

The Nature and Distinctiveness of Social Equality: An Introduction

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Equality is not one idea, and one can advocate or criticize a number of forms of egalitarianism. Many egalitarians advocate the equal distribution of one of a range of *equalisanda*—in other words, what it is that should be equalized, such as political power, human rights, primary goods, opportunities for welfare, or capabilities. This notion that equality is best described according to some “thing” that should be distributed equally has been subject to criticism by a range of schools of thought. Of these critics, a number of prominent contemporary philosophers insist that, while the ideal of equality clearly has distributive implications and may well match certain distributive notions of equality, equality is foremost about relationships between people. The structure of relationships can be more or less egalitarian, more or less hierarchical. When we appeal to the value of equality, we mean the value primarily of egalitarian and nonhierarchical relationships, and not of distributions, which may only be instrumentally valuable in terms of how well they reflect or help to achieve egalitarian relationships. This form of egalitarianism is known as social or relational egalitarianism.¹

¹ For the purposes of this introduction, we take social and relational equality to be equivalent and use mainly “social equality” as the umbrella term to refer to both social and relational equality. There are a number of different understandings of social and relational equality, and some theorists may be tempted to describe these different understandings according to a distinction drawn between social equality, on the one hand, and relational equality, on the other. We believe, however, that there are enough similarities between what some theorists call relational equality and some call social equality to merit referring to them as equivalent. It is an open question, and one that social egalitarians may answer variously, as to whether there is a need to distinguish between social and relational equality.

While a number of contemporary theorists point to the importance of social equality, it can also be seen to have played a significant role in the understanding of equality in the history of political theory.² Among the primary concerns of early egalitarians such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Paine, for example, were the morally arbitrary differences, such as gender or aristocratic birth, on which many social hierarchies are constructed.³ While social equality appears to be an important ideal in the history of political theory and in practice, and it has a number of contemporary advocates, it is still relatively neglected in comparison to theories of distributive equality—what social equality might be and why it could be valuable still requires much theoretical work. This collection of original essays is an attempt to help to redress this neglect and to develop the notion of social equality further.

Overall, this introduction serves two purposes. In the first section, we aim to provide background on important themes in social egalitarianism and to set the context for understanding which significant questions the essays in this book pose and attempt to answer. In the second section, we provide a brief explanation of the structure of the book and each of its essays.

1. An Introduction to Social Equality

Two overlapping perspectives are particularly significant for putting the social egalitarian debate into context. The first considers social equality what can be called “internally”—for example, by asking what characterizes social equality or inequality, or what makes socially egalitarian relationships egalitarian. The second considers it from an external perspective—by trying to determine what distinguishes social equality from similar concepts and commitments.

1.1 Socially Egalitarian Relationships

What, more precisely, is social equality? We can answer the question by elucidating which kinds of relationships, or structures of relationships, are compatible

² For a selection of contemporary texts on social equality, please see the bibliography at the end of this introduction.

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men*, Reprint (New York: Penguin Classics, 1985 [1755]); Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man; Common Sense; and Other Political Writings*, ed. M. Philp (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1791]); Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1792]). See also Elizabeth Anderson, “Equality,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ed. David Estlund (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

with or exemplify equality and by determining which kinds of asymmetrical relationships, which kinds of social hierarchies, egalitarians should oppose. Examples of social egalitarian interactions and relationships might be the use of “Mr.” and “Ms.” to address everyone, rather than distinguishing according to rank, education, or marital status, for example, or choosing friends “according to common tastes and interests rather than according to social rank.”⁴ Social equality can be seen to be embodied in certain forms of “communes, state communism, anarchism and syndicalism, companionate marriage, multiculturalism [. . .], republicanism, democracy, socialism and social democracy.”⁵ Claims are made that social equality is violated by, for example, slavery, class systems, hierarchies of social status based on race or gender, orders of nobility, behavior that is “either, on the one hand, noticeably flattering or deferential or approbatory or obsequious or, on the other hand, noticeably disparaging or deprecatory or insulting or humiliating,”⁶ and any kinds of relationships between superiors and inferiors.

What is it about these interactions and relationships that make them socially egalitarian or inegalitarian? A popular response is to associate social equality with relationships that express respect (usually respect-for-persons) or recognition.⁷ In this case, an important part of determining what social equality is would be to identify the relevant notions of respect and to unpack how egalitarian relationships constitute or reflect this form of respect. Whether respect exhausts social equality is a question that social egalitarians need to answer and that they are likely to answer in various manners. The asymmetrical relationships that social egalitarians oppose also include (certain kinds of) hierarchies of prestige, honor, and esteem, as well as those of power, command and domination—why and under what circumstances these should be opposed, and whether these hierarchies can all be categorized as constituting violations of respect, requires further analysis.

The high emphasis social egalitarians place on *relationships* raises a number of questions about the subject and scope of social equality. The subject of justice is often confined to major social institutions such as the constitution and the form of the economy—personal choice, social norms, and civil society are often seen to be excluded from the regulation of principles of justice.⁸ If social equality is about social relationships, surely even private, interpersonal

⁴ David Miller, “Equality and Justice,” *Ratio* 10, no. 3 (1997): 231.

⁵ Anderson, “Equality,” 40.

⁶ W. G. Runciman, “‘Social’ Equality,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 17, no. 68 (1967): 223.

⁷ Runciman, “‘Social’ Equality”; Miller, “Equality and Justice”; Jonathan Wolff, “Fairness, Respect, and the Egalitarian Ethos,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27, no. 2 (1998): 97–122; Elizabeth Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?” *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (1999): 287–337; Christian Schemmel, “Why Relational Egalitarians Should Care About Distributions,” *Social Theory and Practice* 37, no. 3 (2011): 365–390.

⁸ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Part 2, 6–10, & Part 14, 73–78; John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press

relationships should be subject to norms of equality. Descriptively, it seems clear that concerns of equality are indeed significant in at least certain kinds of interpersonal relationships, and in friendships and partnerships we often aim to avoid creating conditions in which one person is treated or made to feel inferior. Conceptually, we would need to understand what makes these kinds of relationships more or less socially equal and, normatively, we may wonder what weight equality should have among a diversity of values governing these kinds of relationships.

Many discussions of social equality are particularly concerned with the implications of equality on a political and an institutional level. The claim is that as citizens or, even merely as human beings, we should be treated as social equals, and the state and its institutions should not express, establish, or reinforce (certain kinds of) inegalitarian and hierarchical relationships between individuals or groups of individuals. However, even the fact that social equality could be seen as a significant moral value at the level of individual behavior and informal social structure (e.g., where interaction is guided primarily by norms rather than by official regulations, policies, or laws), and as a significant political value, raises a number of important questions. Is social equality one value that can be reflected on both a personal and an informal level, as well as on a political and formal level? What can we learn from social equality on an informal level that could apply formally, or vice versa?

These questions about the subject of social equality also raise challenges about whether we may be justified to intervene in personal relationships—if we aim to achieve social equality, and if this form of social equality is reflected in or determined by personal relationships, then do we not have reason to try to establish equality in personal relationships? Of course, this may not mean that social egalitarians, even if they agree that many personal relationships should be egalitarian, will necessarily promote intervention all things considered, but it does raise the question of whether the subject of social equality should indeed include informal relations, or whether it need be limited in range in the same way that justice often is.

This can be seen to be a case of asking *which* relationships should be socially equal. This raises not only questions about the application of social equality to a specific subject—informal or personal versus formal or political relationships—but also about the scope of social equality in terms of its application to citizenship or residency in nation states. If social equality is what is owed fellow citizens, or if social equality is constitutive of or necessary for civic

of Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 10–12. Confining justice in this way is not without its critics: see, for example, G. A. Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're so Rich?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 117–147.

friendship,⁹ then what does this imply in terms of our relationships with non-citizens and residents of other nation-states?¹⁰ Can social equality be said to be what we owe all other human beings, or need it be confined to residence or citizenship? Could we justify cosmopolitanism on the basis of social equality?

1.2 The Distinctiveness of Social Equality

An essential part of determining the value and potential significance of social egalitarianism is to indicate how a theory of social equality can be distinguished from other kinds of theories, or how social equality can be distinguished from other significant notions in political philosophy. Social equality overlaps with or shares certain similarities with at least the following: moral equality or equal moral worth; equal respect and concern; recognition and the politics of difference; non-domination; and social justice and distributive equality. Different notions of social equality will have different ways of understanding these similarities, and there is no standard account of either social equality or of these other concepts to which we can refer to explain any distinctions. We will, however, highlight a few potential approaches to determining the distinctiveness of social equality. This is important to address—for social egalitarianism to have major significance it needs to be (somewhat) distinct and cannot merely replicate other claims under a different name; at the least, it needs to provide a different perspective even if it deals with concepts and claims substantially similar to those dealt with by many theories of justice for example.

While social egalitarians often relate social equality to equal moral worth or to what it means to treat people with respect and concern, they do not *equate* social equality with these other forms of equality. Many distributive egalitarians (or prioritarrians) follow on from what they see as a foundational claim (or basic intuition) that people are equals and should be treated as such, to providing distributive principles that they claim are an expression of this fundamental notion of equality.¹¹ Social egalitarians could claim that while social equality may well be an expression of equal moral worth or treating people with respect and concern, it is a substantive ideal in itself that needs to

⁹ Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?”; Elizabeth Anderson, “Justifying the Capabilities Approach to Justice,” in *Measuring Justice Primary Goods and Capabilities*, ed. Harry Brighouse and Ingrid Robeyns (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81–100; Andrew Mason, *Living Together as Equals: The Demands of Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Richard Norman, “The Social Basis of Equality,” *Ratio* 10, no. 3 (1997): 238–252; Rekha Nath, “Equal Standing in the Global Community,” *Monist* 94, no. 4 (2011): 593–614.

¹¹ See, for example, Scheffler’s discussion of this tendency. Samuel Scheffler, “Choice, Circumstance, and the Value of Equality,” *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 4, no. 1 (2005): 5–28.

be fleshed out, and this fleshing out will help to determine which distributive principles are compatible with equality.¹²

Theories of social equality also overlap with many theories of recognition, the politics of difference, and notions of non-domination.¹³ Like advocates of these theories, social egalitarians criticize a distributive paradigm (we discuss this criticism further below) and emphasize the unacceptability of hierarchical relationships, misrecognition, and domination. One could claim that notions of social equality, however, might distinguish themselves, first, by having a broader scope (e.g., by combining concerns about power and domination with concerns about respect, esteem, and recognition); second, by being directly concerned with equality in itself and positioning itself explicitly within the debate on the value of equality; and third, often by offering a particularly liberal egalitarian slant on recognition and domination with influence from John Rawls's justice-as-fairness. This is not to say that a particular theory of social equality *need*, however, make any of these particular claims, but this indicates how social egalitarians could potentially distinguish themselves.

Two of the most significant questions in terms of the distinctiveness of social equality are whether and how this form of equality can be distinguished from justice, or, relatedly, from questions associated with distribution.¹⁴ The rest of this section of the introduction will be dedicated to highlighting a selection of significant aspects associated with the potential distinction between social equality and justice, or social equality and distributive equality.

David Miller has argued particularly influentially for drawing a distinction between equality and justice, claiming that there are two valuable forms of equality, the first, and which is indeed directly related to justice, is distributive equality—at times, justice may require equality in distribution. Social equality, however, is not directly related to justice but rather “identifies a social ideal, the ideal of a society in which people regard and treat one another as equals,

¹² Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?” Samuel Scheffler, “What Is Egalitarianism?” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 31, no. 1 (2003): 5–39; Scheffler, “Choice, Circumstance, and the Value of Equality.”

¹³ For examples, see: on recognition, Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the Postsocialist Condition* (Routledge, 1996); on the politics of difference, Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, 1990); on republicanism, non-domination, and their relationship with social equality, Philip Pettit, *On the People's Terms: A Republican Philosophy of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Fabian Schuppert, “Non-Domination, Non-Alienation and Social Equality: Towards a Republican Understanding of Equality,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* (forthcoming, Winter 2014).

¹⁴ While theories of social justice are often concerned with distribution (of resources or opportunities for welfare, for example), we cannot necessarily equate concerns of justice with concerns about distribution.

in other words a society that is not marked by status divisions such that one can place different people in hierarchically ranked categories, in different classes for instance.”¹⁵ Such a distinction indicates that justice and equality are two separate values implying, for example, that social equality could make moral claims besides, and even in conflict with, the claims made by a theory of justice.¹⁶

While one might disagree with Miller about whether social equality and justice should be seen as separate, one might still accept that Miller has identified an important distinction between concerns of social equality and concerns of distribution. Social egalitarians often distance themselves from an emphasis on distribution as being the primary concern of egalitarianism. While social equality is likely to have significant implications for distribution, many egalitarians insist that social equality cannot be captured foremost according to a description of the distribution of goods or some other relevant currency.¹⁷ Although social equality could be described in distributive terms as something like equality of (the social bases of) status, social egalitarians could still object that the distributive paradigm does not capture a number of pertinent concerns.

First, for example, the moral concern of social equality often presupposes the existence of a relationship; in contrast, distributions can exist even if there are no relationships (such as between the two parts of Derek Parfit’s divided world),¹⁸ but these are irrelevant from the perspective of social equality. Second, social equality or inequality is conveyed through, among other things, attitudes, and evaluations, and their expressions via behavior and institutions, which seem difficult to subsume under a wholly distributive paradigm—at the least, such a paradigm would need to try to make room explicitly for these kinds of phenomena, if indeed it is able to do so. Last, it seems doubtful that what social equality will require can be captured by singular descriptions of distributive patterns as it is likely to make nuanced demands in terms of esteem, power, or social cooperation, which will not be properly characterized by claims that these should (simply) be equalized.

¹⁵ Miller, “Equality and Justice,” 224.

¹⁶ Not all social egalitarians agree. Christian Schemmel, for example, insists that relational egalitarianism should be seen as an ideal of social justice—the problem with inegalitarian relationships is precisely that “they constitute unjust treatment” (Schemmel, “Why Relational Egalitarians Should Care About Distributions,” 366).

¹⁷ Here, Young and Fraser’s criticisms of distributive models of justice can be understood to back up the social egalitarian concern with reducing social equality to distribution: Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*; Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*.

¹⁸ Derek Parfit, “Equality and Priority,” *Ratio* 10, no. 3 (1997): 202–221, at 206.

Emphasizing the discontinuity between distributive and social egalitarianism also functions to indicate how social equality can be used as a basis (1) to criticize the way in which many distributive egalitarians move from a broad notion of equal moral worth or equal respect and concern straight to distributive concerns without fleshing out the ideal of equality that should, arguably, underlie these distributions, and (2) to criticize specific distributive principles or distributions. For example, we could criticize income inequalities on the basis that they create objectionable status differences between the rich and the poor.¹⁹

A particular theory of social justice that is often considered to be in conflict with social equality is luck egalitarianism. This form of egalitarianism can be described as the view that inequalities are fair if they occur due to option luck but are unfair if they are due to brute luck. A number of significant advocates of social equality have criticized luck egalitarianism on the grounds, for example, that it violates respect by treating certain citizens as inferior and that it is disconnected from a more fundamental and valuable form of egalitarianism.²⁰

A further significant aspect of the potential distinction between questions of distribution and social egalitarianism is the relationship between distributive *patterns* and social equality. A primary debate within social justice is whether we really require equality, at least as an ideal that is valuable in itself, or whether some other distributive pattern might not be our ultimate aim, such as, for example, providing the worst off with best possible position, or providing individuals with “enough,” with a sufficient amount. This debate has led many to question whether equality is valuable at all.²¹ Social egalitarians could respond by emphasizing that this debate is too focused on only certain forms of (distributive) equality, in isolation from the social egalitarian commitments that could underlie them. Indeed, we could distinguish at least two ways in which social egalitarians could make claims to establishing the value of equality.

First, although one could point to the many negative consequences of social inequality, social equality can also be seen as constituting a form of equality

¹⁹ See, for example, Miller, “Equality and Justice,” 224–225; T. M. Scanlon, “The Diversity of Objections to Inequality,” in *The Ideal of Equality*, ed. Matthew Clayton and Andrew Williams (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 41–59, at 52.

²⁰ Wolff, “Fairness, Respect, and the Egalitarian Ethos”; Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?” Scheffler, “What Is Egalitarianism?”

²¹ Even an only partially comprehensive set of references here would be too numerous. For early contemporary statements of the sufficientarian, egalitarian, and prioritarian positions see, respectively, Harry Frankfurt, “Equality as a Moral Ideal,” *Ethics* 98, no. 1 (1987): 21–43; Larry S. Temkin, *Inequality* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1993); Parfit, “Equality and Priority.”

that is noninstrumentally valuable or is desirable per se.²² Derek Parfit's influential criticism of telic egalitarianism's commitment to equality as a good in itself is directed at *distributive* equality.²³ While many egalitarians reject Parfit's argument on various grounds, even if we accept Parfit's criticism, social equality, arguably, provides an understanding of equality that seems to justify why we should indeed value equality itself—it seems, at least at first glance, to make more sense to claim that we value equal social relations per se, in contrast to making similar claims about equal distributions. Second, however, social equality could provide *egalitarian* grounds for equal distributions.²⁴ While prioritarists and sufficientarians could indeed promote equality in the distribution of certain social goods, they would argue that the reasons why we should prefer these distributions are actually ultimately *inegalitarian*. For example, we may still prefer an equal distribution of goods if our ultimate aim is to achieve the best possible opportunities for welfare for the worst off, and not equality per se.

However, a number of egalitarians have pointed out that there seem to be a range of reasons why we might prefer equal distributions of at least certain kinds of goods, and although some of these, such as a concern for the absolute position of the worst off, are not egalitarian, a number of them, including reasons that correspond to social equality, are indeed egalitarian. So, for example, when we are concerned that inequalities in social goods lead to “stigmatizing differences in status, whereby the badly off feel like, and are treated as, inferiors. . . [or they create] objectionable relations of power and domination” we have egalitarian reasons, specifically, *socially egalitarian reasons*, to value distributive equality.²⁵

Whether social equality does indeed demand distributive equality, however, needs further critical assessment. Social equality has been used as the basis to argue for particular distributive schemes, such as a demanding form of equality of opportunity²⁶ or a sufficient set of central capabilities to enable citizens to function as social equals, for example.²⁷ Different notions of social equality are likely to engender different patterns of distribution. It may also be the case that

²² For example, Norman, “The Social Basis of Equality”; Anderson, “Equality”. Also consider Fourie's discussion of the value of equality: Carina Fourie, “What Is Social Equality? An Analysis of Status Equality as a Strongly Egalitarian Ideal,” *Res Publica* 18, no. 2 (2012): 107–126.

²³ Parfit, “Equality and Priority.”

²⁴ For example, Scanlon, “The Diversity of Objections to Inequality”; Martin O'Neill, “What Should Egalitarians Believe?” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 36, no. 2 (2008): 119–156; Daniel M. Hausman and Matt Sensat Waldren, “Egalitarianism Reconsidered,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 8, no. 4 (2011): 567–586; Jonathan Wolff, “Scanlon on Social and Material Inequality,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 10, no. 4 (2013): 406–425.

²⁵ O'Neill, “What Should Egalitarians Believe?” 126.

²⁶ Schemmel, “Why Relational Egalitarians Should Care About Distributions.”

²⁷ Anderson, “Justifying the Capabilities Approach to Justice,” 83.

even where we agree on a theory of social equality, such a theory could be compatible with more than one pattern of distribution or notion of social justice.

While there is no singular account of social or relational egalitarianism, certain overlapping concerns stand out, such as an emphasis on determining the structure of egalitarian relationships, and not merely on determining distributive patterns of social goods. This introductory section has aimed to highlight some of the significant questions that can be asked of this form of egalitarianism and indicated some of the potential ways in which they can be answered. The essays in this volume will provide unique and more in-depth answers to many of these questions.

2. The Structure of the Volume

Two primary kinds of questions can be distinguished based on the discussion in the previous section: First, what is the nature social equality? Second, what is its relationship with theories of justice and with politics? The next two subsections of the introduction provide a brief description of each of the contributed essays, categorized according to these two major questions. The essays—as they are presented here in the introduction and in the volume as a whole—have been ordered in such a way so as to indicate many of the significant relationships between them.

2.1 The Nature of Social Equality

The essays of the first part of this volume elaborate on the multitude of overlapping but irreducible aspects of which the ideal of social equality is comprised. They investigate the relevance of respect, esteem, love, deliberative practices, power, and domination for conceptions of social equality. In so doing, the contributions aim to flesh out which kinds of relationships, which social hierarchies, and which social practices are compatible with social equality and which are not. Taken together, the essays in the first part of this volume provide a picture of the complex nature of social equality.

In his essay, *Samuel Scheffler* analyzes two objections against the claim that social equality is a distinct form of equality that is not reducible to distributive concerns. First, since social egalitarians accept that in some instances equality supports egalitarian distributions, one can ask whether it makes a difference to adopt a social egalitarian instead of a (merely) distributive egalitarian view. Second, it could be objected that relational concerns, once specified in sufficient detail, would necessarily take a distributive form. By investigating how conditions of joint decision-making in social relations among equals should

be envisaged, Scheffler emphasizes, however, that there is at least one aspect distinguishing relational conceptions from distributive egalitarian views.

Scheffler establishes what he calls the egalitarian deliberative constraint. This constraint, he argues, is a distinctively nondistributive, egalitarian element of social equality. The egalitarian deliberative constraint denotes what the practice of equality as a social ideal should be—a practice of decision-making within which all parties involved show equal respect and concern for each other's comparable interests. Thus, according to the egalitarian deliberative constraint, in relationships of equality, decisions would not specifically aim to make everyone equally well-off in terms of distributive goods. Rather, the egalitarian deliberative constraint requires all parties involved to consider each other's comparable interests as equally important.

The idea that decisions should track an agent's relevant interests is also at the very heart of the republican ideal of non-domination, which *Marie Garrau* and *Cécile Laborde* consider critically in their essay. Garrau and Laborde analyze the role republican non-domination can play in social egalitarianism. Non-domination demands that no one can wield arbitrary power over others. In their essay, Garrau and Laborde argue that the republican understanding of an egalitarian society is committed to and characterizes some version of social egalitarian relationships. In this view, social relations are grounded in mutual social interdependence and vulnerability. From a social egalitarian perspective, to secure status equality these fragile interdependences must be stabilized. First and foremost, this means ensuring that no one can arbitrarily dominate someone else, whether due to inequalities in economic conditions or due to positions of power.

However, according to Garrau and Laborde, it is not only the risk of arbitrary domination that must be a central concern of social egalitarians as individuals are also vulnerable to other social processes. For instance, members of a society are also vulnerable to structural conditions that do not necessarily lead to domination. An individual who loses social connections because of unemployment is vulnerable to social marginalization but not primarily to domination by others. This observation leads Garrau and Laborde to conclude that although the republican concept of non-domination captures some social egalitarian concerns, it cannot be the only overarching concept explaining a republican understanding of a society of equals.

John Baker would certainly agree with this observation since domination as a form of power is only one among several dimensions of social equality. According to Baker, we must distinguish at least three primary, overlapping dimensions of social equality—respect and recognition; love, care, and solidarity; and power. Within each of these dimensions we can analyze how members of society should relate to each other. Against this backdrop, Baker

investigates how these three dimensions might be interpreted according to two different social egalitarian perspectives: liberal egalitarianism and a radically egalitarian alternative. While the liberal egalitarian view is mainly concerned with limiting and justifying inequalities, the radical egalitarian view aims at eliminating inequalities as much as possible.

For example, within the domain of respect and recognition, Baker points out that liberal egalitarians tend to understand social inequality according to violations of respect, while considering inequalities in esteem to be unobjectionable. Radical egalitarians by contrast would indeed be concerned about inequalities in social status based on esteem. From a radical egalitarian perspective, an important objective would be to get to a point where esteem is nearly equal in society.

Carina Fourie agrees that inequalities of esteem should be of concern. In her essay, Fourie aims to determine when differences in social status based on esteem might be more or less acceptable from a social egalitarian point of view. She argues that social egalitarians should neither simply dismiss inequalities of esteem as irrelevant, nor condemn them outright. The normative problem underlying inequalities of esteem, she claims, is often really a problem of disrespect and thus not a problem of esteem per se. However, she finds that even when they are not associated with disrespect, inequalities of esteem may still be morally objectionable as they can make persons reasonably feel inferior or they can interfere with civic friendship. Social egalitarians, she argues, thus have reason to reduce or eliminate (certain) hierarchies of esteem and to reduce the damage that they do.

Fourie identifies seven morally relevant factors that social egalitarians could take into account when assessing hierarchies of social status based on esteem in order to determine which of these hierarchies may be more or less problematic. Among these factors are the grounds for according esteem, the pervasiveness of hierarchies of esteem, and whether or not inequalities of esteem are institutionally backed.

All of the contributions in this first part of the volume concern which social structures and relationships are compatible with social equality. This is also the topic of *Fabian Schuppert's* essay. However, while the chapters introduced thus far are more concerned with identifying particular features of the structure of egalitarian and inegalitarian relationships, Schuppert analyzes three concrete kinds of social relationships, namely manager–worker relationships, rich–poor relationships, and gender(ed) relationships. According to Schuppert, social egalitarians must engage in a detailed analysis of concrete relationships not only to show under what conditions they are compatible with social equality but also to understand better the complex and demanding nature of social equality itself.

For example, since manager–worker relationships are significant for most individuals in their everyday lives, Schuppert argues that inequalities in decision-making power should be diminished as much as possible. To do so, what must be secured are social structures and conditions of non-domination that allow workers to effectively voice and defend their relevant interests. What is needed, therefore, is for hierarchical structures and large differences in power to be democratized in the workplace. In the case of rich–poor relationships, social egalitarians have to be aware of the complex interrelation between inequalities of wealth and their effects. Inequality in wealth can lead to relative deprivation, structural discrimination, and objectionable inequalities of esteem, all of which tend to undermine status equality.

Inequalities in wealth are often clearly also concerns of distributive equality and of social justice. Furthermore, the inequalities in respect, esteem, and power discussed in this part of the volume, as at times indicated by the contributors here, may be caused by or in turn may contribute to injustice and to inequalities in the distribution of social goods. Using a broad sense of distribution and what it is that can be distributed, we could arguably even claim that these social inequalities are maldistributions of the social bases of important goods such as respect and esteem. In this sense, a theme that more or less implicitly runs through many of the essays in this part of the volume is how social equality relates to justice and what the distributive implications of social egalitarianism could be. This is an explicit aspect of the second theme of the volume.

2.2 The Relationship between Equality, Justice, and Politics

The chapters in the second part of this volume engage in-depth with several important questions, including: What is the relationship between the concept of social equality and justice? What is the subject and range of social equality? What is the scope of social equality? What is the politics of social equality? While many of these issues were already more or less implicitly raised by the essays in the first part of this volume, the contributions in the second part of the volume aim to flesh out these aspects and to provide distinctly social egalitarian answers to the abovementioned questions.

The first few contributions in this second part of the volume offer different accounts of the exact relationship between social equality and social justice, investigating the question of whether social equality is part of the idea of justice or whether social equality actually goes beyond the realm of justice. No matter on which side of this debate one stands, social egalitarians must devise clear criteria and norms for assessing the status of certain relationships and

for determining whether the issues identified by social egalitarians are necessarily concerns from the viewpoint of justice. However, to determine whether a certain state of affairs, or a certain action, (a) violates social equality and (b) represents a case of injustice, is often a difficult task.

In his essay, *Andrew Mason* offers a detailed analysis of four instances in which an agent A does not seem to treat another agent B as a social equal. As Mason argues, while we might find all four instances morally problematic, there exist good reasons to believe that A's actions should not be considered unjust. According to Mason, then, not all social inequalities are a matter of (in)justice. For example, if a person decides out of prejudice against a particular shop owner to shop at a different store justice might not have been violated, even if we find it morally problematic to have this prejudice and to act on it.

However, just because we do not consider an isolated instance of a certain action a case of injustice does not mean that the same action—seen in a wider context—cannot become a matter of injustice. As Mason observes, our deontic assessment of any given act also depends on the circumstances in which we operate. Thus, in cases of background injustice, such as unequal opportunities to occupy positions of social esteem, or structural practices of social discrimination, unequal treatment of others, which might otherwise be considered merely morally dubious, can become part of an ongoing societal practice of injustice.

Generally speaking, it seems that we can distinguish at least two different conceptualizations of social equality and its relation to justice: on the one hand, those theories that hold that social equality is justice based, which is the term *Christian Schemmel* uses, or directly justice connected, and on the other hand, those theories that see social equality as partially distinct from justice. In the terminology of Schemmel's essay, which offers us a typology of social egalitarianisms, this gives us two broad camps: justice-based relational egalitarianism and pluralist social egalitarians. Defenders of justice-based relational egalitarianism have a somewhat narrower conception of social equality than pluralist social egalitarians, who hold that the idea of social equality is of independent value above and beyond justice.

Schemmel draws out possible implications of subscribing to these different accounts of social equality and their respective ranges. Accordingly, justice-based relational egalitarianism limits the range of social equality to issues of justice, which means that social equality is primarily about emphasizing the sometimes neglected social-relational side of justice, whereas pluralist social egalitarianism argues for social equality as an autonomous value that is only partially tracked by principles of justice. Following this typology, Mason's account of social equality that claims that not all violations of social equality are necessarily unjust presents a case of pluralist social egalitarianism. While

Schemmel does not aim to provide a full defense of justice-based relational egalitarianism, he argues that this view may be able to object to inegalitarian norms of social status while avoiding the perfectionism of pluralist social egalitarianism.

In his essay, *Stefan Gosepath*, investigates the grounds of social equality within a broader attempt to track the idea of distributive equality back to the idea of moral equality, which for him is tightly connected to social equality. On Gosepath's reading social equality does not provide us with a distinctive normative vision other than the idea of equal basic respect and entitlement. In this way, social equality is for Gosepath simply part of the justification for taking a prima facie distributive egalitarian outlook. Gosepath calls this distributive egalitarian outlook "the presumption of equality". It holds that in the absence of any overruling reasons, strict distributive equality should be our default position. The reason for this is people's basic social equality, which in turn is tracked back to people's basic moral equality. Gosepath thus offers an alternative account of the grounds of social equality and how to cash out the ideal of social equality in distributive terms.

In her essay, *Rekha Nath* also addresses the question of the grounds for social equality in an attempt to specify the exact scope of social equality. Nath links recent social egalitarian accounts with the wider questions of what grounds trigger the duties and responsibilities associated with social equality and whether the ensuing scope of social equality is limited to members of one society, or whether social equality is—at least potentially—global in scope. Nath argues that the principle of social equality is triggered once people reach a certain level of interconnection with each other. Since these connections can easily go beyond established borders and boundaries, the scope of social equality is unlimited in theory. This conclusion might, of course, prove challenging for all those theorists, who seem to be treating the idea of social equality as one that speaks to the way in which members of *one society* should relate to each other.

If we follow Nath in assuming that social equality is indeed (at least potentially) global in scope, social egalitarianism turns into a demanding account of what global relations should be like. On such a reading of social equality, social egalitarians have good reasons to join cosmopolitan theorists of global justice in their fight against massive differences in wealth and power across countries. This prompts the question: what would a social egalitarian politics look like?

According to *Jonathan Wolff's* essay, social equality might indeed be best suited to identify and challenge instances of gross unjust inequality. In fact, framing the debate on social equality around clearly discernible ideas of justice might be considered a case of using the wrong lens, since—on Wolff's reading—most social egalitarians seem to be first and foremost concerned

with a range of unacceptable social inequalities, which need to be overcome. Wolff therefore poses the question of whether the social egalitarian project is not so much about developing an alternative account of what egalitarianism is and how it relates to ideals of justice but rather an exercise in applied political theory that aims to develop an effective tool for identifying and overcoming existing harmful social inequalities.

Wolff's argument provides us with a possible account of what a social egalitarian politics could look like, by identifying the situation of "benefit cheats" as a case of manifest injustice. While many of the contributions to this volume touch on the politics of social equality more or less implicitly, the relationship between social egalitarian theory and its practical politics certainly remains undertheorized. Fleshing out the politics of social egalitarianism seems a key issue, though, since social egalitarian theory encourages us to reconsider many so-called informal and personal relationships that are often thought to lie outside the purview of justice and state regulation. If social egalitarians are right in claiming that many hierarchies of esteem and inequalitarian personal relationships are morally objectionable, we should also consider the question of what we can do about it and whose responsibility it is (if anybody's) to regulate such relationships.

In this introduction, our aims were to contextualize the contributions to this volume within the wider debate on social equality and to highlight the key questions that social and relational egalitarians care about. In fleshing out possible answers to these questions, this edited volume helps not only to clarify the nature of social equality and its relation to justice and politics but also to contribute to the further development of the egalitarian project overall.

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