

FOUR KINDS OF EQUALITY

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MY MAIN TASK here will be to distinguish, not four doctrines of equality, but four sorts of doctrine, the first constituting contentions about what actually *is* the case, the other three prescribing what ideally *ought* to be. But in bringing out the connections and, more important, the lack of connections between these four sorts of egalitarianism, I shall also indicate where there is a promise of support for, or a threat to, liberty.

EQUALITY IN POTENTIAL

The first of these four refers usually to potentialities, which are then said or assumed to be the same, or at any rate equal, in the beginning. But, particularly in interpreting material presented by professing social scientists, we need to notice that there are parallel doctrines about the equality of all cultures or subcultures, and especially about the equal adequacy of all languages or dialects.¹

In earlier days the typical claim was that all individual human beings start with equal potentialities, although, to be fair, we also need to notice that most spokespersons have been willing, if not always eager, to concede the existence of relatively minute minorities of both the quite exceptionally handicapped and the extraordinarily well-endowed. In seeking a specimen of the typical claim, incautiously unqualified, there is no call to hark back so far as the France of the later 1700s. For it appears that—in those not so distant days when you could have your Model T in any color you liked, just so long as black was your beautiful—the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* laid it on the line: “at birth human infants, regardless of heredity, are as equal as Fords.”²

In our own later, more sociologically minded and collectivist times, it is common to assert, or rather to assume: not a person-to-person equality between individuals, but an average equality between groups. Indeed, it appears to be among professing social scientists the established norm, not the deviant exception, to offer evidence of average differences in the achievement of the offspring

of various social and racial classes as by itself sufficient to show corresponding inequalities of average opportunity—a form of argument that quietly takes for granted the absence between members and the offspring of members of the classes thus compared of any relevant antecedent average differences, whether purely genetic or partly or wholly conditioned by the previous environment. Insofar as this assumption is completely general, made about absolutely any classes (quite regardless of the criteria by which their membership is to be specified) then, it should be immediately obvious, it necessarily requires, or collapses into, the original contention that all the individuals concerned are in all relevant aspects themselves equal one to another.

As an example of the assertion of a would-be factual average equality, consider what the U.S. Department of Labor made so bold as to rule in 1965: “Intelligence potential is distributed among Negro infants in the same proportion and pattern as among Icelanders or Chinese, or any other groups. . . . There is absolutely no question of any genetic differential.” For the same sort of equality—not stated, but assumed to obtain between socially as opposed to racially stipulated classes—take the following much too quick movement of thought. It is one that became wearisomely familiar in Britain during the late great crusade to destroy, at least within the public system, all grammar (selective) as opposed to comprehensive (neighborhood) schools. With rasping indignation we were first told that, for instance, in 1973, 59 percent of the children in grammar schools came from “white-collar” homes, although children from such homes constituted only 38 percent of the relevant population cohorts, or that in the period 1968-69 only 28 percent of university students were sons or daughters of manual workers, whereas 60 percent of the working population in that year were manually employed. Confronted with figures of this kind we were expected to conclude, forthwith and without any further reason given, that such findings “rightly brought into doubt the 11-plus examination and the tripartite education system. . . which results from it.”³

Let us here discount the obvious trades union, job-protection interest that professional social scientists are bound to have in maximizing the scope and importance of environmental as against genetic determination: I have already had my say about this elsewhere.⁴ We can certainly say now that the chief reason for insisting, in the teeth of evidence, that there actually *is* some general equality

of potentiality, is the belief that this is necessarily presupposed by cherished prescriptions for what ideally *ought* to be. There are even those, including some paid to know better, who appear to construe the claim "that all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence, as not merely presupposing but directly constituting the contention that "at birth human infants, regardless of heredity, are as equal as Fords." A second glance at the text reveals that Mr. Jefferson, not unaware of his own egregious talents, glossed this crucial clause as a claim not of fact but of right: "that they are endowed . . . with certain unalienable rights."

This is not, I trust, an occasion when it has to be argued yet again that Hume's Law is, because necessarily true, true—that is, that no purely neutral and detached description of what it is supposed actually *is* the case can by itself entail any committed prescription of what ideally *ought* to be. It is nevertheless relevant to point out here that this principle—so offensive, it seems, to many of our contemporary radicals—generates one of the two independently decisive reasons why immoral conclusions about the propriety of giving advantages or disadvantages to individuals upon grounds of racial group membership cannot validly be deduced from premises stating only that certain racial groups are on average in their natural endowments either superior or inferior to other racial groups. (The second independently decisive reason is that nothing whatever about the particular characteristics of any one particular member of any group follows from any general statement about the average of that group: you may be either a dwarf or a giant or neither and yet still happen to belong to some group that is on average either very tall or very short or neither.)

Hume's Law, however, covers only logical presupposition, logical incompatibility, and entailment. It still leaves open the possibilities of both weaker connections and more tractable conflicts. For instance: although there would be no contradiction in believing in the enormous importance of political liberty while still conceding to B. F. Skinner that by nature we are all the creatures of largely impersonal external forces, your position could not but be uncomfortable. Again, there is no formal contradiction between this commitment to the value of political liberty and an admission that at birth all human beings are substantially identical. Nevertheless, the fact, if it were a fact, could scarcely fail to rob that ideal of much of its charm.

DEMOCRATIC EQUALITY

The first of our three different ideals of equality is often seen as a secularized version of something thought to be common to all the three main traditions of Mosaic theism: the doctrine that all souls are of equal value in the eyes of God. It was this democratic equality that was, very rightly, being demanded and conceded when in 1964 the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a sentence for contempt against Mary Hamilton, a black. She had refused to answer the public prosecutor of Alabama when he called her Mary and not, as he would have had she been white, Miss Hamilton.⁵

The general principle of which this was one particular application is best approached through Kant on "The Formula of the End in Itself." After taking "rational nature"—or, as we should be more likely to say, personality—as "something *whose existence has in itself an absolute value*," his Categorical Imperative becomes: "*Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.*"⁶

We cannot, of course, accept Kant's formulations. Yet they do have a large part of the heart of the matter in them. One sufficient reason why they cannot be accepted as they stand was urged by an early, admiring critic. It is, strictly, incoherent to speak of "ends in themselves." There can no more be "ends in themselves" unrelated to the person whose ends they are than there can be sisters in themselves, unrelated to any siblings of whom they are the sisters.⁷ But it remains that Kant was seized of the crucial importance of the facts: that we are all able to, and cannot but, form ends for ourselves and that, in giving to ourselves or to others our reasons for acting thus but not thus, we are, however irrational those reasons, rational beings.

From those surely defining truths about our human nature, nothing can be immediately deduced about how such creatures as we ought to treat one another. However, to borrow another characteristic concept from Kant, "as legislating members of the Kingdom of Ends," we ourselves can lay it down that all such rational agents are to be respected in their pursuit of their own chosen ends, or, in favorite words of a much more recent generation, their doings of their own things. Indeed, and the true heart of the matter, we cannot avoid making this universal and a quasi-legislative claim if we once say or assume that, being such agents, we ourselves possess these moral rights.⁸

The secret is that the notion of reciprocity is essential to that of a moral if not of a legal right. So, if people are implicitly or explicitly to presuppose that they themselves, when they are doing no harm to others, are not merely able but entitled to act without interference, then it follows necessarily from this, their own presupposition, that all other similar agents must possess these same "normative resources."⁹ Wherever I claim that I have a moral right—indicating, as I must, the ground of that claim—there I necessarily allow, by that token, to everyone else who satisfies the same condition that same moral right.¹⁰

The notion of equality here enters essentially, because no one can consistently claim such universal human rights for himself except insofar as he at the same time concedes to others the same rights, the same liberties. The content of such rights cannot but in consequence be the same for all. For the universal human rights and liberties of one person must end when, and only when, these would conflict with another person's corresponding rights and liberties. The 1945 Turkish constitution provides an agreeably unhackneyed illustration: "Every Turk is born free and lives free. He has liberty to do anything which does not harm other persons. The natural right of the individual to liberty is limited only by the liberties enjoyed by his fellow citizens." The practice presents every kind of problem. The principle is luminous.

Our first ideal of equality, therefore, does not in any way threaten liberty. Instead, it imperatively requires the maximum, equally for all. It also, surely, requires some minimum of what too many people nowadays simply and wrongly identify with liberty—democracy. It demands, that is to say, at least the permanent possibility of in due season voting the scoundrels out, which is, I think, the substantial cash value of talk of government by consent. This demand is not based on any false and silly doctrine that majorities are always or usually right. Collections of potentially rational agents can be in their decisions as prejudiced, ill-informed, perverse, and—in a word—(actually) irrational as their individual members! The point, rather, is precisely that the decisions should be their decisions. This just is what it is to respect people as choosers and pursuers of their own ends. It was put, simply yet magnificently, by the russet-coated Colonel Rainborough during the Putney Debates on the New Model Army: "Really I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he; and therefore truly, Sir, I think it is clear, that every man that is

to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do believe that the poorest man in England is not at all bound to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under."¹¹

Besides some minimum of consent to government, the same ideal clearly calls for limitations on what government does. Since the object is equal liberty for all, and the maximum for everyone, it cannot accept the doctrine of total popular sovereignty—that anything and everything goes, provided only that it is supported by a majority. It was indeed a main part of the political wisdom of the makers of the U.S. Constitution, dedicated as they were to this ideal, to be almost obsessively aware of the danger that majorities in sovereign assemblies will exploit and oppress minorities and will restrict their liberties.¹² That is why they created, as American conservatives love to say, not a democracy but a republic. That is the reason for most of the entrenchments, above all the entrenchment of the amendments known collectively as the Bill of Rights. It is also the reason why many in Britain who hold to the same ideal have recently begun to debate the idea of writing the previously unwritten constitution or in some other way entrenching a similar Bill of Rights. We speak, with feeling and reason, of the present sovereignty of the House of Commons as elective despotism, adding perhaps that—thanks to an electoral system giving most unequal value to the various votes cast, especially those cast for third-party candidates—no government since World War II has come into office with even the slimmest majority support in the previous general election.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

The second ideal of equality is always called equality of opportunity, although a far better description is “fair and open competition for scarce opportunities.”¹³ This is what was known to the great French Revolution of 1789 as *la carrière ouverte aux talents*, and for most of those revolutionaries it was to be applied primarily, if not perhaps exclusively, to public service appointments. The aim of the exercise always was that the scarce opportunities in question—opportunities to command armies, to become civil servants, or whatever else—should be awarded as prizes to the winners in a fair and open competition—a competition, that is, from which no one is excluded on any irrelevant grounds and in which the

organizers treat the contestants equally and without partisan prejudice. Thus, in Article VI of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* we read: "The law... should be the same to all... and all being equal in its sight, are equally eligible to all honors, places and employments, according to their different abilities, without any other distinction than that created by their virtue and talents" (emphasis added).

That proclamation should make it clear from the beginning that giving a fair and equal chance to all competitors does not mean ensuring that in fact every competitor is as likely to succeed as every other. Organizers are not by the ground rules of natural justice bound either to offset by handicapping or otherwise to neutralize every actual competitive edge making success in fact more likely or even certain. Whereas every advantage can be argued to be, not every advantage can be an unfair advantage. Nor will it do—notwithstanding that nowadays it is all too often done—to construe "treating all potential contestants equally" as "making their actual chances of success equal."

It is a paradoxical truth that the fact that the probabilities of winning are for this lot many times those for that lot, is no proof at all that either had, in the appropriate sense, less than an equal chance. Indeed, if any confrontation is so arranged that all possible alternative outcomes are equiprobable, then what we have must be either a lottery or some other game of chance. In a perfect competition, the winners necessarily have to be the best performers. And, were the outcome in any such perfect competition to turn out to be a dead heat between all the participants, then that would make it impotent to determine the allocation of scarce opportunities—or, indeed, of scarce anything else.

These fundamental points once taken, it becomes obvious that there can be no purchase for the application of this second ideal of equality save where there are among the potential contestants some actual inequalities—actual inequalities that are also allowed to be both relevant and legitimate. This observation cannot, of course, be made to yield any conclusions about which in particular may and which may not be admitted as legitimate or relevant. Yet, it does throw a somewhat sick light on one favorite move in a much-commended article by Bernard Williams. For "The Idea of Equality" contends "that a system of allocation will fall short of equality of opportunity if the allocation of the good in question in fact works out unequally or disproportionately between different sec-

tions of society; if the unsuccessful sections are under a disadvantage which could be removed by further reform or social action."¹⁴

Against the first clause quoted, before the proviso, a single, short, sharp word of objection is at this stage sufficient. It is that the distinction between opportunity and outcome has been collapsed, even by a philosopher, in a manner yet more gross and scandalous. "Surely," that even more scandalous argument went, "we could always define 'real chance' in such a way that if two members of a society have the same real chance to achieve equality of economic welfare, then their actual economic welfare level will be the same."¹⁵ Yes indeed, we cannot but agree, nothing easier; nor more arbitrary; nor more obscurantist.

The fresh interest in this Williams contention lies for us in the proviso: "if the unsuccessful sections are under a disadvantage which could be removed by further reform and social action." Without exception, every feature that in fact differentiates one identifiable human being from another must in principle, if not yet—or ever—in practice, be alterable. Whatever is in fact determined by the environment theoretically could be altered by changing that. With appropriate alterations, the same applies to genetic constitutions and to their results. Science fiction can easily imagine a society in which all the babies come identical, as products of cloning. It is a situation that, as has been remarked previously, too many professing social scientists and practicing social engineers are inclined to assume obtains already. As for an identity of upbringing, visionaries from Plato onward have dreamed, or had nightmares, of a world in which all (or at least all members of one special caste) would immediately from birth be raised in one single uniform environment.

Williams himself proceeds: "In these circumstances, where everything about a person is controllable, equality of opportunity and absolute equality seems to coincide; and this itself illustrates something about the notion of equality of opportunity."¹⁶ Certainly, after the semicolon, the final statement is true. Yet what the speculation illustrates is, not the ultimate coincidence of equality of opportunity with absolute equality (otherwise, equality of outcome or equality of condition), but the truth of what was being urged earlier about the purchase needed for any application of our second ideal—that there have to be actual competitive edges not put down as unfair.

If there are to be scarce opportunities, and if these are to go to

the winners of competitions, then some competitors have to enjoy competitive advantages and some have to suffer competitive disadvantages; furthermore, some of these advantages and disadvantages have to be authentically and legitimately theirs. So the truth is not that these two ideals must in the end coincide but that they are, on the contrary, ultimately incompatible. This is so because, insofar as the outcomes are to be made the same for all regardless, there can be not only no incentive to compete but no scarce opportunities for which to struggle. The hypothesis requires that the attractions of anything that is inherently and incorrigibly scarce must be artificially offset by corresponding repulsions. Otherwise, there will emerge or remain that most obvious and infamous of evils, inequality.

The extent of the threat to liberty from this second ideal of equality depends both upon the stage or stages in the human life-cycle at which the various recommended competitions for scarce opportunities are to be held and upon which possible competitive advantages it is proposed to nullify or prevent "by further reform or social action." Such recommendations and proposals have in fact covered almost all the possibilities between two extremes. Suppose, at one end of the scale, that it is proposed, in a nonsocialist country, that all but only public appointments must by law be filled by open and general competition—without any restricting of candidacies to those of some particular parentage, race, or region. Suppose, too, that the actual competitors, who will (except in the case of competitions for educational opportunities) presumably be at least into their teens if not fully adult, troop up to the start-line. Suppose, finally, that every capacity or incapacity, every disposition or indisposition, that could in fact further or impede their candidacies is allowed to be legitimately theirs: allowed to be, that is, a part or consequence of "their different abilities. . . created by their virtue and talents." Then I can see no threat here to the liberties demanded by the first ideal of equality. In these understandings, at any rate, there is no inconsistency between the first and the second elements in the triune motto of the successive French republics.

But, if we were to follow Williams to the opposite end of the scale, it would be an altogether different story. For, proceeding from the first passage quoted, he goes on to argue "that one is not really offering equality of opportunity to Smith and Jones if one contents oneself with applying the same criteria to Smith as affected by favourable conditions and to Jones as affected by un-

favourable but curable conditions.”¹⁷ So, Williams infers, curable competitive disadvantages—and presumably, by the same token, removable advantages—do not truly characterize or legitimately belong to those actual or potential competitors to whom they—what shall we say?—apply. He therefore delivers an Olympian ruling: “Their identity, for these purposes, does not include their curable environment, which is itself unequal and a contributor of inequality.” Next, referring to his own stunningly high-handed proceedings, he comments: “This abstraction of persons in themselves from unequal environments is a way if not of regarding them as equal, at least of moving recognizably in that direction.”¹⁸

It is only after extending this approach, as consistency demands, to cover also alterable genetic constitutions that Williams begins to display a slight anxiety about the presuppositions thus revealed: “Here we might think that our notion of personal identity itself was beginning to give way; we might well wonder *who were* the people whose advantages were being discussed in this way. . . . if one reached this stage of affairs, the individuals would be regarded as in all respects equal in themselves—for in themselves they would be, as it were, pure subjects or bearers of predicates, everything about them, including their genetic inheritance, being regarded as a fortuitous and changeable characteristic.”¹⁹

I cannot afford to say much more here about this view of the nature of man. I am, however, the less reluctant to refrain since I have pursued the topic elsewhere—with reference not only to Williams but also to John Rawls and Stuart Hampshire.²⁰ What does have to be said is that some view of this sort is in one way or another presupposed by all those who present as the supreme imperative of (social) justice the imposition of what Williams calls “absolute equality” and what we shall be distinguishing as the third of three fundamentally different ideals. Because, their argument has to run, no individual human beings can be either entitled to or responsible for any of their differentiating characteristics, there cannot then be any deserts or entitlements other than whatever necessarily equal rights can be grounded in the essential and defining characteristics of humanity.

We have seen already that to follow Williams to the end would be to eliminate all those competitive advantages or disadvantages that alone make competition at all possible as a method of determining the allocation of what is scarce. It remains only to emphasize what the steps along this road are steps toward: namely, both the aboli-

tion of the family as an institution for the production and upbringing of children, and the removal of all relevant choice in all the periods up till the arrival of the competitors at the start-lines, both from parents and from their offspring. No doubt this is all pretty far removed from either Williams's present intentions or even those of the *enragés* and *ultras* of his party. Nevertheless, the full Williams program just is a program for a most total and, of course, totalitarian transformation. His specifications of perfect competition are, as we have argued, in any case incompatible with the occurrence of any actual competition at all. They also require that all "competitors" (shall we think of them, naughtily, as Cambridge competitors?) be, if not in all respects, then at least in all relevant respects, identical. And how is this to be achieved if not by first producing every successive generation of monozygotic, same-sex siblings, each from its single big-batch cloning, and then insisting, from the moment of perhaps not exactly birth, upon the most rigorously uniform, state-monopolistic, unstreamed, unsettled, comprehensive upbringing? In this, of course, there must be no substantial options anywhere for anyone, lest the consequent choices, if they turned out to be made in different senses, give rise to those most unspeakable and excruciating of evils, diversity and inequality.

ABSOLUTE EQUALITY

The third of our three sorts of ideal was indicated by Williams in speaking of "absolute equality." Since this demands that all goods be distributed equally—all goods, that is, and not necessarily only those that are in some narrow interpretation recognized as economic—it is better characterized as equality of outcome or equality of result. In the later stages of the great French Revolution, aspirations of this kind found their first major activist spokesman in Gracchus Babeuf, the inspirer and leader of *The Conspiracy of the Equals*.²¹ But today, notwithstanding that they appear to have gripped many, if not most, of our political intellectuals, it is remarkable and perhaps significant that it is very rare to find such ideals rationalized and articulated systematically. Indeed, this remarkable fact is one excellent reason for suspecting that this Procrustean and bureaucratic objective of an enforced equality of condition is not so much the disinterested dream of independent well-wishers of the human race as it is the main plank in the justifying

and uniting ideology of “the new class” of its would-be enforcers.²²

At this point someone is likely to protest that I am erecting a strawperson. No one, they will say, actually advocates complete equality, in all directions: scarcely anyone insists that there must be no incentive income differentials whatsoever (only, in real terms, ever fewer and smaller!); while no one at all suggests seriously that the law should enforce sexual equality in the new, but immediately intelligible, second sense of ensuring that everyone is to have as much as everyone else. To this the reply is (and it is a reply that has wider application) that the contention that equality is for you a value, that you cherish it as good in itself irrespective of consequences, is not refuted either by the fact that you are not committed to making people equal in every respect or by the fact that in those respects where you do advocate more, you nevertheless eschew complete equality.

Of these two objections the first may show only that it is equality in some certain directions that is for you the value. You might, for instance, in fact value equality in income or wealth, without your also valuing equality in natural gifts, and in consequence urging that the better-endowed must be taxed in order to provide for the compensation of the less genetically fortunate. So far the advocates of such genetic inheritance taxes have in fact been few: most mentions of ideas of this kind have occurred in satire. But note that those who pick and choose their outcome egalitarianisms need to take a lot of care to ensure that the rationale for their several inclusions or exclusions includes and excludes all and only those dimensions of outcome equality and inequality that they do themselves wish to include or to exclude. I have myself yet to meet any such rationale making halfway plausible provision for the consistent exclusion of all and only what most of our present Procrustean are (at any rate so far) in fact proposing to exclude.

The second objection—that our alleged outcome egalitarians are not advocating a complete and perfect equality—shows at most that for them it is not an infeasible or the sole good. In that case, the reason why they do not advocate it complete and perfect will, presumably, be that they expect always to have to make trade-offs against some other value or values. Consider, for instance, a statement in the final political testament of one widely regarded as the very model of a modern social-democrat: “the argument for more equality is based not on any direct material gain to the poor, but on

the claims of natural and social justice. And the question is: do these claims conflict with the need for incentives?"²³ Or, again, consider David Donnison's devout profession of devotion to "equalizing policies" and his expression of revulsion against any "inequalities of earnings": these, we were told, are tolerable to him only, if at all, where required "to keep the economy moving."²⁴ Donnison, sometime second in command and later successor to Richard Titmuss as professor of social administration at the London School of Economics, appointed to his present rather conspicuously unequal Whitehall job by a Labor Minister of Health and Social Security, had a couple of years earlier been picked by one leading journal of "the new class" as the most suitable spokesperson for its and his ideology of compulsory equalization.²⁵

It is, therefore, altogether wrong to say: "Extremes are not worth discussing. Perfect equality is not conceivable, let alone workable."²⁶ If talk about equality makes sense, then this entails that equality, complete and unqualified, is conceivable. More to the present practical point, wherever equality is a value but not the sole value, extremes cannot but claim our attention. For it is precisely the extremes that the trading off is trading off between.

A second point to get straight is that equality is essentially relative. No egalitarian can be, as such, concerned with anyone's absolute position on any scale of anything. No one is cherishing equality as a value save insofar as the fact that someone has or is going to have something is for them a reason, perhaps *the* reason, why someone else should have either the same or some equivalent—and this regardless of where any of the parties involved either are or will be on any absolute scale. To want someone or everyone either to attain or to be given some specified minimum, or to be in general concerned for the raising of minima, is by no means essentially and necessarily egalitarian. Egalitarianism begins when and only when the aim is to diminish or, we hope, to collapse the gaps between aboves and belows. It is indeed this defining involvement with the relativities rather than (or even at the expense of) the absolutes of value that those of us who are not this kind of egalitarian find so alien and so repulsive in those who are.

One immediate consequence, usually neglected, is that those who do not accept equality as a value are not necessarily, and by that token, lovers of inequality. These dissidents may be, and very often are, rejecting egalitarianism in part because it seems to them perverse to attend above all, as they see it, not to first-order goods

and the maximization thereof, but instead to second-order questions about who has more or less of these than another has. It is, therefore, although understandably tempting, wrong to label all those who do not recognize equality as a value, or who oppose policies premised thereon, inegalitarians. Brian Walden thus lapsed from his normal high standards of fairness and accuracy when he recently described certain dedicated and strenuous opponents of progressive Procrusteanism as "Jacobins of inequality." One might as well argue that anyone repudiating the classical utilitarian thesis that the supreme good is the greatest happiness of the greatest number must be, by that rejection, committed to cherishing as the only alternative the maximum misery of the maximum number.

A second immediate and often overlooked consequence—a consequence far more important and for that reason frequently with malicious intent suppressed or denied—is that Procrustean policies for producing (relative) equalities neither entail nor are entailed by safety-net policies for maintaining or raising (absolute) minima. It surely ought to be, yet apparently is not, obvious that a desire to maintain some (relative or absolute) floor level below which no citizen ever has to fall is neither the same as, nor otherwise necessarily linked with, a desire to fix a ceiling screwed hard down as near as may be to that floor. In fact, of course, as no one venturing to hold or to express opinions on these topics has any business not to know, almost all of us who are opposed to Procrustean state-monopoly provision of health, education, and welfare services are just as firmly committed to safety-net policies, whether in the form of comprehensive, Friedmanite negative income tax schemes, or whether through various continuing state provisions from which eventually and ideally almost everyone would in fact be able and willing to contract out in favor of their own personally preferred private arrangements.

Even when all appropriate allowance has been made for the severity of the temptation to intentional misrepresentation (which must be suffered by persons increasingly aware of their own intellectual and moral bankruptcy) we have still to recognize also that socialists and social-democrats do sometimes find it extremely hard to get hold of these (to others) obvious distinctions. We may well, for instance, dismiss as nothing but a sanctimonious slanderer the publicly prominent Procrustean who wrote to me in a private letter: "It *is* arguable that bad housing, squalor, pollution, ignorance etc.

are 'good'. But unless you are prepared to argue that case you must be an egalitarian" (emphasis and punctuation in original).

But no similar interpretation is possible with the contributors to the recent inquest volume *Labour and Equality*, who were, presumably, addressing primarily their fellow Fabians.²⁷ One after another complains of a betrayal by the last administration of its and their egalitarian objectives, giving as grounds such irrelevant but sobering facts as that there was between 1974 and 1977 an average 7 per cent fall in British standards of living. Yet no one appears eager or even willing to give due discredit for Procrustean achievement to a sadistic and boorish chancellor who began his term by both increasing the higher rates of income tax to record levels and imposing some further, albeit not all the previously threatened, confiscatory taxes on capital. Certainly he did not add to these particular rates and taxes in any of many later budgets. But, since the pound halved in value during his five-year term, just keeping the rates and the thresholds steady in money terms must have produced an equalizing effect increasing step by step with inflation, an effect further supplemented in the years of same-sum rather than percentage inflationary pay increases.

The third main thing to notice about our third ideal of equality is that, for almost all its most prominent enthusiasts, equality of outcome is not a personal ideal to be pursued by individual persuasion and sometimes sacrificial example but a political or administrative policy to be enforced by the full power of an ever growing state machine. This is the reason why I refer to it as Procrustean—an intentionally offensive description that would be quite inept if applied to the self-imposed equalities of some such strictly voluntary organization as an Israeli kibbutz. The same fact carries interesting implications.

In the first place it provides, I believe, the main reason why the Procrustean like to describe their efforts as directed toward the achievement of social justice. (That some explanation is required must occur to anyone who has ever asked himself what other non-social sorts people have it in mind to dismiss in speaking so glibly, and so fashionably, not of justice but of *social* justice; and who has reflected that if all justice is, as it has been traditionally defined to be, a matter of allowing to each his own several and often various deserts and entitlements, then justice scarcely can be construed as demanding the same for all and equal.)

The appeal of this description is that it provides an answer to the

objector who asks by what right the Procrustean is laboring to enforce his ideal upon other people—a challenge that loses none of its force when, as is usually the case, that Procrustean is both rather conspicuously underdeprived and equally conspicuously reluctant to start by imposing his own ideal first upon himself. The answer, if once the description is permitted to pass, is direct and decisive. Everyone must agree that it is the proper business of the public power to enforce justice.

But, like everything else possessing any kind of value or attraction, this move has a price. Its price is the implication that anyone either obtaining or holding more than the going national average (or should it be, what is still at this time very substantially less, the going international average?) is either making or holding on to unjust acquisitions. Indeed he is, not to put too fine a point on it, either stealing or holding on to stolen property. Nor will it do to meet this much too rarely pressed counter-objection with some expression of willingness, when the next socialist chancellor gets into No. 11 Downing Street, to pay his still more steeply progressive and confiscatory taxes.²⁸ Those few prominent Procrusteanes with whom I happen to be acquainted are not (to do them justice!) people who would in any ordinary and undisputed context either steal or even temporarily hang on to stolen property. So I can only interpret their well-sustained refusal to accept the present challenge as a tacit admission of the truth that social justice, construed as either a strict or a modified equality of outcome, is no more truly justice than People's Democracy is truly democracy.

It remains finally to say something about the implications for liberty of this third, Procrustean ideal of equality. The conflict here is irreconcilable and all-pervasive.

The conflict arises directly whenever it is proposed that the state should extort money by force in order to finance suitably uniform and usually state-monopoly provision of services in health, education, welfare, or whatever else. Where my money is thus taken from me, I am thereby deprived of my freedom to allocate that money as I would see fit; and wherever there is monopoly, I am robbed of any chance to choose between rival suppliers. This simple point was well put recently by the sometime holder of an ultra-safe socialist parliamentary seat: "if the social wage bites into the individual's wage... the individual wage earner will lose some of the freedom which he would otherwise have enjoyed... A society in which 50 percent of the gross domestic product is spent by the

state may be healthier, better educated, or more equal than a society in which the state spends only 30 percent of GDP. But it will also be less free, and it is humbug to deny the fact."²⁹

The fundamental conflict arises more indirectly in another way. If and insofar as anyone wants to impose and maintain any sharply defined pattern of distribution (whether fiercely egalitarian or whatever else), he has first to establish a socialist state, in which there are no privately controlled holdings of capital and in which wages, prices, and all other incomes and expenditures are centrally determined. But all theory, and what is by now a very substantial amount of drearily homogeneous experience, shows, first, that the total political and economic centralism of a socialist order is in practice incompatible with the maintenance of the basic liberties definitionally essential to a free and democratic society and hence, second, that economic pluralism is a contingently necessary (but not, of course, a sufficient) condition of political pluralism.

It is, surely, no mere quirk of history that, among all the now very many (as near as makes no matter) fully socialist countries, there is not one where opposition parties are allowed to organize and to contest elections. In Poland, for instance, I have myself heard all too experienced students of political geography ask, "Where is there a socialist democracy?" They give themselves the wry answer, "On the moon."

Certainly the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow is happy to recognize that, in a favorite Soviet phrase, "it is indeed no accident." For in 1971, with their own high hopes for Chile and for France most particularly in mind, they sketched a program for achieving, through "United Front" or "Broad Left" tactics, irreversible Communist domination: "Having once acquired political power, the working class implements the liquidation of the private ownership of the means of production. . . . As a result, under socialism, there remains no ground for the existence of any opposition parties counter-balancing the Communist Party."

That very model of a modern social democrat, the author of that well-nicknamed *Epistle to the Costa Ricans*, made a similar point with equal emphasis: "A mixed economy is essential. . . . complete state collectivism is without question incompatible with liberty and democracy."³⁰ Unfortunately, he gave no indication either there or elsewhere of the point, if any, at which he himself would have to leave a party, and especially high ministerial office in a party, committed by its constitution to "the public ownership of all the means

of production, distribution, and exchange," and a party in practice insisting relentlessly on ever more and never less state ownership and control of everything—except, of course, its own owners, the labor unions. So it is to be presumed that Crosland was, for whatever reasons, at one with

... the virtuous young lady of Kent
Who said that she knew what it meant
When men took her to dine
Gave her cocktails and wine;
She knew what it meant—but she went.

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1. See, for instance, D. Swift, "What Is the Environment?" in K. Richardson and D. Spears, eds., *Race, Culture and Intelligence* (Harmondsworth and Baltimore: Penguin, 1972), p. 156, and P. Trudgill, *Accent, Dialect and School* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), chap. 2. Compare A. G. N. Flew, *Sociology, Equality and Education* (London and New York: Macmillan, Barnes & Noble, 1976).

2. F. A. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics, and the History of Ideas* (London and Chicago: Routledge & Kegan Paul, University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 290.

3. F. Field, *Unequal Britain* (London: Arrow, 1973), p. 17.

4. Flew, *Sociology, Equality and Education*, chap. 4.

5. J. R. Pole, *The Pursuit of Equality in American History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 340-41.

6. I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *The Moral Law*, trans. H. J. Paton (London: Hutchinson, 1948), pp. 90, 91 (emphasis in original).

7. A. Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 95.

8. A. Gewirth, *Moral Rationality* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1972), p. 20.

9. S. Benn, "Human Rights—For Whom and for What?" in E. Kamenka and A. E.-S. Tay, eds., *Human Rights* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), p. 64.

10. A. G. N. Flew, "What Are Rights?" *Georgia Law Review* 13 (1980).

11. C. H. Firth, ed., *The Clarke Papers* (London: Clarendon, for the Camden Society, 1891), vol. 1, p. 301.

12. E. Vieira, "Rights and the American Constitution," *Georgia Law Review* 13 (1980).

13. D. A. Lloyd-Thomas, "Competitive Equality of Opportunity," *Mind* 86 (1977).

14. B. Williams, "The Idea of Equality," in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 245.

15. L. Ericsson, *Justice in the Distribution of Economic Resources* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1976), p. 130 (scare quotes added).

16. Williams, "Idea of Equality," p. 247.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 245-46.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 246-47; emphasis in original.

20. A. G. N. Flew, "Who Are the Equals?" *Philosophia* 9 (1980). An improved version appeared later as chapter 4 in *The Politics of Procrustes* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1981).
21. J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1952), pt. 3.
22. R. Nisbet, "The Fatal Ambivalence," *Encounter*, Dec. 1976. Compare Flew, *Politics of Procrustes*, *passim*.
23. C. A. R. Crosland; *Social Democracy in Europe* (London: Fabian Society, 1975), p. 6.
24. D. Donnison, *Observer*, Feb. 12, 1978.
25. *New Society*, Nov. 20, 1975.
26. H. Stretton, *Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
27. P. Townsend and N. Bosanquet, *Labour and Equality: A Fabian Study of Labour in Power, 1974-79* (London: Heinemann, 1980).
28. Stretton, *Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment*, p. vii.
29. H. Marquand, "Inquest on a Movement," *Encounter*, July 1979, p. 10. For a further spelling out, compare A. Seldon, *Charge* (London: Temple Smith, 1977), and R. Harris and A. Seldon, *Over-ruled on Welfare* (London: Institute for Economic Affairs, 1979). For social democracy in its fullest, Swedish development, see P. Huntford, *The New Totalitarians* (London: Allen Lane, 1971).
30. Crosland, *Social Democracy in Europe*, p. 2.