that others should avoid bailing out those who are responsible for their own misery.

The notion that no decent society can in fact refrain from assisting those in misery—irrespective of the part they themselves have played in their predicament—is widespread (Feinberg 1986, p. 140; Jones 1985, p. 154). So it is incumbent upon luck egalitarians to somehow accommodate this intuition. One way in which they can attempt to overcome this challenge is by incorporating a sufficientarian baseline, i.e., a standard of well-being below which no one is allowed to fall, however irresponsible or reckless their behavior prove to be (Williams 2006, pp. 500-502). We may conceive of this baseline, as Segall does, as being based on moral values other

[19] And in communications he makes clear that he believes that the considerations we have in mind might count in favour of his view, although not amounting to a decisive argument for it.

(and more fundamental) than justice, say in terms of the fundamental requirement to meet basic needs (Segall 2010, pp. 64–66, 68–69).

In the light of such a solution to the challenge, Segall's version of luck egalitarianism may be seen to have some virtues. Consider Segall to this effect:

> It is relatively easy, notice, for the sort of luck egalitarianism I defend here to allow the concern for basic needs to complement the requirements of egalitarian distributive justice. For, as I said repeatedly, my version of luck egalitarianism is distinct from the ideal of desert. It does not insist on punishing individuals or on matching the level of their well-being to the level of their deservingness (prudence-wise). It is therefore not a requirement of justice, on my account, that the imprudent be left to suffer. The account thus lends itself to being coupled with the rather straightforward concern for meeting basic needs (Segall 2010, p. 69. Cf. pp. 18, 65).

We understand Segall's claim of compatibility regarding his version of egalitarianism and a sufficientarian baseline of catering to basic human needs in the sense that the former does not deny the facet of the latter saying that we ought to cater to people's basic health care needs unconditionally, i.e., irrespective of these needs stemming from their negligence or recklessness. This distinguishes it from the symmetrical egalitarian view. Like other egalitarian views, however, Segall's view denies that we should be unconcerned about inequalities beyond the baseline.[20]

We grant that Segall's version of egalitarianism is in this sense easier to combine with (i.e., less in conflict with) a sufficientarian threshold, hence allowing egalitarians an effective response to the harshness or abandonment objection. We deny, however, that this amounts to an argument for accepting Segall's version of egalitarianism in favor of alternative versions, including the one we defend. The fact that the latter is in conflict with a sufficientarian threshold amounts at

[20] We may say that Segall's view, as opposed to the symmetrical view, enjoins the positive thesis of sufficientarianism (i.e., it is important that people live above a certain threshold) and, together with other egalitarian views, denies the negative thesis (i.e., additional distributive requirements are irrelevant). See Casal 2007, pp. 297–298. We owe this point to Lasse Nielsen.

most to a nonegalitarian objection to it—one that does not imply that the conception in question is not the correct conception of equality.

To explain, we should distinguish between different types of objections to notions of equality. One type rests upon a notion of equality differing from the notion being objected to; i.e., it claims that the notion of equality objected to fails to treat people equally or as equals. This is an egalitarian objection. Another type of objections questions the feasibility of the conception of equality to which it objects. For example, it says that the kind of information required to implement the conception (e.g., about the burdens of different types of labor) is inaccessible. A third type regards how a given conception may jeopardize values other than equality that we cherish. For example, the required information to implement a given conception may be accessible, but unearthing it would be intrusive (Cohen 1989, sec. II). The latter two types of objections are nonegalitarian.

If we object to a proposed conception of equality, say equality of (opportunity for) welfare on the grounds that it is infeasible in that the information required for its implementation regarding people's welfare level is unavailable, we seem not to be objecting to the conception in question as the correct or best conception of equality. Indeed, if this represents our sole grounds for objecting to the conception, we are plausibly committed to the conditional claim that "if equality of (opportunity for) welfare could be implemented it should be" (Cohen 2008, pp. 250–251).

Similarly, if the objection to the latter conception is not that obtaining the required information is infeasible but that providing it would jeopardize other values, especially liberty, in that it would involve intrusive measures, the point seems not to be that this conception is somehow misguided regarding what the correct conception of equality is; rather, the point is that the offered account is in conflict with other values that we cherish.

Returning to the kind of consideration Segall appeals to in support of his version of egalitarianism, it amounts to the claim that the latter is not in conflict with another value, namely the sufficientarian basic human needs consideration; the implied objection to the alternative view, the view we support, then concerns its conflict with this other value. In this sense, it clearly seems to amount to a so-called nonegalitarian objection, and if what we have just said is correct, this provides no reason whatsoever to reject the symmetrical view as the correct account of equality (or for endorsing Segall's alternative asymmetrical view as the correct account).

To be sure, in the light of what we said above regarding the harshness objection and the proper egalitarian reaction to it, a nonegalitarian objection of this type is valid and we should defer to the value it appeals to (i.e., the importance of meeting basic human needs) when we implement egalitarian principles, but it does not provide any reason for abandoning the symmetrical view as the correct conception of equality. This would be a category mistake and conceal the kind of trade-offs luck egalitarians moved by the harshness objection must make. Accordingly, we believe that the potential foothold for Segall's view canvassed here evaporates.

In our treatment of this argument we have proceeded on the assumption apparently shared by Segall that the values pertaining to the basic human needs threshold are external to considerations of luck egalitarianism strictly conceived. However, others believe, not unreasonably, that considerations of sufficiency may be seen as integral to egalitarian considerations (Arneson 2011; Gosseries, 2012; Williams 2006). The basic needs threshold (or another threshold account) may, that is, be seen as an important component of luck egalitarian view. Still, even on this construal of the relation between the basic needs threshold and (other) egalitarian considerations it is unclear that consistency or a lack of tension with the threshold on the part of a candidate account of the responsibility-sensitive component of luck egalitarianism counts in favour of it. In the service

of clarity we might want to develop the components separately and then balance them against each other afterwards in the way alluded to above.

VI. Conclusion

We conclude that the equivocation in a standard way of formulating the luck egalitarian view, the Principle of Equality, should be resolved by embracing the view we call *symmetrical egalitarianism.* According to the latter, equalities, just as inequalities, are bad if, and only if, they reflect something other than choices or exercises of responsibility, that is, brute luck. Equalities reflecting differential exercises of responsibility, the issue of contention in this paper, are bad because they countenance costs displacement, making the prudent and industrious pay for the costs of the perfectly voluntary choices of the imprudent. Such extension of costs is unfair. It runs counter to the ideal of treating people as equals. The symmetrical view is, not least in virtue of its stance on arbitrary equalities, capable of meeting head-on a forceful responsibility objection pressed against egalitarianism. The asymmetrical view, in contrast, seems impotent in the light of this objection (denying, as it does, the badness of the equalities rightists focus on).

Furthermore, the symmetrical view is capable of standing its ground against two central objections. The first objection holds that the view is not genuinely egalitarian; it collapses, this critique claims, into a notion desert. However, we have shown that the symmetrical view is perfectly capable of satisfying standard conditions for qualifying as an egalitarian view, and that the value of equality, according to it, plays a role independent to that of desert or responsibility. The second objection holds that the symmetrical view, as opposed to the asymmetrical view, is problematic in the light of its incompatibility with sufficientarian considerations to which egalitarians may need to appeal in order to respond to the harshness objection. In response, we pointed out that although the symmetrical view may be incompatible with sufficientarian

considerations, it fails to establish an egalitarian objection to it. The upshot of the considerations in this paper is then a strong recommendation of the symmetrical view.

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