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What Should Egalitarians Believe?

This article is concerned to eliminate a number of possible confusions in egalitarian thought. I begin by showing that the most plausible forms of egalitarianism do not fit straightforwardly on either side of the distinction between Telic and Deontic egalitarianism. I go on to argue that the question of the scope of egalitarian distributive principles cannot be answered in the abstract, but instead depends on giving a prior account of the different ways in which distributive inequality can be bad. I then discuss some misconceptions about the “Levelling Down Objection,” and about the relationship between egalitarianism and prioritarianism. In doing so, my aim is to present a more plausible account of what egalitarians should believe.

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I. TELIC AND DEONTIC EGALITARIANISM

In his influential discussion of equality and priority, Derek Parfit distinguishes between *Telic* and *Deontic* versions of egalitarianism.¹ Telic egalitarians accept “the Principle of Equality,” and so believe that:

- (A) It is in itself bad if some people are worse off than others.²

Deontic egalitarians reject the “Principle of Equality.” They believe that:

- (B) We should aim for equality, not to make the outcome better, but for some other moral reason.³

Accordingly, Parfit describes Telic egalitarians as believing that:

- (C) Inequality is *bad*,⁴

whereas Deontic egalitarians believe that:

- (D) Inequality is not *bad*, but *unjust*.⁵

This distinction leads to a difference between Telic and Deontic egalitarians with regard to the scope of their concern with distributive equality. Because Telic egalitarians hold that it is *in itself* bad if some people are worse off than others, they also hold that:

- (E) The scope of egalitarianism encompasses all cases of inequality, with regard to everyone who ever lives.

As Parfit puts it, on this kind of Telic view, “it is in itself bad if there are or have been, even in unrelated communities, people who are not equally well off. Thus it is bad if Inca peasants, or Stone Age hunter-gatherers, were worse-off than we are now.”⁶ Deontic egalitarians reject this view. They hold that distributive inequality is a matter of injustice rather than

1. Derek Parfit, “Equality or Priority?” *Lindley Lectures Delivered at the University of Kansas* (Lawrence, Kansas: 1991). Reprinted in *The Ideal of Equality*, ed. Matthew Clayton and Andrew Williams (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 81–125. All subsequent references to Parfit’s article are to this reprinting.

2. See Parfit, “Equality or Priority?” p. 84.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

5. See Parfit, *ibid.*, p. 90: “We can now redescribe my two kinds of Egalitarian. On the Telic view, inequality is bad; on the Deontic view, it is unjust.”

6. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

badness, and that “injustice . . . necessarily involves wrong-doing.”⁷ Hence, when a Deontic egalitarian objects to inequality, her objection “is not really to the inequality itself. What is unjust, and therefore bad, is not strictly the state of affairs, but the way in which it was produced.”⁸ Deontic egalitarians, according to Parfit, should therefore hold that:

- (F) The scope of egalitarianism is restricted to those cases of inequality that result from injustice, and thereby to cases of inequality that result from wrongdoing.

Given (F), Deontic egalitarians, as Parfit presents them, do not think that *natural* inequalities are morally significant; and hence such inequalities do not call for redress or redistribution. Telic egalitarians, on the other hand, believe that inequality is bad whatever its cause.

Parfit’s distinction between Telic and Deontic forms of egalitarianism is a helpful one, and has been widely adopted in the subsequent literature on equality and priority.⁹ Nevertheless, it divides the conceptual territory in a potentially misleading way, and thereby obscures some of the most plausible varieties of egalitarianism.

In its most attractive versions, egalitarianism is neither Telic nor Deontic, in the senses given above. The forms of egalitarianism that Parfit’s distinction obscures are the different varieties of instrumental egalitarianism, including what I will call *Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism*. Although Parfit mentions views of this kind, they cannot be accommodated within his characterization of the distinction between Telic and Deontic egalitarianism. Telic views accept Claims (A), (C), and (E). Deontic views accept Claims (B), (D), and (F). But, as we shall see, the most plausible forms of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism reject both (A) and (B), accept (C), and reject both (E) and (F).

By way of illustrating these claims, let us consider some of the main reasons that we might have for being egalitarians. Following T. M. Scanlon, we might hold that inequality is bad because (a) the alleviation of inequality is often a condition for the reduction of suffering and deprivation; because (b) inequality creates stigmatizing differences in status;

7. Ibid., p. 90.

8. Ibid., p. 90.

9. See, for example, Dennis McKerlie, “Equality,” *Ethics* 106 (1996): 274–96; and Andrew Mason, “Introduction,” in *Ideals of Equality*, ed. Andrew Mason (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. vii–xi.

and because (c) inequality leads to unacceptable forms of power and domination.¹⁰ John Rawls also identifies some of the ways in which inequality can be bad, using some of the same categories as those identified by Scanlon. Rawls thinks that inequality can be undesirable because (a) it sometimes prevents the satisfaction of people's basic needs, even in conditions in which there is not real material scarcity. Like Scanlon, Rawls also stresses the ways in which inequality can (b) lead to inequalities in social status "that encourage those of lower status to be viewed both by themselves and by others as inferior."¹¹ Rawls further holds, like Scanlon, that inequality can be bad insofar as (c) it leads to the domination of one part of society by the rest.^{12,13}

10. See T. M. Scanlon, "The Diversity of Objections to Inequality," delivered as the Lindley Lecture at the University of Kansas (Lawrence, Kansas: 1996), reprinted in his *The Difficulty of Tolerance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 202–18. Scanlon also gives two further kinds of considerations in favor of reducing inequality, both of which are more purely Deontic, in Parfit's sense. These egalitarian reasons are given by the fact that "some forms of equality are essential preconditions for the fairness of certain procedures" (p. 205) and because "procedural fairness sometimes supports a case for equality of outcomes" (p. 207). That both types of consideration involve a version of Deontic egalitarianism is clear from the connection drawn between equality and fair or just procedures. See also T. M. Scanlon, "When Does Equality Matter?," unpublished manuscript, where he characterizes these kinds of reasons under the headings 'Procedural Fairness' and 'Unequal Benefits', respectively.

11. See John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 131.

12. John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 130–31 (§39, "Comments on Equality"). Like Scanlon, Rawls also gives more purely Deontic considerations in favor of reducing inequality, relating to the significance of fair procedures. See also John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 244–48. Rawls acknowledges his indebtedness to Scanlon with regard to his treatment of "the reasons for regulating social and economic inequalities" (*Justice as Fairness*, p. 130) in both books. (See *Justice as Fairness*, p. 130, fn. 48; *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, p. 246, fn. 6.)

13. Rawls also addresses the ways in which the effects of inequality can be bad in *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), §16.1, "Equality among Peoples," pp. 113–15. Here, Rawls retains the focus on suffering and basic needs (i.e., consideration [a]), and on the deontic idea of procedural fairness, as well as on self-respect, servility, and deference (i.e., consideration [b]). It is interesting to note, however, that, as against the discussion in *Justice as Fairness*, Rawls does not emphasize the badness of inequality in terms of its giving rise to relations of domination in *The Law of Peoples*. One may speculate that, had Rawls allowed the particular significance of considerations of relations of domination in his discussion of equality among 'peoples', then, given the prevalence of such relations in the interactions of wealthy 'peoples' with poorer 'peoples', it would have been much more difficult for him to maintain his objections to more robustly

In his discussion of the different ways in which inequality can be instrumentally valuable, Parfit follows Thomas Nagel in claiming that we may also object to inequality because (d) it weakens self-respect, especially the self-respect of the worst-off.¹⁴ Both Rawls and Parfit also point out that we may object to inequality on the basis of the consideration that (e) inequality creates servility and deferential behavior, given that “we may think it bad for people if they are servile or too deferential, even if this does not frustrate their desires, or affect their experienced well-being.”¹⁵ Nagel further holds (although he does not explore the argument in detail) that we may object to inequality because it undermines healthy fraternal social relations and attitudes in society as a whole.¹⁶

Let us give the name *Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism* to any view that appeals to some subset of these reasons (a)–(f) for reducing inequality. There are clearly a plurality of reasons to be distributive egalitarians, and we might accept all or only some of them. Whatever the precise set of egalitarian reasons we find most compelling, it is plausible to think that some variety of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, accepting some or all of considerations (a)–(f), is the most compelling kind of egalitarian view.

If we accept a version of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, what should we say about the badness of inequality, and about Claims (A) and (B)? Claim (A) seems extravagant and undermotivated. Why should it be *in itself* bad for inequality to exist? Inequality is a great evil, but the kinds of reasons given under (a)–(f) appear to capture the variety of ways in

egalitarian or redistributive forms of international distributive justice. But I shall not pursue this thought within the bounds of the present discussion.

14. Parfit, *ibid.*, p. 86. See also Thomas Nagel, “Equality,” in his *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 106–27, esp. at p. 106.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 86. See also Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 131.

16. See Nagel, “Equality,” p. 108, where he says that: “There are two kinds of argument for the intrinsic value of equality, communitarian and individualistic. According to the communitarian argument, equality is good for a society taken as a whole. It is a condition of the right kind of relations among its members, and of the formation in them of healthy fraternal attitudes, desires and sympathies.” Having identified the ‘communitarian’ argument for equality, Nagel then moves on in his essay to devote his attention solely to ‘individualistic’ arguments. As Parfit rightly points out (Parfit, *ibid.*, p. 86), Nagel’s terminology is somewhat misleading here, as he takes himself to be discussing different kinds of argument for the *intrinsic* value of equality. It would be more natural to think of these ‘communitarian’ considerations as supporting an instrumental or non-intrinsic understanding of the value of equality.

which this badness is grounded, and with reference to which it can be explained. Indeed, the sheer variety of ways in which inequality is non-intrinsically bad demonstrates precisely why we have such good reason to eradicate inequalities where this is possible. If, on the other hand, we accept Claim (A), the ideal of equality can seem unduly obscure and abstract: as a merely *arithmetic* goal, the value of which is impossible to grasp. It is difficult to understand the great badness of inequality, and the moral urgency of its eradication, if one endorses Claim (A), and does not consider reasons (a)–(f). So, Non-Intrinsic egalitarians should reject Claim (A).

However, Non-Intrinsic egalitarians should also reject Claim (B). We need not appeal to “some other moral reason” over and beyond the badness of states of affairs, in order to motivate a concern for the elimination of inequality. Non-Intrinsic egalitarians should claim, with Telic egalitarians, that it is bad that some are worse off than others. They should part company from Telic egalitarians, however, insofar as they should deny that that badness is an unanalyzable form of intrinsic badness. Thus, Non-Intrinsic egalitarian views are not forms of Telic egalitarianism, as Parfit presents the view, as they do not posit any intrinsic badness of inequality. Unlike Deontic views, however, they are concerned with the goodness and badness of states of affairs, and not just with rights-claims or questions of justice. One can be concerned about the goodness and badness of states of affairs without that concern being limited to intrinsic badness. This should not be surprising, given that not all forms of badness are intrinsic badness. But, given that its focus is on the badness of inequality, rather than its connection to claims of right or justice, Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is also not a form of Deontic egalitarianism. Thus, Non-Intrinsic egalitarians should reject both (A) and (B). Their view is therefore neither Telic nor Deontic in Parfit’s terms.

Now, some views favor egalitarian outcomes without appeal to distinctively egalitarian reasons. For example, utilitarians may favor some degree of equality of condition, as a consequence of the diminishing marginal utility of greater benefits. On such a utilitarian view, we should favor an egalitarian distribution by virtue of an appeal to the nonegalitarian reason that such a distribution maximizes total overall welfare. Other views may favor equality as a precondition for the achievement of some other aim, such as a society in which there is a greater realization of the goods of free or autonomous agency, or a society that better meets

the social preconditions for democratic politics.^{17,18} We might describe such views, which are egalitarian in a fairly contingent sense, as forms of *Weak* egalitarianism. But Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism should not be viewed as a form of Weak egalitarianism. Instead, it is egalitarian in a more robust sense, and should be seen as a Strong egalitarian view.

The ‘strongly egalitarian’ credentials of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism should become clear when we come to examine the content, and inter-connections, of the egalitarian considerations (a)–(f). These egalitarian reasons can, with one exception, best be understood as elements that together constitute a complex background picture of how people should live together as equals. I shall begin with the one exception to this claim: namely type-(a) considerations, which state that the reduction of inequality is often a prerequisite for the alleviation of suffering or deprivation. This particular consideration counts in favor of distributive equality, but does so on the basis of underlying reasons which are

17. We may, for example, share Rousseau’s belief that equality is necessary for the preservation of freedom. As Rousseau famously puts it at the start of Chapter 11 of Book 2 of *The Social Contract*: “If one inquires precisely into what the greatest good of all consists in, which ought to be the end of every system of legislation, one will find that it comes down to these two principal objects, *freedom* and *equality*. Freedom, because any individual dependence is that much force taken away from the State; equality, because freedom cannot subsist without it.” (See Rousseau, “Of the Social Contract,” 2: 11.1, in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], p. 78.)

18. Alternatively, we might believe that distributive equality is important because the distribution of property rights within the economy has a deep effect on the distribution of (negative) freedom. For example, consider G. A. Cohen’s convincing argument that the distribution of money (or, more generally, of sets of property-entitlements) in an economy amounts to a particular distribution of freedoms and unfreedoms. If Cohen is right about the relationship between money and freedom, then it might turn out that the best way to maximize overall freedom within a society would be to equalize individuals’ economic position. This would generate another potential line of argument in favor of distributive equality. See Cohen’s important paper on “Freedom and Money,” published online at http://www.utdt.edu/Upload/_115634753114776100.pdf (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Universidad Torcuato di Tella, 2001); see also G. A. Cohen, “Capitalism, Freedom and the Proletariat,” in *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin*, ed. Alan Ryan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); G. A. Cohen, “Appendix: On Money and Liberty,” in *Equality*, ed. Jane Franklin (London: Institute of Public Policy Research, 1997); and Jeremy Waldron, “Mr. Morgan’s Yacht,” in *The Egalitarian Conscience: Essays in Honour of G. A. Cohen*, ed. Christine Sypnowich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). I shall not pursue these ‘freedom-based’ lines of argument within this article, but merely note them as potential alternative ways of arguing for distributive equality from premises that are not themselves fundamentally egalitarian.

themselves simply humanitarian, rather than being distinctively egalitarian at this deeper level. Thus, consideration (a) is itself only weakly egalitarian, in the same way that the democratic or utilitarian views mentioned above are themselves only weakly egalitarian. An egalitarian view that appealed only to reasons of type (a) would thus not itself be strongly egalitarian. Therefore, for the sake of terminological tidiness, and so as to preserve the truth of the claim that Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is a strongly egalitarian view, we should modify the definition of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism to include only those egalitarian views that appeal to some subset of considerations (b)–(f), whether or not they additionally appeal to humanitarian considerations such as (a), or any other type of weakly egalitarian consideration.

Having registered this one minor exception, and refined our definition of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, we can now turn to an examination of the strongly egalitarian nature of reasons (b)–(f). To recall, these reasons recommend the promotion of distributive equality, given that inequality: (b) creates stigmatizing differences in status, whereby the badly-off feel like, and are treated as, inferiors;¹⁹ (c) creates objectionable relations of power and domination; (d) weakens self-respect (especially of the worst-off); (e) creates servility and deferential behavior; and (f) undermines healthy fraternal social relations.

Let us start with an examination of consideration (b). Rawls and Scanlon both take reasons of this kind to get to the center of what is wrong with distributive inequality. When discussing the effect of inequality on social status, Rawls claims that this brings us “closer to what is wrong with inequality in itself.” As he puts it:

Significant political and economic inequalities are often associated with inequalities of social status that encourage those of lower status to be viewed both by themselves and by others as inferior. This may arouse widespread attitudes of deference and servility on one side and a will to dominate and arrogance on the other. These effects of social and economic inequalities can be serious evils and the attitudes they engender great vices.²⁰

So, for Rawls, inequalities lead to manifestations of “serious evil” and “great vice,” whereby those evils and vices are themselves best

19. See Scanlon, “The Diversity of Objections to Inequality,” p. 204.

20. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 131.

understood as violating an important conception of human beings as equals.²¹ As Rawls points out, status-harms wear their specifically inegalitarian character on their sleeve, as status itself is inherently a hierarchical and positional good, in that

in a status system, not everyone can have the highest rank. High status assumes other positions beneath it; so if we seek a higher status for ourselves, we in effect support a scheme that entails others having lower status.²²

Given the positional nature of status as a good, only a robustly egalitarian distribution of status, with individuals viewing each other as citizens, living as equals, with equal standing, avoids the dangers of stigmatization.²³

Rawls's diagnosis of the "evils" involved in these kinds of inegalitarian status-harms already makes links to other elements of the set of non-intrinsic egalitarian reasons. He mentions the tendency of status inequalities to generate servility and deference (hence forging a link to consideration [e]), as well as arousing the will of some to dominate others (linking to consideration [c]). Needless to say, the existence of social relationships characterized by stark hierarchies of status, and marked by relations of domination, deference, and servility, preclude the existence of the sort of healthy fraternal social relations mentioned under consideration (f). It would be plausible to add that, just as the interpersonal manifestation of inequalities of status is linked to the generation of servility and domination, so the *inner* experience of reduced social status is associated with the loss of self-respect (linking to consideration [d]). Thus, an exploration of the nature of the evils attendant on status inequalities quickly brings us to see the interconnections between each member of the set of egalitarian considerations (b)–(f).

21. In which claim Rawls takes himself explicitly to be echoing the Rousseau of the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*. See Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 131, fn. 50.

22. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 131. See also Rawls's discussion of Rousseau's ideas on equality, in John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, pp. 244–48.

23. As Rawls puts it, this "suggests Rousseau's solution, followed (with modifications) in justice as fairness: namely, the fundamental status in political society is to be equal citizenship, a status all have as free and equal persons. (See Rousseau, *Social Contract* [1762])." See Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 132; and also Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, pp. 246–48.

We may view consideration (b), the objection to stigmatizing differences in status, as providing the best route to understanding the egalitarian nature of the full set of Non-Intrinsic egalitarian reasons ([b]–[f]) for opposing distributive inequalities. Such offensive status-harms, when they are internalized, prevent individual agents from viewing themselves as self-authenticating sources of valid claims (to use Rawls's terms),²⁴ living as equals among others of the same status. In so doing, they undermine our self-respect (consideration [d]), and are thereby corrosive of the secure sense of standing and of agency that is essential to our dignity as agents. It is important to note here that the conception of self-respect that is in play is itself a distinctively egalitarian idea: it is the idea of one's self-conception as an efficacious and undominated agent (linking here also to consideration [c]), enjoying an equality of standing with others.²⁵ One might wish to say that this conception of equality is, in essence, an egalitarian conception of *amour-propre*. Such self-respect is inconsistent with living under conditions of domination, or of being under the arbitrary power of others.²⁶

There is a sense, therefore, in which the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian considerations (b)–(f) fit together as a unified whole. They share a common underlying basis in a particular kind of egalitarian vision of how people might live together as equals. Our concern with each of the

24. See Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 23–24; or, for Rawls's earlier usage of “self-originating sources of valid claims,” see John Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory,” *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): 515–72, at 543–48. As Rawls has it: “To return to equality, we say: everyone is equally capable of understanding and complying with the public conception of justice; therefore all are capable of honoring the principles of justice and of being full participants in social cooperation throughout their lives. On this basis, together with each person's being a self-originating source of valid claims, all view themselves as equally worthy of being represented in any procedure that is to determine the principles of justice that are to regulate the basic institutions of their society” (“Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory,” p. 546).

25. For elaboration of a general conception of respect for persons as involving an irreducibly ‘second-personal’ element, see Stephen Darwall, “Respect and the Second-Person Standpoint,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 78 (2004): 43–59; and Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

26. As Rawls puts it at *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, p. 248: “Given our needs as persons and our natural indignation at being subject to the arbitrary power of others (a power that makes us do what they want, and not what we both can will *as equals*) the clear answer to the problem of inequality is equality at the highest level, as formulated in the social compact” [my emphasis].

considerations (b)–(f) is, therefore, a concern with each of a number of ways in which that egalitarian ideal might fail to be realized. As Scanlon points out, “the ideal of a society in which people all regard one another as equals has played an important role in radical egalitarian thinking—a more important role than the idea of distributive justice which dominates much discussion of equality in our own time.”²⁷ Scanlon is surely correct here, as regards the dominant themes in the history of egalitarian thought, at least since Rousseau. Indeed, Rousseau himself can plausibly be seen as endorsing the full set of egalitarian considerations (b)–(f): from the significance of avoiding domination, to the harms of unequal status, to the significance of eradicating inequality as a condition for the preservation of the secure self-respect of all.²⁸ Thus, Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is a kind of egalitarian view that finds support in the history of egalitarian thought, and that concerns itself with normative ideals and aspirations that have long motivated egalitarian politics. Indeed, as this article argues, we need not view ourselves as facing a strict dichotomy between ideals of social equality and ideals of distributive equality; rather, we can see the former as providing a foundation for the latter, via

27. Scanlon, “Diversity of Objections to Inequality,” pp. 204–05.

28. There is therefore a sense in which Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is itself a Rousseauian position. A detailed discussion of Rousseau’s views on equality, and of his endorsement of the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian considerations (b)–(f), is outside the scope of the current discussion. But we should not be surprised that considerations (b)–(f) should occur together in the work of an egalitarian political theorist like Rousseau; for these five kinds of egalitarian reasons intersect with one another, and find a common home in a plausible egalitarian vision of the characteristics that a society of equals must have. For Rousseau’s views, see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men, Or Second Discourse,” in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); “Of the Social Contract,” in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and *Emile, Or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979). For instructive discussion of the relationship between equality, domination, status, and *amour-propre* in Rousseau’s writings, see Christopher Bertram, *Rousseau and the Social Contract* (London: Routledge, 2004), esp. chaps. 2 and 5; Nicholas Dent, *Rousseau* (London: Routledge, 2005), esp. pp. 39–41, 57–74, and 104–07; and John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, pp. 189–248, esp. pp. 231–35 and 244–48. On the wide view of *amour-propre* defended by both Dent and Rawls, *amour-propre* is, in Kant’s terms, “originally a desire merely for equality.” See Rawls, *ibid.*, pp. 198–99; Dent, *ibid.*, pp. 104–05; and Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Book I, Section 1, Ak: VI: 27, p. 51.

the provision of the set of Non-Intrinsic reasons (b)–(f) that count in favor of distributive equality.²⁹

The case should now be secure for why we should regard Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism as a strongly egalitarian view. The reasons to which Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism appeals are themselves generated by distinctively egalitarian concerns with the badness of servility, exploitation, domination, and differences in status. The badness of these outcomes can best be understood by virtue of the contrasting value of certain kinds of fraternal, egalitarian social relations. The existence of these kinds of social relations should itself be seen as intrinsically valuable, independent of the positive effects that such relations may have for individual welfare.³⁰ States of affairs in which individual self-worth and fraternal social relations are undermined by domination and stigmatizing differences in status are, we might say, offensive to the dignity and standing of human agents.

There is, then, a sense in which Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is, after all, a broadly Telic egalitarian view, as it ultimately appeals to a particular egalitarian conception of how states of affairs can be valuable or disvaluable. Such a view is nevertheless not the same as Parfit's version of (what we may call) 'pure' Telic egalitarianism. On the pure Telic view, distributive equality is *in itself* valuable, without any need to appeal to any further reasons. On the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view, distributive equality is valuable because of its effects, and specifically by virtue of the fact that it brings about states of affairs that are themselves intrinsically valuable for egalitarian reasons. On this view, however, distributive equality is not, in itself, intrinsically valuable, and so the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian rejects Claim (A).

Ultimately we may come to the view that the terminological distinction between 'telic' and 'deontic' views is more misleading than it is

29. On equality as a social ideal, see also Elizabeth Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109 (1999): 287–337; David Miller, "Equality and Justice," in his *Principles of Social Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 230–44; Samuel Scheffler, "What Is Egalitarianism?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 31 (2003): 5–39, and "Choice, Circumstance, and the Value of Equality," *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 4 (2005): 229–53; R. H. Tawney, *Equality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931); and C.A.R. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (Oxford: Jonathan Cape, 1956), esp. Part Four.

30. Recall that, as Parfit puts it, "we may think it bad for people if they are servile or too deferential, even if this does not frustrate their desires, or affect their experienced well being" (Parfit, *ibid.*, p. 86).

useful. I have suggested that there is a sense in which Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism may seem like a species of telic view, despite not falling under Parfit's description of (pure) Telic egalitarianism. One may also take the (seemingly, but not actually, inconsistent) view that, when subjected to sufficient interrogation, Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism can in a sense be seen as a deontic view (again, despite not falling under Parfit's characterization of Deontic egalitarianism). This latter claim receives some support if our ultimate explanation of the value of egalitarian social relations, or of the disvalue of status-harms, relations of servility, or forms of domination, appeals to what individuals might be owed by virtue of respecting the dignity of human agents.³¹

We should also be clear that the connection between distributive egalitarianism and these broader egalitarian goals and values, although in some sense contingent, is not a weak one. If this connection were weak, then we might again, for different reasons, question whether Non-Intrinsic egalitarian views are strongly egalitarian at all. Yet it seems plausible to think that it is a deep social fact that we can realize the values embedded in the egalitarian considerations (b)–(f) only where substantial inequalities of condition have been eliminated. This 'deep social fact' therefore suggests a further sense in which Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is a strongly egalitarian view. This social fact has two aspects: firstly, reductions in inequality almost always bring about improvements in states of affairs of the sort favored under considerations (b)–(f); secondly, such improvements are generally possible only where inequalities are reduced, and greater distributive equality is achieved. If this 'deep social fact' really does obtain, then Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism will reliably mandate the elimination of inequalities of condition, given that this is the only reliable route available for promoting the egalitarian values that generate considerations (b)–(f).

31. I therefore certainly agree with A. J. Julius, in his claim that "the opposition between deontological and teleological or consequentialist ethical views does not offer a notably stable or informative map of many of the disagreements that are routinely referred to it" (see A. J. Julius, "Basic Structure and the Value of Equality," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 31 [2003]: 321–55, p. 323, fn. 4). Nevertheless, the ultimate basis of the telic/deontic distinction is properly outside the central concerns of this article. My claim regarding 'telic' and 'deontic' views is simply that Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism fits on neither side of the distinction, as characterized by Parfit, between Telic and Deontic forms of egalitarianism. This claim is consistent with, and orthogonal to, any claims about the ultimate coherence or informativeness of the distinction between teleological and deontological views.

Where does this leave us, then, with regard to what should be said, from the viewpoint of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, about the badness of inequality, and Parfit's Claims (C) and (D)? Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is strongly egalitarian insofar as it endorses the goodness of distributive equality on the basis of underlying egalitarian considerations. The view is, therefore, in one sense related to Telic egalitarianism; but it rejects the central claim of pure Telic egalitarianism that "it is in itself bad if some people are worse off than others."³² With respect to the badness or injustice of inequality, and Claims (C) and (D), Non-Intrinsic egalitarians can agree with Telic egalitarians that inequality is bad, and hence accept Claim (C). They can therefore deny the Deontic Claim (D) that inequality is never bad unless it is unjust.

It should be made clear at this point that it is no part of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism to claim that there are no distinctively Deontic reasons for objecting to distributive inequality. The Non-Intrinsic egalitarian can allow, with the Deontic egalitarian, that inequality is in some cases (and in some respects) bad *precisely because* it is unjust. A distributive inequality will be bad by virtue of its injustice when that distributive inequality undermines procedural fairness: for example, as when a substantive inequality is inconsistent with fair equality of opportunity.³³ A background inequality can, for example, undermine fair market procedures, thereby precluding the possibility of social justice.³⁴ Such an inequality is then objectionable in virtue of its unfairness (and thereby bad on 'Deontic' grounds), in addition to being objectionable for any of reasons (b)–(f). Holding a Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view does not preclude us from recognizing the distinctive injustice of some inequalities in such cases.

Substantive inequalities may also be objectionable specifically in virtue of their injustice when they are in violation of a demand of equal benefit or equal treatment, where this demand is itself an independently

32. See Parfit, "Equality or Priority?" p. 84.

33. See Scanlon, "Diversity of Objections to Inequality," esp. pp. 205–12; and Scanlon, "When Does Equality Matter?" esp. pp. 9, 15–30, 34–35. See also Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 131; Rawls, *Law of Peoples*, pp. 114–15; and Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, p. 246.

34. As Rawls puts it in *Justice as Fairness*, p. 131: "Monopoly and its kindred are to be avoided, not simply for their bad effects, among them inefficiency, but also because without special justification they make markets unfair. Much the same is true of elections influenced by the dominance of a wealthy few in politics."

grounded demand of justice.³⁵ In this latter regard, Scanlon gives a general characterization of cases where an inequality would be wrong precisely in virtue of its (non-procedural) injustice or unfairness in these terms: “If each member of a group has the same claim that some individual, or institutional agent, provide it with a certain benefit, and if that agent is obligated to respond to all of these claims, then that agent must, absent special justification, provide each member of the group with the same level of benefit.”³⁶ Here, again, the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian can recognize reasons for objecting to inequalities that are grounded in distinctively Deontic considerations of unfairness or injustice.

Nevertheless, although Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism can recognize certain cases where inequality is wrong specifically in virtue of its injustice, this does not mean that Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is, in Parfit’s terms a Deontic view. For recall that Deontic egalitarians accept Parfit’s Claim (D), and thereby take the view that inequalities are bad *only when* they are unjust (and, by extension, only in virtue of their injustice). Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism denies Claim (D), as it holds that inequalities are objectionable in virtue of egalitarian considerations (b)–(f). Thus, on the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view, there can be many cases where we should say that a distributive inequality was in some respect bad or objectionable, even if it were not an instance of unfairness or injustice of any kind.

Unlike Deontic egalitarians, Non-Intrinsic egalitarians accept Claim (C). The Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view allows that distributive inequality is to be viewed as bad, and as objectionable. It is not the mere existence of a distributive inequality that is bad; rather, the badness of distributive inequality is to be explained with reference to the egalitarian considerations (b)–(f), as discussed above. Thus, we can properly say that there is something objectionable about states of affairs that display inequality, and thereby reject the Deontic egalitarian Claim (D). Yet in accepting Claim (C) and positing the badness of inequality, one need not thereby accept the (pure) Telic view about the *intrinsic* badness of inequality.

We might therefore say that the difference between Non-Intrinsic and Telic egalitarian views is that the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian will have a more fully elaborated account of why and how inequality is bad, of a kind

35. See Scanlon, “Diversity of Objections to Inequality,” esp. pp. 205–08, 210–12; and Scanlon, “When Does Equality Matter?” esp. pp. 9–13, 35.

36. See Scanlon, “When Does Equality Matter?” pp. 10–11.

that is unavailable to the Telic egalitarian. It is to the credit of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism that this makes the view easier to defend. On a Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view, the skeptic about egalitarianism can be countered by a detailed account of the variety of considerations in which the badness of inequality is grounded. The Telic egalitarian can appeal to no such further reasons.

II. THE SCOPE OF EQUALITY

What of the scope of equality? Here, egalitarians should reject both Claims (E) and (F), again parting company from both Telic and Deontic views. We may think that it is a shame that Inca peasants or Stone Age hunter-gatherers were not better off than they actually were. Their lives were, no doubt, marked by terrible forms of suffering and deprivation, and this was in itself bad. However, it seems to be a mischaracterization of our concern for the well-being of each person to think that what was bad about the deprivations of ancient peasants was the inequality between their position and our own. We could regret the suffering of ancient peasants without appealing to any distinctively egalitarian considerations; for example, a utilitarian would also regret the deprivations that such individuals might have faced. A weakly (or formally) egalitarian concern for each individual requires that we think that the deprivation and suffering of ancient peasants mattered as much, morally speaking, as would the deprivation and suffering of any individual, including those alive today. But this is not to say that their deprivation and suffering matters morally *because* it made them less well-off than we are. In other words, we do not need to appeal to strongly egalitarian considerations in order to make sense of the badness of the suffering of these ancient Incas. Indeed, an appeal to a comparative judgment seems to lack any real bite in this case, given that none of the egalitarian reasons (b)–(f) obtain with regard to the relationship between these ancient peasants and us now.

Those who hold a strongly egalitarian view should regret the fact that the societies in which these ancient peasants lived were themselves marked by inequalitarian social relations, such as unacceptable forms of servility, power, and domination, if their lives did indeed have these features. But this also has nothing to do with the comparison of their lives to our lives. This situation would be different if we stood in some real

social relation to these ancient peasants, or if we could somehow have helped them out from their deprivation by transferring goods to them, but such a retrospective reallocation of goods is of course impossible.

Nevertheless, while Non-Intrinsic egalitarians should reject Claim (E), which holds that the scope of claims of equality encompasses everyone who ever lives, they should not rush to the opposite extreme of accepting Claim (F), which holds that the scope of egalitarian claims is restricted to states of affairs that result from injustice, or to states of affairs that result from wrongdoing. If we accept Claim (F), then we need not be troubled by inequalities that result from bad luck, or from natural disasters such as, for example, famines or earthquakes. But, if we accept some subset of the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian considerations (b)–(f) as giving us an account of the different reasons that we have for reducing inequalities, we find that these reasons can still obtain regardless of the source of the inequalities in question. If one social group is much worse off than others, then this can lead to a breakdown in fraternal social relations, to the corrosion of self-respect, or to the growth of objectionable forms of servility, power, or domination. None of these ways in which inequality can be bad need necessarily depend on the way in which the inequality in question was produced. Therefore, Non-Intrinsic egalitarians should reject (F).

If we should reject both (E) and (F), what then should our view about the scope of egalitarian views be? The proper scope of egalitarianism should depend on the underlying account that we accept of the ways in which inequality can be bad. For example, none of the egalitarian reasons (b)–(f) can obtain in cases where causal interaction between different groups or individuals is impossible. Stigmatizing differences in status, unacceptable forms of power and domination, and relations of servility and deference can only obtain when particular individuals, or groups of individuals, stand in really existing social relations with one another. Likewise, distributive inequalities can undermine healthy fraternal social relations, or undermine self-respect, only where healthy fraternal social relations, supportive of the self-respect of each, have the possibility of existing. This explains why we are not exercised, in virtue of a concern with equality, by the deprivations of ancient peasants. This also explains why we should not be exercised, in virtue of a concern with equality, by the distribution of well-being in the ‘Divided World’ cases introduced by Parfit. Let us consider such a case:

*The Divided World:*³⁷

The two halves of the world's population are, we can suppose, unaware of each other's existence. Perhaps the Atlantic has not yet been crossed. Consider next two possible states of affairs:

- (1) Half at 100 Half at 200
- (2) Everyone at 145

In the 'Divided World' case, none of the egalitarian reasons covered by (b)–(f) can obtain, and hence I claim that we have no reason of equality to prefer Distribution (2) to Distribution (1). This is not of course to say that we may not have some other reason for thinking that Distribution (2) represents a better state of affairs to Distribution (1). It is just to say that, if we accept Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, then we should believe that any such reason is not derivable from a commitment to the value of equality. However, although no egalitarian considerations obtain in the Divided World case, many of the egalitarian reasons (b)–(f) can obtain outside the bounds of any particular society or nation state. Thus, Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism need not reduce the scope of our concern with equality to the bounds of a particular state, or only to situations characterized by institutional coercion or economic reciprocity, in the way favored by many broadly contractualist views.³⁸ We may be nonstatist cosmopolitans, in the sense of thinking that the scope of egalitarianism is global, in virtue of the fact that we believe that (for example) objectionable forms of power and domination can exist in transnational or international contexts. But, on such a view, this nevertheless means that the scope of egalitarianism cannot extend into cases where such relationships are impossible, such as in 'Divided World' cases, or in cases involving those who are no longer living, such as Parfit's Inca peasants.

It would be useful at this point to register a few remarks about the implications of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism for how we should understand the demands of equality in international and transnational

37. This example occurs at Parfit, *ibid.*, p. 87.

38. See, for example, Michael Blake, "Distributive Justice, State Coercion and Autonomy," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 30 (2002): 257–96; Thomas Nagel, "The Problem of Global Justice," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 33 (2005): 113–47; and Andrea Sangiovanni, "Global Justice, Reciprocity, and the State," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 35 (2007): 3–39.

contexts.³⁹ The first thing to be said is that acceptance of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is inconsistent with holding any version of the view, endorsed by Thomas Nagel, that is described by Joshua Cohen and Charles Sabel as “strong statism.”⁴⁰ According to “strong statism,” we should endorse the claim that “normative requirements beyond humanitarianism only emerge with the state.”⁴¹ According to Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, however, considerations (b)–(f) give us reason to reduce or eradicate inequalities, for distinctively egalitarian reasons, even in situations that obtain across or beyond the borders of any particular state. Inequalities between members of different societies may give rise to status-harms, to forms of domination, and to offensive forms of social relations, that themselves exist across state borders. According to Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, we have reason to reduce or eradicate those inequalities, and those reasons can be based in considerations over and above the minimal normative requirements of humanitarianism. Therefore, acceptance of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism entails the rejection of “strong statism.”

On the other hand, although Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is a cosmopolitan view, it rejects the strong (“globalist”) cosmopolitan claim that the demands of distributive equality should be wholly insensitive to facts about existing human relations and practices.⁴² To illustrate the contrast, consider pure Telic egalitarianism, which holds that all distributive inequalities are in themselves bad. On the strongly cosmopolitan pure Telic view, facts about social relations make no difference to the urgency of demands that inequalities between individuals be reduced. Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, in contrast, holds that the badness of distributive inequalities can be explained by reference to the badness of the kinds of social relations that such inequalities bring about. Accordingly, the question of the degree to which distributive inequalities will manifest these forms of badness will depend to some large degree on the

39. I am grateful to an Editor of *Philosophy & Public Affairs* for pushing me towards greater clarity on this point.

40. See Thomas Nagel, “The Problem of Global Justice,” *ibid.*; and Joshua Cohen and Charles Sabel, “Extra Rempublicam Nulla Justitia?” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 34 (2006): 147–75.

41. Cohen and Sabel, “Extra Rempublicam Nulla Justitia?” p. 148.

42. On the distinction between “globalism” and “internationalism,” see Andrea Sangiovanni, “Global Justice, Reciprocity, and the State,” pp. 6–7. Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism does not fit easily on either side of this distinction.

nature and intimacy of the social relations that exist between the individuals in question.

Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, as we have seen, holds that there is nothing objectionable, by the lights of equality, regarding distributive differences between populations that have no possibility of interaction. Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism can also take the view that the degree of interaction between different individuals, peoples, or societies can determine the extent to which a distributive inequality between them is objectionable. Where there is minimal interaction between two individuals, or two groups, an inequality between those individuals or groups will be less significant, by the lights of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, than an equivalent inequality that exists between two individuals, or two groups, that are in intimately close contact. The relative strength of the social relations between peoples or societies will, on the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view, in part determine the degree of concern we should have for distributive inequalities that obtain between those peoples or societies.⁴³

Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism can therefore be seen as piloting a middle course between more standard views that, on the one hand, endorse a strongly cosmopolitan “globalism,” which sees the demands of equality as applying everywhere with the same strength, regardless of the character of current social relations, and, on the other hand, “strong statist” forms of “internationalism,” which see the demands of equality as operating only within the bounds of the state. One may thereby take the view that the middle position, occupied by Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, with regards to distributive equality in international contexts, is the most plausible view of these matters available. Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is able to explain why we should typically have a strong

43. We might say that, according to Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, the (degree of) badness of distributive inequalities is (in part) determined by the nature of social relations. But this does not mean that Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is a “relational view” of equality, in the sense introduced by Andrea Sangiovanni. Relational views hold that “the practice-mediated relations in which individuals stand condition the content, scope, and justification” of distributive principles (see Sangiovanni, “Global Justice, Reciprocity, and the State,” pp. 5–6). It is no part of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism that the “content, scope or justification” of the demands of equality are themselves generated by social relations; rather, social relations are significant with regard to the *application* of egalitarian considerations. Thus, although it is centrally concerned with social relations, Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is, in Sangiovanni’s terminology, a *nonrelational* view.

concern for equality in transnational contexts, while at the same time also explaining why the demands of equality will be especially salient within the bounds of particular nation states, where social relations are, in the typical case, more intimate. Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism is able to arrive at this plausible intermediate position by starting from a specification of the ways in which equality can be valuable, rather than by attempting to delimit the bounds of equality in any more abstract fashion.

The capacity of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism to pilot this middle course on the question of international equality is a consequence of its piloting a similar middle course between Telic and Deontic views. In both regards the salient point is that, for Non-Intrinsic egalitarians, the scope of egalitarianism should be understood as dependent on a prior account of the plurality of ways in which inequality can be bad. In contrast with Telic views, this approach connects well with the sometimes strangely neglected insight that equality is a *political* value. That means, minimally, that it is a value that relates to the nature and consequences of relationships among people. Telic egalitarians seem often to lose sight of this point. Non-Intrinsic egalitarians, by contrast, in appealing to reasons (b)–(f), provide an elaboration of a complex social and political ideal of how people should best live together.

On the Telic view, by contrast, the ideal of equality can seem merely *arithmetic*, instead of being a properly intelligible political value. It is difficult to understand why this ‘merely arithmetic’ idea of equality should be so important, and hence Telic views are in danger of undermining the plausibility of egalitarian claims. Parfit claims that it is harder to justify redistributive policies if inequality is not in itself bad.⁴⁴ This may be true, but it is, in turn, particularly hard to justify the abstract Telic claim that inequality is in itself bad. Hence, redistributive policies are very difficult to justify if we have only the resources of Telic egalitarianism, and egalitarianism is harder to defend against its opponents when we have access only to the argumentative resources of the Telic view.⁴⁵

44. Parfit, “Equality or Priority?” p. 99.

45. As Scanlon puts it (“The Diversity of Objections to Inequality,” p. 203): “Opponents of equality can seem most convincing when they can portray equality as a peculiarly abstract goal—conformity to a certain pattern—to which special moral value is attached.” I would contend that (pure) Telic egalitarianism portrays equality as just such a peculiarly abstract (and correspondingly fragile) goal.

By comparison, it is much easier to defend the claim that inequality is, in many ways, non-intrinsically bad. We may therefore think that the rejection of Telic egalitarianism actually makes redistributive policies easier and not harder to justify. This is not, of course, in itself an argument in favor of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism or against Telic egalitarianism. It is simply, as it were, an added bonus: a further fact that is itself politically welcome from an egalitarian perspective.

At the other end of the egalitarian spectrum, the Deontic view, as Parfit describes it, construes the political nature of the demands of equality in too narrow a way, especially insofar as it takes inequality to be objectionable only when it obtains within a particular society (as on “strong statist” views such as that of Nagel), or only when it is occasioned by some prior wrongdoing or injustice. It thus fails to see how the political disvalue of inequality still obtains, even in cases in which the causal genesis of the inequality in question cannot be traced to injustice or to wrongdoing, or when that inequality traverses the borders of any particular state. The Non-Intrinsic view avoids both of these pitfalls, securing an understanding of equality as a *political* value, but nevertheless as a value which may have a very broad scope, extending beyond the bounds of any particular society.

III. EQUALITY AND THE LEVELLING DOWN OBJECTION

It is often thought that the distributive view with the most initial intuitive appeal is Telic egalitarianism. This has been disputed in the previous section. One might plausibly suppose that the ‘merely arithmetic’ nature of Telic egalitarianism undermines its intuitive appeal, and makes it excessively abstract and mysterious as a distributive view. Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, on the other hand, with its provision of a plurality of reasons for preferring equality, has much greater intuitive force. We can, however, set this issue of intuitive appeal to one side for now. Parfit claims that, despite its (putative) intuitive appeal, Telic egalitarianism is the only egalitarian distributive view that faces a very serious objection, which he calls the Levelling Down Objection. As he puts it:

If inequality is bad, its disappearance must be in one way a change for the better, *however this change occurs*. Suppose that those who are better off suffer some misfortune, so that they become as badly off as

everyone else. Since these events would remove the inequality, they must be in one way welcome, on the Telic View, even though they would be worse for some people, and better for no one. This implication seems to many to be quite absurd. I call this the *Levelling Down Objection*.⁴⁶

So, for example, consider these distributions:

- (3) Half at 100 Half at 150
- (4) Everyone at 99

The Levelling Down Objection here states that:

- (G) It would be absurd to think that Situation (4) was in some way preferable to Situation (3).

Parfit claims that only the Telic egalitarian need reject Claim (G) and thereby only Telic egalitarianism faces the Levelling Down Objection. He presents the Levelling Down Objection specifically as an objection to Telic forms of egalitarianism, but holds that “on a Deontic view, we can avoid all forms of this objection.”⁴⁷ Parfit further claims that the Levelling Down Objection is extremely troubling, given that Claim (G) is a compelling claim, such that it would plausibly motivate egalitarians to reject the Telic view, in favor of Deontic egalitarianism, or some other view.⁴⁸ But both of Parfit’s claims about the Levelling Down Objection are mistaken.

It is not only on the Telic egalitarian view that we have reason to prefer (4) to (3), or to reject Claim (G). A Non-Intrinsic egalitarian could also think that we have reason to reject (G) and to prefer (4) to (3). For example, Distribution (3) might represent an affluent but class-ridden society, marked by forms of servility, domination, and exploitation. The Non-Intrinsic egalitarian should think it in one way preferable to move from such a society to a more egalitarian society (as in [4]) even if this adversely affected each person’s level of all-things-considered

46. Parfit, *ibid.*, p. 98. For earlier presentations of versions of the Levelling Down Objection, see Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), chap. 9; and Larry Temkin, *Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), chap. 9.

47. Parfit, *ibid.*, p. 99.

48. As Parfit puts it (*ibid.*, p. 99): “If we are impressed by the Levelling Down Objection, we may be tempted by the Deontic View.”

well-being. This is because the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian can allow that certain kinds of egalitarian social relations have a value that is not reducible to the effects on individual welfare that those social relations may have. The Non-Intrinsic egalitarian can take the view that the eradication of servility, domination, and exploitation in (4) is so significant that this makes (4) preferable to (3) even if everyone in (4) is worse off, all things considered, than in (3). This may sound counterintuitive, but such a position is not at all mysterious. If we think that certain egalitarian values have a significance that is independent of the effects of equality on individual well-being, then we may think that the value of equality can sometimes trump the value of maximizing (or a fortiori of merely increasing) well-being. Hence, the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian should reject Claim (G).

Moreover, the Deontic egalitarian does not escape the Levelling Down Objection, if that objection is understood in a slightly generalized way. Parfit thinks that Deontic egalitarians escape the Levelling Down Objection because their view is only a “view about what people should do, and makes no comparison between states of affairs.”⁴⁹ But we can recast the Levelling Down Objection so that it also catches the Deontic egalitarian. Consider this claim:

- (H) It would be absurd to think that we can have reason to act so as to bring about equality, even if doing so makes everybody worse off.

Claim (H) captures the force of the Levelling Down Objection just as well as does Claim (G). Now, it is true that certain forms of Deontic egalitarianism may accept Claim (H), and thus avoid the Levelling Down Objection. For example, one may object that Deontic egalitarians are able to avoid the Levelling Down Objection because Deontic egalitarianism can be understood as the general doctrine that we should treat people on the basis of equality, rather than the more specific doctrine that we have a basic deontic duty to promote equality. But a view of this kind would be a version of Deontic egalitarianism only in a thin, and rather formal, sense. Such a ‘merely formal’ version of Deontic egalitarianism could, indeed, avoid the Levelling Down Objection if one further held that treating people on the basis of equality need not involve

49. Parfit, *ibid.*, p. 116.

promoting distributive equality. The more substantive version of Deontic egalitarianism that has been under discussion here, however, is the view that holds not only that we have a formal deontic duty to treat people on the basis of equality, but that, furthermore, the specification of the substantive content of that duty involves a duty to promote distributive equality. A substantive Deontic egalitarian view of this kind cannot escape the Levelling Down Objection.⁵⁰

One might further object that Deontic egalitarianism can be reformulated or finessed in some other way so as to avoid the Levelling Down Objection. For example, there may be some versions of Deontic egalitarianism that claim that we only have a reason to pursue equality when we can do so in a way that does not involve any violation of the Pareto principle. That is, there may be a Deontic view that says that we may have reason to 'level up' towards equality, but never to 'level down'. But this would be a very peculiar version of Deontic egalitarianism. Indeed, it would be an egalitarian view only in a rather attenuated sense. In the general case, Deontic egalitarianism claims only that there are reasons of right or justice to promote equality, for example in cases where the inequality in question has been produced by wrongdoing. On such a Deontic view, however, we may still have reason to bring about greater equality through 'levelling down', as long as the reasons that we have for bringing about that increase in equality are reasons of justice.

It is therefore no part of Deontic egalitarian views, in the general case, that they can avoid a generalized version of the Levelling Down Objection. Thus, all the forms of egalitarianism we have discussed—Telic, Deontic, and Non-Intrinsic—face variants of the Levelling Down Objection. Therefore, Parfit is incorrect in claiming that, because only Telic egalitarianism faces the Levelling Down Objection, this Objection could plausibly lead us to choose Deontic egalitarianism over Telic egalitarianism.

The best possible response to the Levelling Down Objection, in either of the variants captured by Claims (G) and (H), is a knockdown response, and is given by Parfit himself. It consists simply in emphasizing that, for egalitarians, equality is not the only value. It may well be the most important political value we have, but it is nevertheless only one value among

50. I am grateful to an Editor of *Philosophy & Public Affairs* for pushing me towards greater clarity with regard to the content of Deontic egalitarian views.

others. Therefore, to discover what would be better, by virtue of egalitarian reasons, is not always to discover what would be better *tout court*. Hence, it can be in one way better to move from (3) to (4), even if, because of the loss of welfare, it is in some other way bad. Conversely, we can have a strong reason to promote equality, even if it would have negative effects on well-being. It is just that this reason need not always carry the day, or always trump other considerations. Let us call this response to the Levelling Down Objection the 'Pluralist Response'. It is, I claim, a definitive response to this objection to egalitarianism. Indeed, unless we hold an implausible one-eyed egalitarianism that claims that egalitarian reasons should always trump all other reasons, and hence that we should *always* level down, the Levelling Down Objection is unproblematic. We should reject both Claims (G) and (H).

One may object that the Pluralist Response involves paying too high a price to save egalitarianism from the Levelling Down Objection, because opening the door to pluralism risks conceding too much. One could, it might be suggested, be a 'pluralist egalitarian' even if one believed that the value of equality was of only limited or marginal importance, and was nearly always trumped by other considerations. One's view would then be egalitarian in a toothless and merely formal sense. This worry, however, is largely misplaced. Any plausible view of the value of equality, which acknowledges the force of considerations (b)–(f), will also acknowledge the great significance of those considerations. Moreover, although the argument of this article has been explicitly about equality, as such, taken as one particular political value, rather than being about the broader question of all-things-considered social justice, the significance of equality (on both Deontic and Non-Intrinsic grounds) will be at the heart of any plausible conception of justice.⁵¹

This conclusion that the Levelling Down Objection is unproblematic may still seem too quick, and so more needs to be said with regard to the

51. I cannot defend these claims in detail within the bounds of the current discussion, but simply make the point that, given the force and significance of egalitarian considerations, both on their own terms, and in terms of their place within an overall concern with social justice, we should not be unduly concerned that adopting 'pluralist egalitarianism' involves marginalizing the place of equality. One might say that, once one gives one's attention to the content of such considerations, one thereby also sees their considerable force. I am grateful to an Editor of *Philosophy & Public Affairs* for pushing me to address these concerns.

possible force of that objection. In considering the force of the Levelling Down Objection, it would be useful to consider three different sorts of situations in which that objection might arise, and how the objection may be able to get more of a grip depending on the precise specification of the situation that is in question. In the remainder of this section I shall, therefore, consider three versions of the Levelling Down Objection, each associated with a differently specified background situation. I shall call these three versions the *Weaker*, *Starker*, and *Starkest* versions of the Levelling Down Objection (the meanings of these terms will become apparent as we proceed). It might be suggested that the 'knockdown' Pluralist Response works only for weaker versions of the Levelling Down Objection, but not for stronger or starker versions of that objection. I shall argue, however, that the objection can be defeated, by appeal to the 'knockdown' Pluralist Response, in all but the most unusual ('*starkest*') circumstances.

First, let us consider the *Weaker* version of the Levelling Down Objection. Consider, for example, a situation where the move from (4) to (3) was in some ways better for many individuals (say, because it increased their self-respect, or because it eradicated demeaning relations of servility and domination) although it was, all things considered, worse for every single individual (let us suppose, because the fall in the welfare of every single individual outweighed the gains to that individual from increased self-respect or from the eradication of servility and domination). In such a situation, we can see how levelling down may be in some ways better for many individuals, while in other significant respects being worse for everyone. Here, it is easy to see why we might think that we can have some reason to prefer (4) to (3), even if (3) is preferable, all things considered.

However, it may be more difficult to understand how we could have some reason to prefer (4) to (3) if we consider a *Starker* case, in which the Levelling Down Objection might seem to get more bite. Here, let us assume that the situation in (4) is in no way better for anyone than the situation in (3). The first thing to say about such a case is that this situation is hard to conceive. For, given the content of egalitarian considerations (b)–(f), it is clear that gains in equality will always (or nearly always) be better (in some respects at least, even if not all things considered) for at least some individuals. Such gains in equality will increase the self-respect of the worse-off, eradicate hurtful

status-harms, remove frustrating sources of alienation, and create more worthwhile forms of social relationships. So, all or almost all gains in equality involve a benefit of some kind to at least some individuals, and therefore all, or almost all, really existing cases of 'Leveling Down' will take the form of the *Weaker* version of the Levelling Down Objection discussed above.

Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, let us imagine such a *Starker* case (even if it is *per impossible*) in which a gain in equality was in no respect better for any individual. It may thus be more difficult to see, in such a case, how we could have some reason to prefer (4) to (3). But we may believe that the sort of fraternal, egalitarian social relations that result from distributive equality are valuable in some way that is simply irreducible to any gain for, or benefit to, any particular individual. We may believe that such relationships have a basic moral significance that is not exhausted by their value *for* any particular individual. Non-Intrinsic egalitarians can take the view that the egalitarian considerations (b)–(f) describe the variety of ways not only in which increasing distributive equality can be valuable *for* particular individuals, but also in which it can be impersonally valuable, in addition to its value for individuals. Hence, the reasons that we may have for preferring (4) to (3) can be separable from any effects on the well-being of the affected individuals, or from any effects with regard to the promotion of the personal values of the affected individuals. We can believe this, from the standpoint of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, while at the same time placing weight simultaneously on the (all-things-considered) well-being of each individual. Thus, we could hold that we had some reason to prefer (4) to (3) that was independent of consideration of the well-being or personal values of the individuals in each distribution, while nevertheless holding that (3) was preferable to (4), precisely because everyone was better off in (3). This demonstrates that Parfit's 'Pluralist Response' to the Levelling Down Objection is fully adequate, whether we attend to that objection in its *Weaker* or *Starker* versions.

It is striking that the rejection of the *Starker* version of the Levelling Down Objection involves invoking impersonal reasons in favor of equality. This might seem in some way surprising, given that our egalitarian considerations (b)–(f) are each plausibly seen as generating personal reasons for preferring greater distributive equality. It is comparatively uncontroversial that considerations relating to the avoidance

of status-harms, objectionable forms of domination, and the erosion of self-respect, or relating to the promotion of healthy, fraternal social relations, can make equality valuable *for* individuals, and thereby give individuals personal reasons to prefer greater equality. Yet to grant this point is not thereby to deny that some or all of the egalitarian considerations (b)–(f) may also give rise to impersonal reasons that count in favor of promoting greater distributive equality.⁵² One can, after all, grant that the egalitarian values endorsed by Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism have both personal and impersonal aspects. On reflection, it is not at all implausible to think that considerations of the dignity and standing of human agents, together with a vision of how they might best live together, might lead us directly to an endorsement of the value of equality that did not have to be routed via consideration of the particular claims of individuals. The totality of reasons for favoring equality would then include, but nevertheless go beyond, the personal reasons that individuals might have, from their particular standpoints, for favoring equality.⁵³ It is in this sense that, while rejecting the claims of pure Telic egalitarianism, Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism may nevertheless be viewed as a broadly Telic view.⁵⁴

Now, the ‘Pluralist Response’ may, perhaps, in some way still seem implausible as a response to the Levelling Down Objection, in either the *Weaker* or *Starker* forms. Some may continue to be convinced that the Levelling Down Objection gives us good reason to reject Telic egalitarianism, or perhaps to reject egalitarianism altogether. However, if the Levelling Down Objection seems to give us reasons to reject any form of egalitarianism, then this can only be by redirecting our attention to the plausibility of that underlying egalitarian view, regarding its positive account of the value of equality. I have already suggested that the Telic egalitarian Claim (A), which Parfit calls “the Principle of Equality,” and which says that “it is in itself bad if some people are

52. On the distinction between personal and impersonal reasons, see T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 5, sec. 7, pp. 218–23.

53. I am grateful to Seth Lazar, Adam Swift, and Andrew Williams for helpful discussion of the personal and impersonal aspects of the value of equality.

54. For the claim that Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism can be seen as a broadly Telic egalitarian view, given that it appeals to the ways in which states of affairs can be valuable or disvaluable, see Section I above.

worse off than others,” is implausible. If we agree that Claim (A) is implausible, then we may be impressed by the Levelling Down Objection, and embrace Claim (G). If we are shown a situation in which a move to an egalitarian distribution is worse for everyone, it can be difficult to see how this move towards equality could be in any way better. This is especially so if the only account we are given of why this new situation might be better is the bald statement of the “Principle of Equality,” seen as a kind of moral axiom. This principle makes a claim for the intrinsic goodness of a “merely arithmetic” idea of equality which, I have suggested, we have no reason to accept. But, if we do feel the force of the pure Telic Levelling Down Objection in this case, that does not so much demonstrate the success of that objection, as the implausibility of the original claim at which that objection is directed. If there really were positive reasons for accepting Claim (A), then the Levelling Down Objection would be toothless for the reasons discussed above. That is, we could reject Claim (G) simply by appealing to the ‘Pluralist Response’, which stresses that egalitarians should be pluralists about value, and can therefore believe that levelling down can be in one respect better, without being better all-things-considered.

If we really did have good independent reason to accept Claim (A), and thereby to be Telic egalitarians, then the Levelling Down Objection would give us no reason to abandon our view. On the other hand, if we find the Levelling Down Objection compelling as an objection to Telic egalitarianism, this tells us only that we did not have good independent reason to accept Claim (A) in the first place. In other words, the plausibility of Telic egalitarianism turns entirely on the question of whether we should accept (A), and is untouched by any independent force that we might misleadingly accord to the Levelling Down Objection. I claim that we have reason to reject Telic egalitarianism, as we have no good reason to accept (A). But this claim need make no appeal to the Levelling Down Objection. Moreover, if Telic egalitarians could successfully make the case for Claim (A), then they need not be at all troubled by the force of the Levelling Down Objection, given that they can appeal to the successful Pluralist Response to that objection.

What, though, of the very *Starkest* version of the Levelling Down Objection? In delineating the starkest possible version of the objection, we should imagine a case in which the disappearance of an inequality has *no good effects whatsoever*, whether with regard to any aspect of

individual well-being or the realization of any *personal* values for any affected individual, or with regard to the greater instantiation of any of the *impersonal* aspects of the various egalitarian values. Consider, for example, this pair of possible situations:⁵⁵

- (5) Half at 150 Half at 100
- (6) Everyone at 75

Let us assume here that Situation (5), like Situation (3), represents a class-bound society, marked by relations of subordination, servility, and domination, where half of the population “lord it over” the other half. But, whereas (4) was a classless society that provided a somewhat reduced level of well-being to all its members, (6) is an altogether less attractive prospect. In (6), let us suppose, we retain all of the terrible social relations of domination and subordination found in (5), but instead of having relatively stable social classes, we instead have two equally (badly) well-off groups, who simply take it in turns to oppress and dominate each other. Here, let us suppose, none of the egalitarian reasons (b)–(f) gives us any reason to prefer (6) to (5), whether with regard to impersonal values or with regard to what is valuable *for* the individuals in each situation. Indeed, we may suppose that (6) is actually much worse than (5) on all relevant egalitarian dimensions: it contains more servility, domination, and oppression than (5), people have less self-respect than in (5), and social relations are in general more hierarchical, nasty, disrespectful, alienating, and unfraternal than in (5).

Thus, it is a particular feature of this *Starkest* situation that these two conditions obtain:

- (i) There is no individual for whom Situation (6) is better than Situation (5), in any respect, including those respects related to the egalitarian considerations (b)–(f), *and*
- (ii) There is no *impersonal* value, relating to the *impersonal* aspects of any of our egalitarian considerations (b)–(f), by virtue of which Situation (6) would be preferable to Situation (5).

55. It should be emphasized that nothing here turns on the precise *magnitude* of well-being for individuals in (6) being less than in Situation (4). The distribution of individual well-being, as such, could be identical in the two cases. What is salient to the difference between the two sets of situations is the difference in the overall description of the two cases, including their instantiation of the *impersonal* aspects of the values embedded in egalitarian considerations (b)–(f).

In other words, Situation (6) is not better than Situation (5) *for* anyone, in any respect, *and* Situation (6) is also worse than Situation (5) by the lights of any other value, relating to any of our set of egalitarian considerations (b)–(f).

Here, we may consider this claim, which is a particular, narrowed version of the Levelling Down Objection. This is the *Starkest* version of the Levelling Down Objection:

- (I) It would be absurd to think that a state of affairs such as Situation (6) was in some way preferable to a state of affairs such as Situation (5).

Non-Intrinsic egalitarians should accept *this* (and only this) version of the Levelling Down Objection. Where the reduction of inequality benefits nobody in any way, including in ways related to the egalitarian considerations (b)–(f), and neither does it have effects that are impersonally valuable by the lights of considerations (b)–(f), we have no egalitarian reason to prefer that reduction of inequality. But only when *both* of these considerations are met does the Levelling Down Objection have any force. Moreover, we can accept (I) while rejecting (G) and (H), and there is every reason to think that the sort of situation modelled in Situations (5) and (6) represents only a very small proportion of plausibly realizable Levelling Down cases. In most such cases, levelling down does benefit at least some people in some respects, and it is also impersonally preferable by the lights of egalitarian considerations (b)–(f).

We might say that, in unusual cases such as that involved in the transition from Situation (5) to Situation (6), we face one of the rare, but at least theoretically conceivable, situations in which the ‘deep social fact’ (described above in Section II) that connects gains in distributive equality to substantive improvements with regard to egalitarian considerations (b)–(f) does not, as a matter of fact, actually obtain. When this ‘deep social fact’ does not obtain, one might say that, although a reduction in the inequalities in individuals’ conditions has taken place, this simply gives us no information about whether the value of equality has been in any way advanced. In standard cases, where these sorts of unusual circumstances do not obtain, and where this ‘deep social fact’ holds true, the fact that there has been a reduction in inequality of

condition *does* give us significant information regarding the advancement of the underlying aims of equality.⁵⁶

In cases where the ‘deep social fact’ does not obtain, therefore, there may seem to be some force to the Levelling Down Objection. However, even in cases such as these, strictly speaking the Levelling Down Objection itself does no real work. By the lights of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, there is simply nothing valuable about a reduction in inequality that has no good effects in terms of the egalitarian reasons (b)–(f). Thus, there is not even any *prima facie* tension, on a Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view, between rejecting the force of the Levelling Down Objection in most cases, and thereby rejecting Claims (G) and (H), while at the same time allowing that there may be some exceptional circumstances in which the achievement of distributive equality may be without any value. But, in cases such as Claim (I), it is not so much that the Levelling Down Objection is successful, but rather that it is otiose. For, by the lights of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, there was never anything to be said in favor of this particular gain in distributive equality. This is precisely the sort of judgment that we should expect from a view described as ‘Non-Intrinsic’ egalitarianism, and which denies the intrinsic value of distributive equality, in itself. Moreover, this judgment—that some moves towards greater equality are in no way valuable—seems to be the right one, and its truth determines the precise location of the small grain of truth within the Levelling Down Objection.

If we turn from Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism to Telic egalitarianism, though, we see that this *Starkest* case provides an additional reason for rejecting the Telic view. Telic egalitarians must reject Claim (I) and allow that the move from (5) to (6), in the kind of society described above, is in some way an improvement. But this position seems quite unintelligible. If no one is made better off in any way, and no impersonal egalitarian value is promoted, it is quite mysterious how some change could be an improvement from the standpoint of a concern with equality. But the implausibility of the Telic egalitarian claim that (6) is in some respect preferable to (5) is wholly explicable by virtue of the underlying implausibility of the Telic egalitarian Claim (A). One can thus conclude that the Levelling Down Objection does no independent work in undermining

56. I am grateful to an Editor of *Philosophy & Public Affairs* for very helpful comments relating to these kinds of Levelling Down cases.

the plausibility of egalitarian claims where those egalitarian claims (i) fit within a pluralist theory that accommodates other, nonegalitarian values, and (ii) rest on a plausible positive account of why and how equality is valuable.

The Levelling Down Objection itself thus does nothing to undermine the plausibility of egalitarian claims, whether those claims are Telic, Deontic, or Non-Intrinsic. Parfit claims that the Levelling Down Objection has great force, but is not decisive. This is to accord it too much power: if we are pluralist egalitarians, the force of this objection is quite minimal. Moreover, the Levelling Down Objection does nothing to favor any one form of egalitarianism over others, whether Telic, Deontic, or Non-Intrinsic. All genuinely egalitarian views, and not only Telic views, face the Levelling Down Objection. It is just as well, for the sake of the cogency of egalitarianism, that all pluralist egalitarian views can face down this objection with impunity.

IV. EQUALITY OR PRIORITY, OR EQUALITY AND PRIORITY?

As well as introducing the distinction between Telic and Deontic egalitarianism, Parfit has performed the further service of clarifying the conceptual terrain of possible distributive views through describing the alternative 'Priority View', or prioritarianism. Prioritarianism is generally seen as being an alternative to, or a possible replacement for, egalitarian views. It is significant, for example, that Parfit initially introduces prioritarianism as a view that might act as a possible refuge or fallback position for those who are sufficiently troubled by the Levelling Down Objection to abandon Telic egalitarianism. The Priority View holds that:

- (J) Benefiting people matters more the worse off those people are.

Claim (J) is best understood as a Deontic principle, as it relates to how we should act. But the Priority View can also be expressed via a Telic analogue:

- (K) The goodness of some benefit enjoyed by an individual diminishes as the well-being of that individual increases.

In its Telic version, we can understand prioritarianism as a claim about the diminishing marginal moral significance of gains in well-being. In Section II, I claimed that there was no plausible reason *of*

equality to prefer (2) to (1) in the Divided World case. This is not to say, however, that the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian should thereby prefer (1) to (2), if she were to rank the two states of affairs. The Non-Intrinsic egalitarian, whose view is, after all, a *pluralist* view, can also accommodate the Telic prioritarian insight about the diminishing moral significance of greater benefits in well-being. It is no part of any plausible variant of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, or of any other plausible form of egalitarianism, that it provides a complete axiology or theory of value, or that it provides a complete guide to ranking the goodness or badness of states of affairs. There are many values that do not fall within the ambit of egalitarianism. Hence egalitarians, of whatever sort, should be pluralists insofar as they see equality as one value among others, albeit as a political value of tremendous importance. Indeed, it is for this very reason that all such pluralist egalitarian views are untroubled by the Levelling Down Objection. So, the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian can prefer (2) to (1), for the very reason that she accepts the prioritarian insight about the greater moral weight of benefits to the badly-off. It is just that this choice does not invoke reasons of *equality*, one way or the other.

Most writers, from Parfit onwards, have seen prioritarianism as a rival distributive view to egalitarianism. This is correct insofar as prioritarianism, if adopted as a stand-alone distributive view, finds no room for the distinctive value of equality, as embodied, for example, in considerations (b)–(f). Yet to see the two kinds of views as straightforward adversaries is to mischaracterize the conceptual terrain, and to miss some of the most significant and plausible of the available distributive views.

I have suggested that we should construe egalitarianism, in its Non-Intrinsic form, as embodying acceptance of a plurality of reasons (such as [b]–[f]) for why we should prefer outcomes where inequalities in condition have been eradicated. The Priority View, construed as an axiological claim about the diminishing marginal moral significance of gains in well-being, does not conflict with Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, which is a pluralist view. So understood, we should be both egalitarians *and* prioritarists, and do not need to choose between the two sorts of views.

Now, Parfit himself considers the possibility of a “mixed view,” albeit of a somewhat different kind. As Parfit puts it, “we may hold a mixed view. We may give priority to the worse off, partly because this will

reduce inequality, and partly for other reasons.”⁵⁷ Such a view is a form of Deontic prioritarianism, which may be defended by appeal, at the level of values, to a mixture of Telic egalitarianism and some other reasons. This is not the ‘mixed view’ I have in mind, which admits both Telic prioritarian and Non-Intrinsic egalitarian insights about the goodness and badness of states of affairs. The plausibility of the pluralist view I have in mind shows that there is no conflict between the Telic prioritarian view and the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view at the level of fundamental values. The egalitarian should believe in both the Non-Intrinsic badness of inequality, and the diminishing moral importance of greater benefits.

A pluralist Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view, which embraces the Telic prioritarian insight about the diminishing moral importance of greater benefits, would generate plausible judgments in all relevant distributive cases. Such a view can explain why levelling down is often morally unacceptable, all things considered, but is nevertheless sometimes morally preferable. It tells us, for example, that (4) *may* be, but is not necessarily, preferable to (3); whether it is so preferable, in any particular case, will depend on careful specification and examination of the plurality of egalitarian and nonegalitarian reasons that might count in favor of each option. This pluralist view makes sense of such choices within a plausible and intelligible account of egalitarianism that keeps sight of the nature of equality as a political value. In so doing, it avoids the excessive abstraction and implausibility of pure Telic egalitarianism. Such a pluralist view, combining Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism with Telic prioritarianism, also tells us why we might prefer (2) to (1) in Divided World cases, while nevertheless being clear that there are no distinctively egalitarian reasons for this preference.

Combining Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism with Telic prioritarianism generates a pluralist view that fills in some of the ‘spare’ axiological space that is left vacant by pluralist forms of egalitarianism. Such pluralist egalitarian views remain, nevertheless, robustly and truly egalitarian, and avoid the worst pitfalls of the pure Priority View, which simply fails to see the special moral significance of inequality. Stand-alone prioritarianism is an implausible distributive view, as it can mandate

57. Parfit, “Equality or Priority?” p. 103.

massive inequalities in distributive situations involving ‘unequal benefits’. For example, consider these options:

- (7) Half at 100 Half at 200
- (8) Half at 101 Half at 400

The pure Priority View sees no objection in preferring (8) to (7), even in ‘Undivided’ worlds, where there is social interaction between the individuals and groups in question. Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, on the other hand, sees that there is very good reason (even if it turns out to be nondecisive) for not preferring (8) to (7). Again, as in the previous decision cases, Pluralist Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism seems to give the most plausible distributive view.

Thus, Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism and Telic prioritarianism can fit comfortably together in a combined view that finds room for appreciation of both (i) the non-intrinsic badness of inequality, and (ii) the diminishing moral importance of greater benefits. Egalitarians should accept such a combined view. In accepting this view, they should reject any overly schematic understanding of egalitarianism and prioritarianism as mutually exclusive distributive views.

V. CONCLUSION

So, what should egalitarians believe? Firstly, they should reject both standard forms of egalitarianism—Telic and Deontic. The former is too abstract and is undermotivated. The latter, if understood as an exhaustive account of the value of equality, fails to appreciate the multiplicity of ways in which inequality is a great evil. Egalitarians should reject *both* Claims (A) and (B). Instead of Telic or Deontic egalitarianism, egalitarians should switch to a Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view. Secondly, egalitarians should reject the Levelling Down Objection and should regard it as toothless against any but the crudest egalitarian views. Thus, egalitarians should reject *both* Claims (G) and (H). Thirdly, egalitarians should embrace the central insight of prioritarianism, but without thereby abandoning the core of their egalitarianism. They should hold a pluralist version of Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism, which finds room to accommodate the moral significance of well-being, understood as being subject to the diminishing moral significance of greater benefits. They should accept Claims (J) and (K), but not regard those claims as embodying the whole truth about the ethics of distribution.

Perhaps most significantly, egalitarians should see the scope of their distributive view as a question that is internal to their understanding of equality, and that proceeds from a full understanding of the value of equality. An account of the scope of egalitarianism should be dependent upon a fully worked out, prior account of the variety of ways in which the badness of inequality manifests itself. So egalitarians should accept Claim (C), which says that inequality is bad, and be prepared to give a full elaboration of why and by virtue of what this claim holds true. On the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view, determining the most plausible account of the scope of equality involves piloting a middle course between one more extreme poles of, on the one side, Nagel's "strong statism" and, on the other side, pure Telic cosmopolitan egalitarianism. Egalitarians should thereby reject both Claims (E) and (F). An egalitarian view that encompasses all of these features may seem to be a novel beast within the taxonomy of possible distributive views. But it is the most plausible distributive view available.