

Geoffrey Cupit

Three Ways to Value Equality

Introduction

There is much inequality in the world — inequalities of wealth, political power, health care and life-span, educational and cultural opportunities, and so on. Some of these inequalities are shared around so that they tend to cancel out, but to a large degree this is not so, and some people are much better off overall than others. This is manifest on any plausible way of measuring how well off people are overall.

The issue I want to consider is whether this overall inequality matters? Is it objectionable? It may be asked why we should focus on overall inequality, rather than on specific inequalities. The answer is that, providing it makes sense to talk of overall equality and inequality — and I will assume it does — then, if equality is indeed an ideal, it seems reasonable to suppose that it is *overall* equality that is that ideal. If inequalities really did cancel out, then, as far as equality is concerned, it would seem that specific inequalities would not matter.

To be concerned about inequality² is to be concerned about how well off one person is compared to another: it is to be concerned about *comparative* or *relative* well being. A desire for equality, then, is to be distinguished from a desire that those who are badly off (absolutely) be better off (absolutely). This distinction is manifest when the two come apart, as when (the figures representing overall well being) we have a choice between:

Option A	Option B
Alan 1	Alan 1
Beth 1	Beth 2

[1] Thus I will assume that commensurability is not a problem, and that there is some 'currency' in which the required comparisons can be made. What that currency might be I shall not consider.

[2] Unless the context indicates otherwise, I will use 'equality' and 'inequality' to refer to *overall* equality and inequality.

My concern will be with equality, which I will take to be distinct from how well or badly (absolutely) those who do less well do, and thus from such issues as the appropriate priority (if any) to be given to improving the position of the worst off.

How might equality be defended? It is useful to distinguish between two types of argument for equality: those that assert that equality is a good — that it has value — and those that do not. I want to focus here exclusively on the former — that is, on what we may call the teleological arguments for equality.³ It is plausible to suppose that not all arguments for equality are teleological arguments. An argument which seems best understood as a non-teleological argument is: all people are equal (in some fundamental sense); in order for people to have been treated as equals, (significant) overall inequalities must be avoided; hence overall (approximate) equality is required if no one is to have been treated inappropriately (wronged). This argument focuses on the importance of *treating* appropriately. It seems that it does not — or need not — make the claim that equality is a good, and to the extent that this is so it is an example of the type of argument for equality that I shall not consider here.⁴

The central issue faced by any teleological argument for equality is: Why think equality has value?⁵ It might be tempting simply to assert that equality just is valuable — and perhaps to claim that, since at some point all justifications come to an end, egalitarians are as free to assert the value of equality as others are to assert their values. But the claim that equality is itself valuable has an intuitive implausibility, and this implausibility places a burden of proof on anyone who wishes to assert it.

The implausibility of simply asserting that equality is a value is clear if we consider the question: Who is equality good for? In the case we considered earlier, although Option A is better as far as equality is concerned, it may be said that there is no respect in which it is better for either Alan or Beth. But if there is no respect in which it is better for either

[3] Here I follow the distinction between telic or teleological, and deontic or deontological, arguments for equality drawn by Parfit (1991). See also McKerlie (1996).

[4] For discussion of the deontological argument see McKerlie (1996), especially pp. 280-5. I have discussed some of the difficulties associated with the claim that people are equals, and attempted to argue that people ought to be treated as equals, not because they are equals but because they are individuals, in Cupit (2000).

[5] There are other issues. Even if we accept that something is valuable we may still ask why this gives us reason to bring it about, and, in particular, to maximize it. In this paper I focus on equality, and I leave aside, therefore, challenges to teleological arguments in general.

(or for anyone else), how can it be in any respect better? How can something be valuable if there is no one it is valuable for? Wouldn't it be fanatical — crazy — to sacrifice anyone's interests to pursue an end that is in the interests of no one?

Now there may be a satisfactory reply to this question. Perhaps there are impersonal values — things that are valuable without being valuable for anyone. Or perhaps inequality is always bad for those who have less.⁶ Or perhaps equality is in some way good for people without there being any specific individual for whom it is good on any specific occasion. Or perhaps there is some other way to deal with this problem. Exactly how this issue is to be addressed seems best left until we understand why equality is valuable — if indeed it is. At some point, however, this issue must be faced; it cannot simply be ignored and thus we cannot simply assert that equality is a value.

How might it be argued that equality is a value? The kind of argument that may be given depends on the kind of value equality is taken to be. It is a commonplace to distinguish two ways in which something might be of value: valuable as a means (or instrumentally valuable), and valuable as an end. How are these notions to be understood? In its purest form, to be valuable as a means — *merely* as a means — is to be valuable by virtue of being conducive to some (valued) end, the means being distinct and separate from the end. By contrast, to value something (exclusively) as an end is to value it for its own sake — not for its impact or effect on anything else. It is to hold that something is valuable when considered separately, distinctly, and independently.

Understanding valuable as a means and valuable as an end in these ways leaves room for a third way of being valuable: valuable not independently, but by virtue of connections to other values, those connections not being merely instrumental. To think something valuable in this way is to suppose that it has value (when it does) by virtue of its having a place in a network of (sometime) values. I shall refer to these different *ways* of *being* valuable as 'instrumental value', 'independent value', and 'connected value' respectively. The term 'connected value' deliberately leaves open the nature of the connection to other values. To use a more *specific* term — 'interdependent', 'constituent', 'organic' — would be to presuppose a relation that might exist in some cases but not in all. Could overall equality be valuable in any of these three ways? I want to consider these three possibilities in turn.

[6] Cf. '... since what is bad about inequality is its unfairness, inequality is clearly a bad *suffered* by individuals' (Broome, 1991, p. 199).

Equality as an Instrumental Value

Many arguments against specific inequalities are instrumental in form. Inequalities of wealth are said to undermine fellowship – and without fellowship and a sense of community goes stability, peace, and all that peace makes possible. Without fellowship the life of man is likely to be not only 'solitary' but 'poor, nasty, brutish and short'. *Can* we argue in a similar way against overall inequality?

It might be said that instrumental arguments – relying not on conceptual connections but on effects achieved through complex social and psychological processes – are, by their nature, uncertain and at best contingent. This may be so. How far it matters, however, depends on what our *interests* are. If our interests are philosophical and concern theories of value, instrumental arguments may be of little interest. If, however, we simply wish to know whether equality^y is valuable, *we* might not much *care* whether the value is contingent or necessary. If, for all practical purposes, inequality really does undermine fellowship, community, peace, and all that requires peace, then we might say that that is good reason for us to value equality – even if there are possible worlds in which the contingent connections in question do not hold. Thus, perhaps, *we* should not dismiss instrumental arguments for equality merely on the grounds that they can do no more than show equality to be a contingent value. Perhaps being a contingent value is enough.

Nevertheless there are reasons to doubt that instrumental considerations can provide good grounds for thinking overall equality valuable. In setting out these reasons I will focus on the argument for equality from fellowship (or community) since this seems a particularly^y plausible form of the instrumental argument.

One way to cast doubt on the claim that equality is instrumental to some valuable end is to insist that it really does have *to be inequality* that is detrimental to the end, and not some feature that may often be found with inequality but is distinguishable from it. For example, it is often the case that when there is inequality, someone has taken more than their share and has done well at the expense of others. In the classic example, a cake is divided between n individuals, each of whom has the same claim to the cake, and one takes a share larger than $1/n^{\text{th}}$. Now it is hard to imagine how such behaviour could not be damaging to fellowship and

[7] In a very early (1954) party political television broadcast for the British Labour Party, Attlee summed up what his party had to offer in these words: 'Well, you know, there's nothing better than the motto that *we have in* this Borough [Walthamstow], by our greatest citizen, William Morris — 'Fellowship is Life' —we believe in the kind of society where we've fellowship for all. You can't get *that* in a totalitarian society, you can't get that while there's grave inequalities in wealth. That is the hope of the world, and we offer fellowship in our own country and fellowship with all other countries' (Quoted in Harris, 1984.)

community. But this does not show that *inequality* undermines fellowship: fellowship may require that people do not take more than their share or profit at the expense of others, but inequality may not have these accompaniments. If you are better off than me, and could be even better off without affecting me, then your being even better off, though it increases inequality between us, may not constitute taking more than your share, nor being better off at my expense.

The question, then, is whether *inequality* is detrimental to fellowship? Is there any reason to suppose that it is? Rawls identifies 'a natural meaning of fraternity' as 'the idea of not wanting to have greater advantages unless this is to the benefit of those who are less well off', and suggests that family members 'commonly do not wish to gain unless they can do so in ways that further the interests of the rest' (Rawls, 1971, p. 105). Now this allows, of course, that some increases in inequality are consistent with fraternity — increases where those who are worse off do better as a consequence. But this, it might be said, is because in this case the disvalue of the additional inequality is offset by the value of the improvement in the position of those who have less. But what of cases where those who do less well do not benefit from an increase in inequality? Rawls' remarks suggest that such inequalities are detrimental to fellowship. But is even this true?

We may agree that to have a sense of fellowship is to hope that among the ways in which we can improve our own lot will be ways that improve the lot of our fellows; and not to choose those ways when they are available is detrimental to fellowship. Fellowship means being concerned not just about oneself: it means caring about others' interests, loving one's neighbour or fellow. But the less fortunate may love too. And a part of fellowship, surely, is delighting in the good fortune of others — including those better off than ourselves. If a more fortunate member of one's family has the prospect of doing even better (at no one else's expense), would it not be detrimental to fellowship to want her or him to forego that prospect? If fellowship really did require that where some must remain in a state of deprivation, all must, then we might doubt that fellowship is to be cherished — and doubt also that such fellowship underpins stability. But this is not what fellowship requires. That it is not *inequality* that undermines fellowship can be seen if we consider a case such as Oates' noble act on Scott's expedition. Here a less well off member of a community sacrificed his interests in the interests of the better off. Even if *such an* act increased inequality, it would still be, surely, an act of fellowship.⁸

[8] It might be said that while Oates' producing this increase in inequality was not at all detrimental to fellowship, Scott's producing it — say by simply leaving Oates behind — would have been. And, of course, this is true. But that does not show an

We may say, then, that where there is inequality there will often be forms of behaviour — taking more than one's share, profiting at the expense of others, failing to show due concern for others, and so on — that are detrimental to fellowship. But it does not follow from this that *inequality* is detrimental to fellowship. Indeed there is good reason to think that considerations of fellowship, other things equal, provide a reason *not* to constrain inequality, and are better seen as supporting priority^y for those who have less, rather than as an argument for equality.

A second reason to doubt that instrumental considerations can provide good grounds for thinking overall equality valuable focuses on the point that we are here concerned with *overall* equality. To see how this argument comes about consider what we might call the argument against inequality from competitive considerations. As we have noted, to be concerned about equality and inequality is to be concerned about relative levels. Now one reason to be concerned about relative levels is that relative levels can affect absolute levels. If you and I are in competition — for a job, at an auction, or in a battle — what matters is not our absolute level of experience, available funds, or military strength, but who has more. A standard objection to inequalities of wealth and power, then, is based on competitive effects: your having more can make me *worse* off (absolutely) than I would otherwise be.

Do competitive consideration arguments apply if our concern is with *overall* equality and inequality? It may be argued that they do not for, it *may be* claimed, whatever our measure of overall well-offness is, competitive effects will already be included, and to take account of them again would be to double count. Hence although competitive considerations may be of the first importance when *deciding* what effect specific policies and specific inequalities will have on how well off overall different people will be, they are no basis on which to argue against overall inequalities.

So far the argument has been used to support setting aside competitive considerations. But the argument might now be applied to the instrumental effects of inequalities. Thus it may be said that instrumental effects on overall inequality will also have already been taken into account. If fellowship (or whatever it is that equality is instrumentally valuable for) really^y is valuable, this will result in at least some of us being better off. But our being better off will already be reflected in how well off overall each of us is. That being so, instrumental effects can have no further role in the evaluation of the overall inequalities. Thus instrumental arguments for equality — such as those from fellowship — though

increase in inequality is detrimental to fellowship. It shows that some behaviour that increases inequality is detrimental to fellowship — not a conclusion that should occasion surprise.

highly relevant to the assessment of how well-off each of us will be if different policies are pursued, must be irrelevant to an assessment of those overall inequalities.

It is important to note that the argument here relies on a claim about the need to avoid double counting. The argument is *not* that overall assessments are in some sense 'final assessments' and cannot, therefore, reflect (even in part) inequalities in those assessments since that would require a further assessment to be made after the (*ex hypothesi*) final assessment has been made. That argument, were it valid, would apply not merely to instrumental arguments but to all arguments regarding the value of overall equality. But such an argument is not valid. The disvalue of an inequality in overall well-offness can itself be included in overall well-offness.⁹ The point about instrumental arguments is that, the value in question being exclusively *instrumental*, there is no value that has not already been included. Hence there is nothing needing to be added — and to do so would be double counting.

There is, however, a response to the application of this double counting argument to the instrumental effects of equality. The argument is compelling only on the assumption that the whole value of whatever equality is taken to be instrumental to is reflected in (different) people's good. Take the argument that overall inequality tends to undermine fellowship. Presumably the value of this fellowship means that at least some people are better off. But the question is whether *all* of the value of the fellowship will have been captured. Or could the fellowship be valuable in a way that is not reflected in its being valuable for anyone? After all, we earlier left open the possibility of equality itself being valuable without there being anyone it is valuable for. Why might not equality be instrumentally valuable to something that is valuable in this way?

This response may be sound as far as it goes — but it does not leave things quite where they were, for the upshot is that, for the instrumental argument for overall equality to succeed, it is not enough merely that there be an end to which overall equality is instrumentally valuable. The end must be valuable in a way that is not wholly captured in the overall well-offness of individuals. Now nothing I have said has shown this to be impossible. Nevertheless many might consider showing anything to

[9] 'True egalitarians, the objection goes, care about equality in the distribution of *good*. Individualistic egalitarianism may give value to equality in the distribution of income. But surely it cannot give value to equality in the distribution of good. Surely the good of individuals has to be determined before it can be determined how equally it is distributed. Consequently equality in the distribution of individual good cannot itself be part of individual good.... Surprisingly perhaps, there is actually no difficulty about making equality of individual good itself an individual good. It is only a matter of setting up some simultaneous equations.' (Broome, 1991, p. 181.)

be valuable in this way a tall order; hence, to that extent, the present argument makes showing overall equality instrumentally valuable a taller order than it would otherwise be.

There can be little doubt that specific inequalities — such as inequalities of institutional concern, of power or wealth — can be instrumentally harmful. It is, however, much less clear that this is true of overall inequalities. There are problems, both in showing that overall equality is instrumental to a valuable end, and in showing that an end to which equality might be instrumental is valuable in the right kind of way. I do not say that the points I have made constitute a knockdown argument against the claim that overall equality is an instrumental value. Nevertheless, taken together, these difficulties might be thought to provide reasonable grounds for scepticism.

Equality as an Independent Value

The second way equality might be valuable is as valuable in itself — valuable not by virtue of connections with anything else, but as a 'stand-alone' or independent value. If equality is valuable in this way — independently of connections or consequences — its value is a consequence of its intrinsic nature, and we may say, therefore, that it is an intrinsic value.

To hold that equality is an independent value is not, of course, to deny that in some circumstances we should not pursue equality.⁹ Even if equality is a value it is not the only value: whether equality should be pursued will depend on how the value of equality is to be set off against other values. Clashes between independent values will, presumably, need to be resolved by 'weighing' one value against another. (Given independence it is hard to see any basis for a lexical ordering or an algorithm.)¹⁰

Holding that equality is an independent value does not, then, exclude the possibility of sacrificing equality for other values. But what is excluded is the value equality has by virtue of being an independent value being affected by circumstance. To the extent that equality is an independent, intrinsic value its value depends on nothing outside itself.

[10] How could there be a lexical ordering of two things that are wholly unrelated? Words (in dictionaries) can be lexically ordered because letters are related (ordered). A card of the trump suit can triumph over any non-trump suit card because the trump and non-trump suits are (temporarily) ordered. For the same reason one gold medal can count for more than any number of silver medals. But if there is no connection between equality and the other value — if, that is, they are independent values — what would be the basis of a lexical relation? More generally it seems there can be no basis for an algorithm ordering wholly independent values. In ordering unrelated intrinsic values there seems no alternative to a trade off based on judgement or intuition.

This value being unaffected by circumstance, we may say that, for any two states of affairs, if one contains more equality than the other, the one that contains more equality is in one way better. We may say this because greater equality makes a state of affairs better (in one way) irrespective of what else is true about that state of affairs. Conversely, if we claim that a situation is in one way (non-instrumentally) better simply by virtue of there being less inequality, and no matter what else is true of that situation, we are taking equality to be an independent value.

Is it plausible to suppose that equality is an independent value? It is never easy to show that something is valuable as an end, and it would be unreasonable to expect a rigorous proof. Nevertheless some defence or support might be provided by use of analysis and comparison. For example, if we wanted to support the claim that knowledge is valuable as an end we might begin by analysing knowledge — identifying and describing one or more of its constitutive features. This might turn up something that it seems intuitively reasonable to say has value in itself — and thus suggest some reason for thinking knowledge valuable simply by virtue of its nature. If this fails we might try analysing something else that we believe has intrinsic value — happiness, say — and compare our analysis of happiness with our analysis of knowledge. If we find that knowledge and happiness have similarities, we might argue from those similarities, together with the claim that happiness is valuable as an end, for the claim that knowledge is too.

Can this strategy be used to support the claim that equality is an independent value? Do any of the features of equality seem to make equality valuable in itself? What are the features of equality? Equality is a state embodying a certain uniformity. There are, perhaps, certain affinities between uniformity and neatness. But these are relatively trivial considerations at best. To try to defend equality in these terms is to invite the mockery of those who portray egalitarians as — like Procrustes — driven by an obsessive intolerance for untidiness and variation. Does equality share common features with what are sometimes accepted as values — life, happiness, knowledge, say? There seem no obvious similarities here. Indeed equality, being a relation, seems quite different.

Is there any reason to think that equality is *not* an independent value? We have noted already the problem posed by the question: Valuable for whom? This problem might be thought particularly pressing if we assert that equality is an independent value — for independence may seem to leave few resources with which to deal with the problem. But we face another problem if we claim that equality is an *independent* value. As we have seen, if equality is an independent value, then its value derives from what is intrinsic to it — that is, simply on account of its nature. This nature being unchanging, unaffected by circumstances or anything external to it, equality's value as such a value is also unchanging. In par-

ticular, it never disappears: if equality ever has value as an independent value, then it always has it. So if equality were an independent value, equality would always be valuable. But is this plausible? To approach this question, consider the relationships between equality and desert, and between equality and freedom. What connections are there between equality, desert, and freedom?

One 'connection', of course, is that those who are sympathetic to the importance of equality are often sceptical about the truth of claims of desert and freedom. Egalitarians often question whether choices are genuinely free, and whether those who are said to deserve do truly deserve. These doubts are often raised together — as when it is questioned whether we can genuinely deserve if we are not truly free and responsible. But the issue we need to focus on here is not whether there is genuine desert and freedom, but what impact (genuine) desert and (genuine) freedom would have on the (non-instrumental) value of equality.

Consider first desert and equality. Suppose that what Alan genuinely deserves is not more than X and that what Beth genuinely deserves is not less than Y, and that X is less than Y. Now if we believe that equality is an independent value, we will hold that, even if we leave aside all instrumental considerations for equality, it would still be in one way better if Alan and Beth were to receive outcomes that are more equal than the unequal outcomes that they genuinely deserve. How great a departure from the deserved outcome in the direction of greater equality we think would be best will depend on the relative weights we attach to desert and equality.

Next consider freedom and equality. Suppose Alan and Beth have similar talents, resources, and opportunities, and that their lives have gone equally well, and would carry on going equally well were it not for the choices they are about to make. Let us also assume that all choices are genuine: Alan and Beth are competent, their choices are informed, and neither is manipulated or coerced.

Suppose Alan and Beth each have the choice of being in situation A or situation B. Suppose that Alan chooses A, Beth chooses B, and that A and B are unequal according to our way of measuring how well off people are. Or suppose that Alan and Beth choose to take part in a fair zero-sum gamble — for example, to bet on the toss of a coin. If we value freedom, we will hold that it is (in one way) better if Alan and Beth are free to choose between A and B, or to gamble if they wish. But if we hold also that equality is an independent value, we will hold that, even if instrumental considerations are left aside, it would be in one way better if the outcomes were more equal than the outcomes that are the consequence of free and informed choice. How far we think it best that choices are

constrained in order that greater equality is achieved will reflect the relative weights we attach to the values of equality and freedom.

But these views seem implausible. If some inequality is genuinely deserved, there seems no reason to temper that inequality on the basis of the (non-instrumental) value of equality. And it is not that desert is somehow much more important than (non-instrumental) equality so that equality is always outweighed. If the inequality *is deserved*, it seems that greater equality would have no value — again leaving instrumental considerations aside.¹¹ And it seems plausible to take the same view with respect to freedom. If an inequality is wholly the outcome of a genuine choice, and freedom is a value, why, if we leave instrumental considerations aside, should we think that less inequality would be valuable?¹²

To accept either of these arguments is to accept that equality can cease to have (non-instrumental) value — either where the inequality *is* genuinely deserved, or where the inequality is wholly the consequence of *genuine* choice. Thus to *accept* either argument (or both, of course) is to reject the claim that equality is an independent value. *Setting equality off* against desert or *choice is* entirely consistent with equality being an independent value; but the (non-instrumental) value of equality being *extinguished when* the inequality is deserved, or is the consequence of choice, is not. If equality has no (non-instrumental) value in either of these cases, equality is not an independent value.

Once again this is not a knockdown argument against the claim that equality is an independent value. We may, if we wish, try to argue that even where an inequality is fully and genuinely deserved there would be (non-instrumental) value in equality — a value, perhaps, to be somehow set against desert. But that is, surely, an odd view to take. There *seem*, then, to be good grounds to reject the view that equality is an independent value.

[11] Even someone firmly committed to the value of equality may take this view. Thus Temkin — who writes: 'I, for one, believe that inequality is bad. But do I *really* think there is some respect in which a world where only some are blind is worse than one where all are? Yes,' — also holds that desert extinguishes the value of equality: 'In fact, I think that deserved inequalities are not bad *at all*.' (Temkin, 1993, pp. 282 and 17 original emphasis).

[12] I am not claiming that an arrangement being acceptable to those involved is a sufficient reason to think it unobjectionable. There is good reason to regard some arrangements — slavery for example — as unjust, even if they have been agreed to by the parties involved. The point here concerns only the non-instrumental value of equality. The issue is: Do we wish to claim that an inequality that has been genuinely chosen by the parties involved has disvalue when instrumental considerations are left aside?

Equality as a Connected Value

The third way for equality to be valuable is as a connected value. To be valuable in this way is to be valuable by virtue of connections to other values, those connections not being merely instrumental, but going deeper and linking equality in a conceptual relationship with other values. (Given such interconnections there is the possibility of algorithms, including lexical orderings, that determine when different values are to be pursued.)

The value of a connected value does not depend only on its nature: it may be affected by the other values with which it forms a network. (Such values not being valuable solely by virtue of their intrinsic natures we might hesitate to call them intrinsic values in the fullest sense.) The value of a connected value need not be constant — unaffected by circumstance — and on some occasions such a (putative) value may not be valuable at all. Thus to believe that equality is (non-instrumentally) valuable only in this way is to believe that, although equality may sometimes have (non-instrumental) value, it need not always do so.

Is it plausible to suppose that equality is a connected value? Equality's losing its (non-instrumental) value in the face of genuine desert or choice sinks the claim that equality is an independent value; but it is entirely consistent with equality's being a connected value. And if desert and freedom (or whatever) do not outweigh or override the disvalue of the inequality with which they conflict, but rather exclude the possibility of that inequality having disvalue, then it seems that it is desert or freedom that equality is connected with. If there were no connection between desert and equality, say, why should desert preclude equality's having value?

The idea that desert and equality are related may be surprising. At a practical level desert and equality are often used to express opposing conclusions and recommendations — with egalitarians urging equality and those who appeal to desert defending inequalities. It might be thought from this that desert and equality are opposed and unconnected — perhaps that they reflect radically different views that simply clash. But there is good reason to think that such a view must be mistaken. If equality is to be a (non-instrumental) value at all, while genuinely deserved inequalities are in no way bad, then it follows that there must be a deep connection between equality and desert; and those who believe in equality may need to consider whether they are not thereby committed to the value of desert, and vice versa.

It seems clear that equality and desert are connected. But we should not make the mistake of thinking that they are connected simply by being two sides of the same coin: lack of desert does not in itself entail that equality is required. To see this consider possible responses to the

distribution of natural talents. This distribution is, let us suppose, both unequal and undeserved. The egalitarian position is that these inequalities — or at least the effects of them on overall inequalities — are to be nullified, thereby producing (greater) equality. The egalitarian agrees (let us say) that, were the inequalities deserved, they should stand. But being undeserved (and unchosen) they should be undone.

But why should the absence of desert be thought to provide any reason for equalizing? To be sure, the egalitarian's opponent can respond, if the better endowed deserved not to have more than others, then there would be reason to equalize. If the better endowed had done something so that they deserved to lose their advantaged position, equality would be required. But this is not the case — or so let us assume. It is not that the more fortunate deserve not to have their extra talents (and the benefits that flow there from); they merely do not deserve them. But if they are merely undeserved, where is the argument for equality? The problem would be solved if we could infer from our not deserving something that we deserve not to have it. But it does not follow from our not deserving something that we deserve not to have it.

The mere fact that inequalities are undeserved does not, by itself, entail that equality would have value. What is required is an account of why equality is valuable that explains why equality is not valuable when it conflicts with desert or freedom. Such an account will expose connections between equality, desert, and freedom, and *seems* likely to link those values with justice, fairness, and the avoidance of arbitrariness. But the details of such an argument must be left for another occasion.¹³

[13] This paper forms part of a larger project on which I began work while holding a Charter Fellowship at Wolfson College, Oxford; I am grateful to the Governing Body of the College for electing me to this fellowship. Material in this paper formed part of papers given at a conference in Pittsburgh of St Andrews' fellowship holders; at the Fourth European Congress for Analytical Philosophy at Lund; and at the Universities of Lancaster and Waikato. I am very grateful to the many people who commented on these occasions. I am particularly grateful to Peter Morriss who provided me with extensive written comments.