

Article

EQUALITY, COMMUNITY, AND THE SCOPE OF DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE: A PARTIAL DEFENSE OF COHEN'S VISION

DONG-RYUL CHOO

Department of Philosophy, Hallym University, Chuncheon, South Korea

Biographical Note

Dong-Ryul Choo is a professor of philosophy at Hallym University, South Korea. He studied at Seoul National University and at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, from which he got his Ph. D. in philosophy in 1994. He has been a Visiting Scholar at the University of California-San Diego (Dept. of Philosophy) in 2003-2004, and at Yale University (Dept. of Political Science) in 2010 - 2011. His research interests include moral realism and naturalism in metaethics, many forms and the flexibility of consequentialism in normative ethics, and distributive justice and viable forms and structure of egalitarianism in political philosophy. He may be reached at drchoo@hallym.ac.kr.

Abstract

Luck egalitarians equalize the outcome enjoyed by people who exemplify the *same* degree of distributive desert by removing the influence of luck. They also try to calibrate differential rewards according to the pattern of distributive desert. This entails that they have to decide upon, among other things, the rate of reward, i.e., a principled way of distributing rewards to groups exercising *different* degrees of the relevant desert. However, the problem of the choice of reward principle is a relatively and undeservedly neglected issue among luck egalitarians. The main goal of this paper is to highlight the importance and difficulty of this problem, and to elaborate upon G. A. Cohen's community-oriented response to it. In the last section, I provide a taxonomy of distributive pluralism, contrasting Cohen's view with other (not so genuine) pluralisms - especially with all-things-considered varieties - while trying to motivate readers to adopt the more robust form of pluralism.

Keywords

community, distributive justice, equality, G. A. Cohen, luck egalitarianism

1. Cohen's Proposal for the Luck Egalitarian Job Description

People have many intuitions regarding equality. Of these, I consider two to be the

bedrock upon which an egalitarian theory of distributive justice can be built. The first is that strict or flat equality cannot serve as a fundamental distributive norm. One might end up with strict egalitarianism *after* having examined every available justification for inequality and having found it unconvincing. But strict equality, come what may, is not a usual candidate for a basic distributive norm. In theory and in practice, we aim at giving to individuals according to some criterion: giving the same amount to people who have satisfied the designated criterion to the same extent.

Another entrenched (normative and linguistic) intuition is that any distributive principle allowing for a large (or indefinitely large) gap between individual shares ought not to be called egalitarian. This idea suggests that the “egalitarian” character of a distributive principle comes in degrees. It also places a constraint upon the distributive criterion of a principle for the latter to be an egalitarian principle: A principle is egalitarian to the extent that the nature of its distributive criterion and the way it adjusts the final outcome according to its criterion exhibit intrinsic (i.e. non-instrumental) pressure toward gap-reduction. How much and in how many cases a theory of distributive justice presents in-principle objections and resistance to unequal share determines its egalitarian character.

Based on these two intuitions, I propose that any reasonable egalitarianism should meet two conditions. First, it must pursue “equality according to *X*” as a matter of comparative fairness. Second, as a result of this pursuit, the final gap between individual shares should be reduced compared to other distributive schemes. The second condition, in turn, can be boiled down to two questions: First, how much individual difference results from applying its distributive criterion? According to our first condition, in building an egalitarian theory we need a criterion (*X*), and since such a theory will allow differential rewards for people exhibiting differential degrees of *X*, the range of individual differences permitted by the theory is crucial to the final gap between individual shares. Second, the theory must provide itself with a reward system: how much *distance* in reward would be appropriate for the groups displaying differential degrees of *X*? The degree of individual differences in *X*, and the rate of reward between *X*-classes determine the egalitarian credentials of *X*-egalitarianism.

Paying much heed to the above-mentioned egalitarian intuitions and conditions, a number of philosophers and economists have been advocating “luck egalitarianism,” whose two main concerns are: (1) that one’s deserved economic share should not be influenced by circumstantial factors beyond one’s control and choice (such as his natural talents, skill, sex, or his parents’ educational level); (2) that we need to take account of responsible choice (such as prudential effort or morally worthy activity) in determining individual shares. In other words, according to luck egalitarianism, distributive justice consists of compensation for involuntary disadvantages and reward for responsible choice and action.¹ Luck egalitarians pick out certain aspects of responsible choice and action as “distributive desert”, and equalize the outcome

¹ G. A. Cohen, Richard Arneson, John Roemer, Ronald Dworkin are usually considered the main contributors in the formation of luck egalitarianism.

enjoyed by people who exemplify the same degree of distributive desert by removing the influence of luck. They also try to calibrate differential rewards according to the pattern of distributive desert.² This characterization of luck egalitarianism immediately suggests that anyone who subscribes to it should take three tasks upon himself. He has to clarify, first, what is to be equalized among individuals in the same desert-class (“the currency of egalitarian justice”);³ second, the nature of distributive desert; and, third, the rate of reward, i.e., a principled way of distributing rewards to groups exercising *different* degrees of the relevant desert.

G. A. Cohen, one of the philosophers who initiated the recent discussion of luck egalitarianism, puts forward proposals for each of the above three issues. The main goal of this paper is to highlight the importance and difficulty of the problem of the choice of reward principle, and elaborate upon Cohen's response to it. There are two reasons why I devote this space to the reward problem rather than to other two issues. First, I accept the main thrust of Cohen's views on the first two issues. On the currency, his proposal is to zero in on opportunity for or access to welfare. And, according to Cohen's “labor-burden-adjusted equality,” the relevant part of one's responsible choice that determines his deserved share is prudential effort (rather than *moral* worthiness). Thus, the relevant egalitarian currency is opportunity for or access to welfare when we consider the condition of people *before* they make their choice regarding prudential effort. *After* they make this choice, what is to be equalized among individuals in the same effort-class is welfare. I simply align myself with the welfarist and prudential version of luck egalitarianism in this paper.⁴ However, the main reason for my choice of the topic of this paper is that the problem of the reward principle, that is, the justified rate of differential rewards for different effort-classes, is a relatively and undeservedly neglected issue among luck egalitarians.

² Desert-oriented *equality* is the goal at the level of the principle of justice. In reality, we might opt for giving priority to the worst-off rather than equality in each and every desert-class (and as a result, the gap between individuals might be increased when that gap is “necessary” for raising the condition of the worst-off), either because equality is sometimes infeasible, or it has no chance of commanding a large (political and popular) consensus, or we have to take other distributive ideals (welfare or basic needs-satisfaction) into consideration. By virtue of feasibility, acceptability, and plural concerns in distribution, a final “optimal” or “legitimate” policy may break away from the egalitarian mandate. This paper discusses Cohen's rationale for the distinction between justice and legitimacy in the last section. I believe that underscoring the importance of this distinction, and awakening us to the normative cost and undesirability of keeping distributive justice within the bounds of what is practical and feasible (given the *status quo* social ethos and institutional setting), are two of Cohen's most enduring legacies.

³ Welfare and resources have been two main answers to “equality of what?” Opportunity for welfare emerged as a third contender for the egalitarian currency. For complexities in each proposed currency and relations among them, see Cohen (1989).

⁴ Cohen's official term for the egalitarian currency is ‘access to advantage.’ Cohen includes welfare *and* resources in his notion of advantage, since he believes that sometimes a person's resources deficit constitutes a legitimate ground for egalitarian compensation, even though his welfare level is not low compared to others. See Cohen (1989, 15). For Cohen's labor-burden equality, see Cohen (2000, 130) and Cohen (2008, 56ff, 103ff).

Deciding upon the appropriate luck egalitarian reward principle presents an especially knotty problem in that, although compensation and reward must be considered in tandem, there is no reward principle that is uniquely dictated by luck egalitarian compensation. A reward principle must be part of the luck egalitarian project, but it may well be an additional component not directly informed by the compensation principle. This fact has not been properly appreciated by luck egalitarians, and has attracted insufficient discussion in recent debates. In his later writings,⁵ Cohen sketched out an idea of community as an equality-friendly principle of reward. In the next section, I try to develop this idea, and bolster its egalitarian credentials both by reference to what Cohen has to say about community generally, and by contrast with other proposals which stand in greater opposition to luck egalitarianism.⁶ While the community-based reward principle is an addition to the luck egalitarian ideal of compensation, it nevertheless bears significant affinity with it. Or, so I argue.

The conclusion from section 2 implies that Cohenian distributive justice has two components: luck egalitarian compensation for circumstantial disadvantages and the community-based rate of reward. Distributive justice understood in this way represents a distributive ideal. There are other ideals, such as welfare, need, and Pareto efficiency. Someone might want to widen the scope of distributive justice further, thereby identifying the latter with the best harmonious combination of all the distributively relevant ideals. Cohen belongs to the group of luck egalitarians who maintain a robust pluralistic stance, with all its merits and predicaments. In section 3, I provide a taxonomy of distributive pluralism, contrasting Cohen's view with other (not so genuine) pluralisms -- especially with all-things-considered varieties -- while trying to motivate readers to adopt Cohen's form of pluralism, according to which ideals other than luck egalitarian compensation and community-based reward are regarded as distributively relevant, but non-justice ideals.

Since I do not *defend* every (core) claim that Cohen makes in distributive matters, it is obvious that my discussion of his reward principle and pluralism constitutes only a "partial" defense of his view. However, there are two further senses in which my defense is only "partial." First, my discussion is concerned with largely internal affairs. My focus is usually on debates among those who are, broadly speaking, (luck) egalitarians; I do not discuss *inegalitarian* criticisms of Cohen. Lastly, on some occasions I part ways with (customary interpretations of) some aspects of Cohen's considered view, introducing an amendment or supporting a particular interpretation of his view where it is susceptible to various renderings.

⁵ Notably Cohen (2009b).

⁶ Cohen's view is more egalitarian than other (luck egalitarian) positions in terms of two egalitarian conditions suggested earlier: First, in Cohen's view, smaller individual differences will be countenanced than other views which include more elements in the notion of distributive desert, e.g. preferences and character one does not choose. Second, his community reward principle puts additional pressure on narrowing the gap between differential effort-classes. For a recent statement of Dworkin's preference-based view of responsibility and its distributive implication, see his (2011, 241-48, and 358-62).

2. Cohen's Community as an Egalitarian Reward Principle

2.1 A conundrum for luck egalitarians concerning the reward principle

Suppose that we have a set of all the feasible allocations of resources to individuals. If prudential luck egalitarians are invited to evaluate these allocations from the point of view of distributive justice, how should they proceed in this evaluation? Their compensation principle entails an unambiguous evaluative criterion: the smaller the gap (in the proper egalitarian currency) among persons sharing the same effort, the more ideal the allocation. This means that the distributive impact of circumstantial factors is minimized. But, how about the inequalities among *different* effort-classes? What should be the luck egalitarian verdict regarding those inequalities? In other words, what is the shape of a distinctively luck egalitarian reward principle whose task is to determine the rate of reward for differential exercise of prudential effort?

In this section I argue that the idea of luck egalitarianism as such — compensation for involuntary disadvantage and respect for responsible choice — does not by itself provide a definite principle of reward. I present two reasons why there is no easy and obvious manner in which a reward principle can be constructed that is distinctively luck egalitarian. We need an additional principle to formulate the rate of reward for different effort-classes. On the other hand, it does not seem to be the case that luck egalitarians should be completely indifferent as to the selection of a reward principle, and/or compelled to think that any candidate is equally good. The fact that luck egalitarianism by itself is not sufficient to furnish a reward principle, and yet, selection of the latter cannot be totally outside its concern and task, is the source of its predicament.

1. No absolute share for each effort-class: Someone may entertain the idea that there is an “absolute” level of reward for everyone based on his desert level. One example of this approach is illustrated by Shelly Kagan’s notion of noncomparative desert. Kagan’s “peak” refers to the point in one’s welfare that he noncomparatively deserves, such that the value of his welfare from the standpoint of desert reaches its highest level at this point and would decrease before and after this point.⁷ If there were such an absolute share for each and every effort-class, the problem of rate of reward for effort would be automatically solved. I assume, however, that it is extremely difficult to mobilize plausible support for “peaks,” that is, the idea that there is a certain amount of reward to be absolutely paired with each particular degree of prudential effort expended. The guiding motive in Kagan’s analysis of desert is given by the notion of *moral* worth, and the

⁷ See Kagan (1999). Since in his view the central concern is to grant these absolute shares to as many people as possible, considerations of *comparative* fairness and equality are simply not part of the job of the distributive account based on his view. However, Kagan’s assertion that even in comparative desert, equality and desert considerations frequently diverge is also based on the idea of peak.

contrast between saints and sinners. Perhaps in the case of moral desert and especially for this extreme contrast-class, there might be room for the idea of absolute and noncomparative share.⁸ However, when one's concern is to find an allocation rule according to *prudential* desert/effort, the idea of peak and its concomitant notion of absolute and noncomparative share are simply non-starters. One's share shall be determined not only by the level of his prudential effort but also by those of others (and, of course, by the overall size of the pie to be distributed at the moment). Also, from the standpoint of prudential luck egalitarianism which prizes equality as a matter of comparative fairness, what is valuable - that is, what contributes to the value of the distributive state of affairs - is not that a person receives a particular amount of *distributandum*, but how the pattern of the latter corresponds to that of the effort.

2. No "natural" proportionality: Although the most natural way to elucidate the aforementioned notion of correspondence between effort and reward patterns seems to be to adopt the proportionality view (the view that reward should be given in proportion to effort), this will not serve the purpose of luck egalitarianism. There are a number of reasons for this conclusion. First, it sometimes appears that talking about the rate of prudential effort does not even make sense, due to its often qualitative aspects. The number of hours of labor might not be an adequate measure of the quality of labor-related burdens that people take upon themselves through responsible choice. Even when it makes sense to talk about exercising greater or lesser effort, in many cases there is not a definite answer to the question, "*How much* greater is A's effort than B's?" Finally, suppose that we manage to arrive at a certain (cardinal) measure of effort, and assign some magnitude to each person on account of his effort. Mapping this distribution of effort to the profile of outcome can still be accomplished in several ways. When labor hours are taken as the measure of effort, one way of "proportionally" rewarding effort is to use the logarithm of hours instead of (non-logarithmic) hours as the mapping function. Just as the Celsius and Fahrenheit scales are both perfectly "proportional" measures of the same phenomena — the temperature of the physical object — the prudential activity of people can be translated into a reward profile in many different ways, depending upon the choice of (comparison) unit and mapping function. The upshot is that even when one accepts the general tenet of respecting effort, there is simply no natural or unique answer to the question, how to correlate specific effort difference and difference in reward. The pertinent lesson to be drawn from the above considerations, I submit, is that we need to be aware of the multiple functions in which monotonicity obtains — that is, the existence of multiple ways in which a greater reward is always given for more effort — and recognize that luck egalitarianism alone does not provide sufficient guidance for making a choice among them.

Thus, luck egalitarians have the challenging task of addressing the rate-of-reward issue within the spirit of their egalitarianism: Although luck egalitarianism *per se* does not discriminate

⁸ For the criticism of Kagan and the idea of peak even on this score, see Arneson (2007, 278-84).

among reward principles, it may be the case that some of those principles and luck egalitarianism support one another, or have common normative grounds. Luck egalitarians ought to carry out a search for such a reward principle.

2.2 Luck egalitarian choice with respect to the reward principle

In addition to the views that rely on “absolute” reward or “natural” proportionality, which we have found inadequate, I can think of three more strategies for dealing with the reward problem. First, utilitarians would say that the correct rate of reward is the one that maximizes the sum total of *distribuendum*. Second, the idea of liberal reward implies that once compensation for unfortunate circumstances has been made, we must maintain a “no-intervention” policy. Finally, according to the institutional approach, the rate of reward and legitimate gaps between different responsibility groups must be decided by the norm which best reflects the package of social concerns and desiderata.⁹ These views are *formally* compatible with prudential luck egalitarian compensation. In other words, if they come into play after equality within each effort-class obtains (or is pursued as far as possible), and their reward systems respect the ordinal structure of effort -- where rewards are not distributed in *disproportion* to the degree of effort luck egalitarians can appeal to each of those views as a supplementary principle to their compensatory project. With the idea of “natural” proportionality left out of consideration, there is no formal reason for any of them to be ruled out at the outset.

This formal compatibility notwithstanding, my conjecture is that prudential luck egalitarians would not, in the end, rely on these views. The institutional approach simply is a reminder that we need an additional reward principle: what social fairness implies and which institution best serves it *are* what distributive justice is about, and therefore, this solution amounts to a place-holder for a complete theory. However, the institutional view could take the more concrete Rawlsian form informed by the ideal of equal citizenship.¹⁰ The idea seems to be that gaps between desert-classes should be regulated in order to secure equal political and civil

⁹ Teun Dekker proposes an institutional approach, while Serena Olsaretti sides with a proportionality constraint on reward gaps. See Dekker (2009, 116-18) and Dekker (2010, 224-27); Olsaretti (2009, 184). For the liberal (“no-intervention”) view, see Fleurbaey (2008, 29-31, 113, 265-67) and Dworkin (2011, ch. 16). As is well-known, even in a *laissez-faire* economy the state provides and enforces certain measures of legal intervention (such as the preservation of property relations), which affect distribution. Thus, the so-called “no-intervention” reward principle must be understood as a policy of *minimization* of the state’s role in distribution (after initial luck egalitarian compensation). I should mention that Fleurbaey seems to be of two minds when it comes to the liberal reward principle vs. more robust (*ex post*) compensation (see *ibid.* 32-33, and ch. 10). My impression is that in the end, the liberal mind in Fleurbaey has the best of his egalitarian side. Yet, he is fully aware of the many aspects of the “interplay” between circumstantial and responsibility characteristics.

¹⁰ Pablo Gilabert makes a proposal to the effect that “a concern for status equality and the condition of self-respect” (alongside securing “a minimal threshold of advantage”) grounds plausible limits on the inequalities condoned by luck egalitarian compensation. See Gilabert (2012, 111ff).

status for every member of a society.¹¹ I offer two observations concerning its relevance to the reward problem: First, since Rawlsian equal citizenship is not the same as Cohenian community — for this see below — a Rawlsian reward principle is likely to advocate a certain minimum or threshold (economic) level for ensuring equal political and civil status. Second, beyond that level, the Rawlsian approach would mandate (out of *Rawlsian* reciprocity) the maximum improvement of the condition of the lowest desert-class, rather than gap-reduction across a large or entire segment of desert-classes.

I will not discuss general normative problems of utilitarian and liberal reward systems. I simply would like to draw attention to the fact that maximization of overall outcome and minimization of state intervention are such sweeping goals that they tend to go beyond the confines of a supplementary reward principle. Utilitarians and libertarians, even when they are summoned to resolve the problem of differential rewards for different effort-classes, would tend to impose their own visions on the compensation component of distribution and disrupt the ordinal structure of effort. When the goal is to maximize utility or minimize the role of the state, why stop just at differential rewards for effort-classes? Why, indeed, observe the ideal of luck-neutralization and *equality* according to prudential effort, in the first place? (The aspiration to be comprehensive is not just a *theoretical* tendency of utilitarianism and libertarianism; we observe that policy-makers of both stripes usually advocate a universal application of their tenets.) For this reason, I believe that an amicable partnership between luck egalitarianism and these reward principles is unlikely.

Among luck egalitarians, I consider G. A. Cohen to be the first person who explicitly acknowledged the need to combine luck egalitarian compensation with an *additional* reward principle. Even after this compensation has been achieved, according to Cohen, “the question remains, how *large* is this inequality [justified by differential exercise of effort] likely to be?”¹²

¹¹ The broadly Rawlsian ideal of democratic equality in economic distribution governs not just the reward problem. Its central tenet is that economic equality ought to be promoted *to the extent*, and *basically for the reason*, that it is necessary for a society of citizens with equal political and civil liberties. From this perspective, many Rawlsians admit that the promotion of economic equality (as gap-reduction) falls within the jurisdiction of Rawls’s liberty principle: “[T]he first principle may place *its own* limits on economic inequality, and they may be more severe than the difference principle’s limits.” (Estlund, 1998m 110: Emphasis added.) See also, Daniels (2003, 262-63) and Smith (1998, 17ff). In effect, this is essentially Rawls’s response to the possibility of an ever-widening economic gap. See Rawls (1999, 136-37) and Rawls (2001, 67-68). One of the core features of Cohen’s egalitarianism is that the ideal of removing the influence of luck and rewarding according to prudential effort should exert its own egalitarian normative force, *independently* of its connection with political and civil equality. For the question of distributive justice can survive the significant achievement of political and civil equality, and there might be a mismatch between political and economic equality in the sense that the progress in the former is accomplished while there is a visible setback to the latter. (Indeed, this seems to be a reasonable description of the state of affairs in the USA for the last four decades.)

¹² Cohen (2009b, 29). (From now on parenthetical page numbers in the paper refer to pages in this book.) Note that an earlier version of this book was published in article format in 2001, which predates all writers on the reward problem mentioned in previous footnotes. When Cohen considers justice (that is, luck-egalitarian-compensation)

He also proposes a reward principle in this regard: “Although inequalities [of this type] are not condemned by justice, they are nevertheless repugnant to socialists, when they obtain on a sufficiently large scale, because they then contradict community: community is put under strain when large inequalities obtain.” (p. 34)¹³ Moreover, he suggests that community and equality each “supported the other, and each was strengthened by the fact that it was supported by the other.”¹⁴ Unfortunately, we cannot hear more about the nature, role and distributive relevance of the community principle from Cohen (because of his untimely death). Here, I try to depict major features of Cohen’s notions of community and community ethos, as well as his community-based reward principle, and point to some observations that may indicate the presence of a connection between prudential luck egalitarianism and community which is more intimate than mere formal compatibility.

2.3 Features of Cohen’s community and egalitarian ethos

My observation is based on what Cohen had to say about community in scattered places. Cohenian community has four notable features. (Admittedly, these features are not equally relevant to the reward problem in a direct manner. They indicate, however, how community can have the relationship of mutual support with equality.) First, in the community, my service and contribution are not conditional upon what I get out of this service; I respond to others’ needs. Yet, if my desire and expectation to serve others while being served by them are satisfied, this is the best condition from the community perspective. Such a state is what Cohen calls “a communal form of reciprocity” (p. 38). In this type of human relationship, the ideal state of affairs is mutual serving, but my serving is not motivated by or conditional upon your reciprocation. Since Cohen believes that communal reciprocity is an intrinsically desirable form of human relationship, he considers it legitimate to mobilize that idea for the purpose of placing limits on the inequality of outcome sanctioned by luck egalitarian compensation.¹⁵

Second, community tends to be undermined by unregulated markets. On textual grounds, it seems to be Cohen’s considered opinion that there is an *essential* conflict between community and markets in any form: He asserts that “[e]very market, even socialist market, is a

- compatible inequalities caused by differential prudential choice and effort, his focus is on *regrettable* choice, a case in which the agent retrospectively regrets having exerted a low degree of effort and having landed in a low-level position of welfare. In the earlier article version, he only mentioned “differential exercise of effort” (Cohen 2001, 64). I believe that retrospective regret on the agent’s part is not crucial in considering which inequalities deserve alleviation by an adequate reward principle.

¹³ Recently, Roemer has also claimed that luck egalitarianism as such comprises *only* the principle of compensation, and endorsed community as a candidate for an additional principle that will imply some constraint on the reward to effort. See Roemer (2012, 179).

¹⁴ Cohen (1994, 214).

¹⁵ Cohen’s communal reciprocity is akin to what Michael Taylor calls “generalized reciprocity,” in that it aspires to mutual benefit, but is not conditional upon reciprocation. Taylor argues that the range of communal interaction corresponds to the segment of the spectrum lying “between balanced [conditional] reciprocity and generalized reciprocity, including the latter pole but not the former.” See Taylor (1982, 30).

form of predation,” (82) operating on and reinforcing the motives of greed and fear. (pp. 40ff, 74-75)¹⁶ The essential conflict thesis is a major issue, partly because we do not yet know whether it is possible to preserve the allocational and informational roles of markets without their (now dominant) distributive and motivational consequences. Here, I just register two themes which could be described as being congenial to Cohen: First, there is no doubt that *existing* markets crucially depend on — and build up — profit motives, commodification, and unequal enjoyment of the fruits of efficiency and growth. These are at odds with community.¹⁷ Second, just as Cohen is agnostic when it comes to the feasibility of socialism (equality plus community) *sans* markets, (p. 76) I think he should feel the same way about the possibility of socialism *with* markets, considering the as-yet-unknown limit to market’s flexibility.

Third, in a community any distributive policy should be supported by an argument that could serve as its justification “when uttered by any member [of that community] to any other member.”¹⁸ When a policy does not pass this “interpersonal test,” someone might still benefit from it by not participating in that justificatory practice. Cohen deploys this test in order to show that in a Rawlsian “just society,” when a talented person demands incentives that do not reflect a special labor burden as a condition to work at a reasonable level (comparable to untalented counterparts), *he* would not be able to justify his move to the untalented group. (Policy-makers, on the other hand, may be able to justify his maneuver to the untalented, in terms of the maximin considerations, and *their* giving the talented person the proposed incentives might be a legitimate policy.) His demand would testify to the absence of a communal tie between himself and other parties.

Finally, a community is partly defined by its ethos, “the set of sentiments and attitudes in virtue of which its normal practices, and informal pressures, are what they are.”¹⁹ The diverse forms of community and varying degrees of communal solidarity result largely from the broad spectrum of such an ethos. Some social theories prize deep emotional bonds, ideological cohesion, and the sense of belonging that gives persons their identity. Cohenian community need not be grounded on this (communitarian) form of relationship. Cohenian community exists when its ethos comprises motivational and evaluative structures of its members that specifically inform their sense of what is desirable, valuable, and bearable *in matters of distributive justice*. (This does not mean that communities with thicker ethos cannot be Cohenian communities.) In particular, I think that Cohen’s egalitarian ethos plays three roles:

¹⁶ See also Cohen (1994, 217-20).

¹⁷ Arneson argues that there is no necessary connection between a (capitalist) market economy and any particular form of reciprocity. Thus, Cohenian communal reciprocity (rather than “market reciprocity”) can be embedded in a market economy. See Arneson (2111b, 252ff). Actually, Cohen entertains this possibility: “a more ultimate motive [of performing market activity] can be to use a market gains philanthropically” (earlier article version of 2001, 76, n19). However, he goes on to say: while egoistic self-centered welfare motive is “not essential to marketeering, it is, of course, *as matter of contingent fact*, the dominant form of welfare served by the market” (emphasis added).

¹⁸ Cohen (2008, 42).

¹⁹ Cohen (2000, 145); see also Cohen (2008, 16-17, 73, and 123).

First, it facilitates luck egalitarian compensation and equality of individuals in the same desert-class. People with an egalitarian ethos should be able to accept equality according to prudential effort with ease and without grudge. Particularly, the talented would not demand unjustifiable incentives. Second, an egalitarian ethos guides productivity and career choice. It does not mandate a maximum possible level of production in a most arduous occupation. The Cohenian ethos will provide the motivation to work at the level that is necessary for community and helps it to flourish. And finally, this ethos would make people endorse the alleviation of inequalities among different desert-classes up to a degree that is compatible with the subsistence of the community. This means that the talented would be willing to contribute part of their (luck egalitarianism-deserved) share to the lower desert-classes.

Now, some might argue that the first aspect of the Cohenian ethos, which promotes luck egalitarian compensation within each desert-class, is not in harmony with the last two aspects, whose role is to preserve the gaps between different desert-classes within the bounds of community (yet at a reasonably high level). Patrick Tomlin rightly points out:

while citizens motivated by the luck egalitarian principle will reject inequality-generating incentives (as they will not wish to exploit their luck-derived talent) they *need not* be moved by any of the productive requirements to exercise their talents in the way recommended by the ‘wide ethos’ that Cohen appears to affirm²⁰ (emphasis added).

From this observation, Tomlin derives the “incompatibility” of luck egalitarian compensation and the productive requirement implied by a Cohenian ethos. According to his diagnosis of this internal incongruity of Cohen’s view, the culprit is the latter’s identification of distributive justice with the consideration of purely comparative fairness, that is, luck egalitarian compensation. He argues that we need to bring something like Pareto consideration, together with equality, into the concept of distributive justice. This will take care of the leveling-down objection to the pure relational equality version of justice.²¹

I think that Tomlin detects significant unfinished business in the luck egalitarian project, but arrives at the wrong diagnosis and solution. First, although a strictly luck egalitarian ethos *need not* entail productive requirements, this does not show that they are “incompatible” with each other in any conceptual or empirical sense. The absence of a necessary connection between the two parts of the Cohenian ethos does not mean that they cannot be parts of a coherent theory or, as a matter of human psychology, they cannot both reside within people’s motivational system. (Furthermore, as we will see shortly, they may be reinforcing each other.) Second, the (‘wide’) ethos certainly would give (talented) people an urge to work hard up to a certain degree, but this demand and people’s commitment to it need not reflect welfare or Pareto

²⁰ Tomlin (2010, 237-38).

²¹ Ibid., pp. 234, 240ff.

considerations. Cohen's distinct concern is to sustain and strengthen community, and the productive part of his ethos is intended to furnish this need. Indeed, the leveling-down objection should be a cause for anxiety among luck egalitarians, and, at some point, welfare or Pareto considerations need to be introduced in order to address that objection. This becomes a basis for Cohenian pluralism regarding distributive ideals. However, there are some conceptual and normative costs incurred in the incorporation of welfare/Pareto as part of the concept of justice. (For this see the next section.) In any case, the main purpose of the productive component of the Cohenian ethos is not welfare-boosting itself, but community support (and possibly need satisfaction as well). Tomlin's discussion of the internal structure of Cohen's view of distributive justice highlights the above-mentioned conundrum plaguing luck egalitarianism: the fact that its choice of reward principle is not uniquely dictated by its commitment to egalitarian compensation.

2.4 The community principle, equality, and the scope of justice

Cohen's proposal regarding the problem of reward, that is, the problem of how to handle the gaps among individuals exerting differential prudential effort, is that those gaps should be confined to such a range that helps to keep the community intact and, hopefully, thriving. As we will see shortly, some egalitarian policies and practices can affect the communal character and depth of a society, but *community-building* is a complex and multi-layered causal process. Thus, the community reward principle will be invoked and operate with ease where communal bonds are already entrenched in a group of appropriate size. However, "communal networks" can in principle be universal; they are dependent on "a spirit of communal reciprocity that encompasses us all," not entirely on direct emotional, geological or cultural interactions. (p. 44)²²

What could be the basis of Cohen's assertion (quoted at the end of 2.2) about the mutual support of community and equality? On the one hand, many people point out that community or fraternity is one of the values that ground equality.²³ Equality is valuable partly because it tends to foster community. This is a normative claim, but it also strongly suggests a causal presumption that a stable community is possible when something like luck egalitarian compensation is firmly incorporated as part of its policies and settled down in expectations of its members. When prudential luck egalitarian compensation obtains, unfortunate circumstances are not (to be seen as) the source of chronic disadvantage in life prospects, and people will know that their voluntary effort and work-leisure choices are the only legitimate ground for an outcome-gap. This awareness, together with other psychological and objective factors

²² Hence, the community reward principle should not be understood as signaling what Arneson calls a "social interactionist view" in distribution, according to which equality or fairness matters "only among fellow members of a community who are bound together by significant social interaction." See Arneson (2011a, 47). Furthermore, together with Arneson, I believe that egalitarian *compensation* must be honored within the widest scope possible, beyond the bounds of communities.

²³ For example, see Miller (1982, 83-85).

conducive to solidarity, facilitates community-building and reinforces stability. Thus, community partly relies upon luck egalitarian compensation.

On the other hand, given Cohen's characterizations of communal caring, justification, and ethos, it is hard to deny that community is a fertile ground in its own right for egalitarian distribution. It offers the possibility of a consensus on luck egalitarian compensatory policies. Also, when a community functions reasonably well, it can play the role of a reward principle by permitting only such differential rewards (for different effort-classes) as are acceptable to the justificatory practice and ethos of its members. In this way, community -- unlike utilitarian or libertarian reward principles -- would not sanction ever-increasing and unwieldy differential rewards; instead, it places principled constraints on them. For these reasons, I believe that the community principle bears a closer affinity with prudential luck egalitarian compensation than other candidates that we have considered.

Some people maintain that luck egalitarian compensation (which Cohen often calls socialist equality of opportunity) and the community principle are in "conflict," in that the luck egalitarian principle should sometimes "give way" for the sake of community.²⁴ Cohen's way of describing their relationship seems to lend credibility to this view. He says: "The community principle constrains the operation of the egalitarian principle by *forbidding* certain inequalities that the egalitarian principle *permits*"; the prudential luck egalitarianism must be "tempered" by the community principle; the latter "curbs" some of the inequalities that result from the former (pp. 12, 34, 35; Emphases added). I am not sure whether A *contradicts* or even *puts constraints* on B, simply because A forbids some of what B permits. Moreover, A's tempering or curbing of B's operation does not exactly signal a relationship of conflict or contradiction. A serious conflict between A and B only arises when A forbids what B *demands*. However, if what we have seen earlier about there not being an "absolute" share (for each level of prudential effort) or a "natural" proportionality (between effort and reward) is on the right track, the relationship between the community reward principle and luck egalitarian compensation cannot constitute a conflict of this type. Since the ideal of luck egalitarian compensation aspires to equality within each effort-class, and to the ordinal structure of reward (and perhaps very rough proportionality) among different effort-classes, it leaves open the exact degree of outcome-gap that would exist between effort-classes. Thus, what the community reward principle does in the way of preserving and promoting community — by *adjusting* the distance in reward among effort-classes — cannot "contradict" or "constrain" luck egalitarian compensation in the proper sense, if it does not undermine the ordinal structure of reward. Indeed, I assume that the community principle shall not violate this ordinality of reward (on an extensive scale), because that would have the effect of doing damage to the community. Community tends to be undermined when its members cannot have the legitimate expectation of reward based on their voluntary level of prudential effort, and regularly witness cases in which their prudential efforts

²⁴ Miller (2010, 249). See also Gilabert's discussion of whether the community principle "constrains or contradicts" egalitarian justice, in Gilabert (2012, 106-7).

meet with *disproportional* rewards. The only sense of “conflict” that appears to be present when the community principle is operative comes from occasions when individuals exerting different degrees of prudential efforts receive the same share. Luck egalitarianism demands *some* distance in reward, but community requires equality. I believe that sometimes, community-oriented concerns will lead to requirement for equality of this type. How extensive this requirement, and how long it will remain in effect, depends on the type of community and the urgency of maintaining it. I only assume that the community principle would not cause large portions of luck-egalitarianism-sanctioned distance in reward to collapse to zero; in most cases, *narrowing* the gap would be sufficient to meet the community’s concerns.

The final issue I would like to discuss concerning Cohen’s community reward principle is whether it should be part of a theory of distributive justice. At times, Cohen entertains the view that justice has many (interpersonal and non-interpersonal) components. But this is simply for the sake of argument, and an effort to deal with the leveling-down objection to equality.²⁵ His official position seems to be that “justice *is* (some kind of) equality,” and the kind in question is fleshed out with luck egalitarian compensation and respect (of some kind) for voluntary choice in reward. Cohen’s conviction about distributive justice is the following: “In unequal distribution whose inequality cannot be vindicated by some choice or fault or desert on the part of (some of) the relevant affected agents is unfair, and therefore, *pro tanto*, unjust, and that nothing can remove that particular injustice.”²⁶ So, justice is a matter of comparative fairness, and luck-neutralization and equality within each effort-class fit the bill on this count. On this view, deciding on a *particular* reward principle, such as the community principle, appears to be a consideration that lies outside justice. Even in many places in *Why Not Socialism?*, where Cohen discusses community as his favorite reward principle, his underlying

²⁵ Cohen (2008, 322-23).

²⁶ Ibid. P. 30, fn7 and 7. Apparently, Cohen’s view on distributive justice has changed over the course of his engagement with Rawls. In an earlier article, Cohen says: “for my part, I accept the difference principle..., but I question its application in defense of special money incentives to talented people.” See Cohen (1992, 336); see also Cohen (2000, 124). However, as of the time of his last writings, his mission was to rescue justice and equality from the Rawlsian view. Now, he still accepts the difference principle, but not “*as a principle of justice*, but rather as a principle of intelligent policy” (Cohen 2008, 30, fn.7). Whenever a halfway concession (to Rawls and the difference principle) is made by early Cohen, however, one also has a glimmer of suspicion that he does not speak entirely from the heart. However one interprets its nature, Cohen’s change of outlook on Rawls (and his considered view of justice) is, I think, most lucidly depicted by the following remark:

I agree that the priority view contradicts my views on equality. When I wrote ‘incentives,’ my view was indeed prioritarian, or rather, extreme prioritarianism, which the difference principle view is. But I think that was wrong. I should have said that justice IS equality, because that's what I believe. All the rest is a concession to strict infeasibility on the one hand and human moral weakness on the other. The right policy is maximin, whatever the circumstances, but to the extent that maximin deviates from equality, to that extent maximin, and, therefore, the right policy, deviates from justice. (G.A. Cohen, private e-mail to the present writer, 30 December, 2004.)

assumption is an identification of justice with luck egalitarian compensation, and he continues to treat justice and community as separate concerns (pp. 13, 34, 80-81). Nevertheless, in the end, he is non-committal about the relationship between justice and community: “But is it an *in*justice to forbid the transactions that generate those inequalities? Do the relevant prohibitions merely define the terms within which justice will operate, or do they sometimes (justifiably?) contradict justice? I do not know the answer to that question.” (p. 37)²⁷

Together with some commentators, I am inclined to the view that the community reward principle, or any other principle that combines (best) with luck egalitarianism, should be a constituent of distributive justice in the Cohenian sense.²⁸ I can give four related reasons for this inclusive view. First, Cohen’s equality-centered view of justice is usually invoked in the context of his having grave misgivings about non-comparative values like welfare or Pareto optimality intruding into the territory of justice, and imposing compromises on the comparative nature of justice. However, the community principle, while incorporating welfare concerns to some extent, does not exclusively or centrally comprise non-comparative norms such as welfare maximization, maximin, or Pareto efficiency. (Communities can prosper or wither at various welfare or maximin levels.) Rather, it relevantly concerns itself with comparative (civil and economic) positions of individuals and their multi-layered relationship that are compatible with community. Second, as we have seen earlier, the community principle need not be in essential conflict with the luck egalitarian ideal of compensation. The latter concerns equality within each effort-class, and commits itself to respect for effort in rewarding. The former is about *how* to respect effort in rewarding, and deals with gaps among different effort-classes. Barring widespread disregard of effort in rewarding and the collapse of gaps resulting from differential effort, which is unlikely under the community principle, community and luck egalitarianism can join forces to resist various inegalitarian norms and practices. Since the community principle would mostly act to *narrow* the gaps among different effort-classes, community concerns are arguably equality concerns. Thus, when Cohen identifies justice with “(some kind of) equality,” that equality can be read as luck egalitarian compensation *plus* community-based reduction of gaps in final shares. Third, more fundamentally, distributive justice must present a principled way of specifying fair comparative shares of individuals. Any one person’s share should be determined by the justice-related characteristics exemplified by that person and other people,

²⁷ Original emphasis. He continues in parenthesis: “(It would, of course, be a considerable pity if we had to conclude that community and justice were potentially incompatible moral ideals.)”

²⁸ Tomlin (2010, 228-47); Gilibert (2012, 101-21). I disagree with Tomlin in that he introduces a productive ethos into justice as a welfare or Pareto concern, while I only focus on the productive ethos and demand at the level conducive to community building and stability. (Community can survive at different welfare levels, so welfare and Pareto concerns should still be given consideration in addition to justice understood as equality *and* community. For this pluralism of distributive ideals, see the next section.) Gilibert cashes out the community principle in terms of sufficientarianism (responding to basic needs), and of political equality (securing equal political status). However, community (as justice-related) concerns persist beyond the minimum sufficiency level and even after equal political status is given to members of a community.

and by other considerations pertinent to mapping the difference in these characteristics to differential rewards. So we need a rate of reward among different effort-classes, as well as luck egalitarian compensation within the same class.

Finally, in Cohen's view, not only do we need "just coercive *rules*, but also an *ethos* of justice" in order to accomplish social justice.²⁹ As we have seen, the chief role of this ethos is to provide the motivational ground of luck egalitarian compensation. The talented segment of a society, in particular, would not demand unjustifiable incentives when informed by this ethos, and with the help of the latter, equality according to prudential effort will obtain. However, it is natural to conceive of a productive ethos that gives guidance to the choice concerning the level of production and career move, as part of the egalitarian ethos. Cohen's community ethos would lead people to contribute part of their collective effort (and its result) to reducing the gaps in final outcome within the bounds of the community. Members tendency to respond to needs, and toward the aspiration of mutual serving, would be the measure of this ethos. Of course, the compensatory part of an egalitarian ethos does not conceptually *necessitate* its community-based productive component; nevertheless, there is no incompatibility here. Given the normative connection between community and equality, and a significant possibility of their mutual support (which I tried to pointed out earlier), this community-based productive ethos and reward principle are very much entitled to be a part of Cohenian justice.

The notion of community as such, and its status as constituting a reward principle, should be articulated and defended much further than what I can adumbrate here. I am not prepared to claim that community is the only reward principle compatible with luck egalitarianism. The main message of this section is this: luck egalitarians should be aware of the complexities inherent in the problem of reward for effort, the difficulties surrounding the proportionality view, and the need to supplement compensation for luck by an additional reward principle. If all of the candidates for a reward principle are on a par with respect to luck egalitarian compensation, then there will be a *radical* incompleteness within luck egalitarianism. However, if luck egalitarianism can adopt a reward principle that has an indirect but significant connection with it — a shared normative ground, and/or mutual support in theory and practice, etc. — then, its incompleteness can be diminished, and its egalitarian credentials strengthened.

3. Cohen's Robust Pluralism vs. All-Things-Considered Views of Distributive Justice

I have argued that Cohenian justice is equality, and the latter comprises luck egalitarian

²⁹ Cohen (2008, 123). Strictly speaking, an egalitarian ethos is part of "a just *society*," which is "one whose citizens affirm and act upon the correct principle of justice," rather than part of "a just *distribution*," which consists in "a certain egalitarian profile of rewards." See Cohen (2000, 131-32). Cohen admits that there is a logical possibility of mismatch between the two (non-equality-inspired ethos producing an egalitarian distribution and *vice versa*), but surmises that it is "highly unlikely." He also believes that for a just society, an egalitarian ethos *and* a just distribution are both necessary.

compensation and community-oriented gap-reduction. Someone might want to suggest that we need to bring in other ideals as well into the scope of distributive justice. Hence comes various types of distributive pluralism. There are two types of pluralism of distributive ideals, where those ideals include equality, *from the perspective of the composition of theory*. The first type identifies distributive justice with equality as the reduction of an (unjustified) economic gap, and in choosing a final optimal policy resorts to a trade-off between equality and other ideals (such as welfare, efficiency, or basic needs). Cohen's view belongs to this group. Theories of the second type identify justice with the distributive rule that is ultimately chosen as the result of a trade-off among distributive ideals endorsed by theorists. I favor the first type, since to me it is more natural to make the judgment that the problem of distributive justice still is in existence or aggravated (than to say all is well in the matter of justice) when the condition of everybody, including the least advantaged, improves while economic polarization deepens. With Cohen, I do not regard the choice between the two types of theories as a merely verbal one. Cohen suggests that maintaining the distinction between a principle of justice and the legitimacy of policies can have implications for (future) policy change -- where to target one's efforts when the situation changes -- as well as serve as a reminder to get the principle right.³⁰ Accepting it as natural to make a differentiated ("nuanced"³¹) judgment such as "advances have been made in welfare and efficiency, but there has been a setback in justice implies an attitude that places more substantial weight on demanding the restoration of equality when future circumstantial changes occur.

Hence, whether the trade-off between equality and other ideals is seen as the process in which justice takes account of other ideals under conflicting circumstances (i.e. as a matter of policy guidance) or as a problem with the internal structure of a pluralistic theory of justice (i.e. as a matter of the composition of the principle of justice itself), makes a practical difference. If one considers the state of affairs where (unjustified) gaps keep increasing as "just" (since other ideals are better served), it is very likely that one's theory of justice dispenses entirely with an independent pressure toward (the restoration of) equality, or retains it only in a very weak form. His theory tends to exemplify the all-things-considered view. Since justice — at least in its conception if not in its application — cannot tolerate vague areas, this type of theory, as we will see shortly, would rely on a strict mechanism (such as a priority rule) to coordinate a plurality of ideals. Concerns for comparative fairness and the demand for gap-reduction would lose their independent normative force and urgency by being integrated into that mechanism.

Positions espousing distributive pluralism can be divided into three types, *from the perspective of ways of adjusting different ideals*. The first type confers absolute priority to a particular ideal. The second type comprises all-things-considered theories of justice, which bring forward an encompassing, ultimate principle giving expression to the ideals in question, or an algorithm assigning fixed relative weights to each of them. Theories of the third type

³⁰ Cohen (2009a, 141-42). See also, Tomlin (2010, 243).

³¹ It is Cohen's term; see Cohen (2008, 305).

recognize an independent status (“a certain sovereignty”³²) of each ideal, and undertake a search for a case-based, variable priority rule. A hard-line view, in which a distributive ideal maintains absolute priority over (“trumps”) others, is not really an instance of distributive pluralism. Of course, how one uses the term “pluralism” cannot, by itself, sufficiently ground a full-blown criticism of this view. However, if it should be deemed a practically unwise and theoretically unjustifiable move to let equality trump all the other ideals, by the same token, there is no small burden facing a view in which (for example) Pareto concerns always trump equality.

Three subcategories fall under all-things-considered theories of justice. First, Rawls’s difference principle is supposed to encompass equality and other ideals. Rawls says that the difference principle is “strictly speaking, a maximizing principle” (from the perspective of the least advantaged), and it is “compatible with the [Pareto] principle of efficiency” (when the former is fully satisfied).³³ When the difference principle (plus the prior principles) is fully satisfied, we need not be concerned about equality, Pareto efficiency or welfare anymore. Second, there is a group of priority views according to which a greater weight is given to the per-unit increase of the condition of an individual whose absolute initial condition was at a lower level; here, justice is the maximization of the weighted sum of the increase in outcome. Finally, some “egalitarians” would like to propose an algorithm that assigns relative weights to equality and welfare when evaluating distributive profiles, in such a way that allocates negative scores to any deviation from equality while holding the leveling-down equality in check.³⁴ Proponents of all-things-considered theories would boast that their position has several merits. First, leveling down equality is precluded by these theories in any circumstance. These theories disapprove of it not merely as a sub-optimal policy proposal, but as failing to raise the bar of justice at all. Second, possessing a mechanism to coordinate a plurality of ideals is, they argue, certainly a big plus. In this connection, Rawls proclaims the superiority of his position over views which strike “a balance by intuition,” in the absence of priority rules for weighting plural ideals against one another.³⁵ Parfit announces that “[t]he Priority View... can be held as a complete moral view,” in contrast with other pluralist views juxtaposing several ideals as part of a more complicated structure.³⁶

I think that all-things-considered theories of justice are beset with at least three problems. First, contrary to appearance, the coordination problem is not sufficiently addressed by an independent criterion that is more fundamental than the coordinated distributive ideals. This problem remains just one step removed from the final evaluation of distributive patterns. How much a theorist is committed to equality as opposed to welfare reveals itself in his choice

³² Ibid., p. 4.

³³ Rawls (1999, 68, 69).

³⁴ For an example of the priority and of the algorithm type, see Arneson (2011[b], 247ff) and Christiano & Braynen (2008, 409ff.) respectively.

³⁵ Rawls (1999, 30).

³⁶ Parfit (2000, 103).

regarding the relative weight given to the unit increase of each welfare stratum in the priority view, or in the way he apportions numbers to gap-reduction and absolute welfare level in the algorithm view. This is a controversial normative decision, and at the fundamental level one has to rely upon “striking a balance by intuition.”³⁷

Second, most all-things-considered views are motivated to some extent by efforts to avoid the (alleged) problem of leveling-down equality. Thus, they assign a weight to the egalitarian concern in such a way that leveling-down equality is always assigned a negative evaluation (since it is not an improvement *in any sense* in terms of justice). In the meantime, because of this prerequisite, their evaluation of distributive profiles often seems to be arbitrary or fail to embrace some (egalitarian) justice-oriented intuitions. For example, according to the algorithm proposed by Christiano & Braynen, the distributive configuration of (7,3) is ranked “more just” than (4,4) from the perspective of a justice which they call “egalitarian.” Yet, they confess that this might be “a troubling result.”³⁸

Finally, I think that the genuineness or robustness of the pluralistic credentials of all-things-considered views is rightly open to doubt. This is related to the fact that when a change in distribution passes the difference principle (and Rawls’s prior principles), or achieves the best score (among alternatives) under the priority or algorithm views, it is automatically regarded as an improvement in terms of justice. A differentiated (“nuanced”) judgment indicating pluses and minuses for each distributive ideal is not considered pertinent here. The aggravation of any ideal can go unnoticed.³⁹ The desire for a formula, and to successfully avoid leveling-down equality, overrides the pluralistic mandate to give each ideal an independent status and voice.

Of course, it cannot be denied that what I think of as a robust pluralism -- the view that equates justice with gap-reduction and pursues a case-based coordination of justice with other ideals -- is facing many challenges. I am not prepared to advance a detailed outlook with respect to such coordination. I just point out some of its main features. First, in robust pluralism, each ideal maintains an independent and non-subordinate normative status. Second and relatedly, each ideal stands for a *pro tanto* value in that its advancement represents an improvement in distribution when considered in isolation, that is, when other ideals are equally satisfied. Finally, robust pluralism rejects an absolute priority that allows a particular ideal to

³⁷ In Rawls’s all-things-considered view, as we have seen in the previous section, equality as gap-reduction is essentially a job for the prior principles. Strictly speaking, the difference principle does not reflect the result of a trade-off between equality and welfare or efficiency. It represents what Rawlsian reciprocity demands, namely, what reasonable and cooperative citizens interested in basic liberties and autonomy would accept as fair distribution.

³⁸ Christiano & Braynen (2008, 417).

³⁹ When the condition of the least advantaged is the same (and when the prior principles are met to the relevantly same degree), distributive justice in the Rawlsian sense is served in the same way, regardless of the gap between the highest and the least advantaged groups. In prioritarianism, distributive justice might signal indifference between small welfare (boost) given to a lower group and greater welfare for a higher group, since the greater weight of welfare attributed to the former is cancelled out by the bigger size of welfare enjoyed by the latter.

“trump” others. Accordingly, it acknowledges that there are cases where (for example) one of equality and Pareto efficiency defeats the other. (When the exacerbation of economic inequality is pronounced and totally unjustified, or when this inequality symbolizes and reinforces political and civil inequalities, leveling-down economic equality is sometimes acceptable in robust pluralism as the optimal policy.) Robust pluralism can be egalitarian in theory and practice, not because it accords absolute priority to equality, but because it recognizes a *pro tanto* and the intrinsic value of equality and its exercising of independent pressure, and because it underlines and promotes the many ways in which equality is integrated with – and mutually supports – other ideals.⁴⁰

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