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Equality, Social Justice and Social Welfare: A Road Map to the New Egalitarianisms

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This paper summarises the way equality has featured in the disciplines of social policy and political theory leading up to the presentation of a new egalitarianian framework for thinking about and acting for equality. The paper presents a broadly chronological, integrated review of the place of equality within the subjects concerned. The longstanding problems of universalism and targeting are themes which recur throughout, and in New Labour's approach to equality and social justice.

Introduction

The study of equality is a multidisciplinary field contributed to primarily by the disciplines of law, sociology, social policy and political theory. Each discipline has its own language and literature on equality, inequality and/or social justice. The three terms tend to be used loosely and interchangeably.

A number of concepts or principles have been put forward as fundamental to the study of social policy. Blakemore (1998) for example cites equality, justice, needs and rights, as well as equity. Equity has been a key concept informing the normative of social policy. Equity according to Lister (1992: 79) is 'a distributional principle applied to the allocation of services and benefits in order to achieve what is considered a fair division'. A concern with equity according to Holden (2005) therefore allows us to analyse and pursue reforms related to poverty, wealth, distribution, health, housing and the whole panoply of welfare issues (Holden, 2005: 175).

The welfare state evolved as a particular manifestation of the concern for equality in western democratic societies; communists disdained it, perhaps because Stalin regarded equality as a bourgeois prejudice. The concept of the welfare state if not the phrase itself is first found in the wartime debate between Churchill and Rossevelt in 1941 and expressed in the 'Atlantic Charter and The Four Freedoms' – Freedom of speech; Freedom of religion; Freedom from want and Freedom from fear.

Some have seen the development of the welfare state in historical perspective as part of a broad, ascending road of betterment for the working classes. This kind of Weberian interpretation of social change, positions social welfare and government as elements of a unilinear ascent towards social progress, rooted in collective benevolence. This is not a viewpoint held by many scholars today. The impact of the critical social theorists, feminism and post-modernism has been to reconceptualise government and

social provision as complex contingent phenomena contributing to both self and 'other' 'policing' of mass society. The control and surveillance functions of social welfare systems are as important to the study of equality and inequality as are its positive redistributive effects.

This paper begins by considering the relationship between equality and liberty. The paper then reviews the way key thinkers associated with the foundation of the British post-war welfare state approached equality and inequality in the 1940s and 1950s. Titmuss's analyses of equality were extremely modern in content and tenor but subsequent analyses in the discipline tended to be reductionist, materialist and masculinist. This is typified by the nature of the 'rediscovery of poverty' in the 1960s, discussed in the third section of the paper. The paradox of redistribution and the problems associated with universalism are discussed throughout but also form the backbone of criticism of New Labour's approach to social justice. New Labour's unwillingness to declare a coherent value basis for its equality policy (Ellison and Ellison, 2006) is in strong contrast to old Labour. The new normative frameworks provided by political theories of social justice, the old and the new egalitarianisms that have emerged, are summarised in the fifth section of the paper. The final part of the paper presents the egalitarian framework for thinking and acting for equality developed by the authors and their colleagues in Dublin and Belfast.

Equality and liberty

There are innumerable conceptualisations of equality, and no attempt will be made here to summarise or categorise them all (see Rae, 1981). Rather we focus here on the relationship between equality and freedom. The distinction between positive and negative 'liberty' goes back at least to Kant according to Rawls (2001) but in modern scholarship was first examined in depth by Isaiah Berlin (1969).

For Berlin (1969), negative liberty is the absence of obstacles, barriers and constraints. One has negative liberty to the extent that one is free to act on one's will and not prevented from doing so by the imposition of other's will, for example through physical force. Negative liberty gives individuals the space but not necessarily the capacity to act autonomously. In contrast, positive liberty is the capability of acting – being able to act in such a way as to realise one's choices and will. Positive liberty then is the freedom provided by certain capabilities to pursue one's own definition of the 'good society' and 'the good life'. The civil, political and social rights outlined by Marshall and demanded by the post-war Human Rights Movement constituted the actions and provisions it was believed governments needed to guarantee and provide in order that citizens should have both positive and negative liberty. Priority in liberal or residual welfare states such as Britain and Ireland has traditionally been given to negative over positive liberty.

Post-war governments in Europe introduced free or highly subsidised public 'social services' as part of a general post-war shift towards meritocratic and egalitarian ideals. The post-war Human Rights Movement used the concept of *the indivisibility of fundamental rights and freedoms* to justify the development of social welfare provisions by liberal governments. The concept of indivisibility refers to the way socio-economic, civil and political rights are intertwined and mutually supportive. The same concept was elaborated by T. H. Marshall in terms of the '*three legged stool of citizenship*' (Marshall, 1950: 25).

Marshall's concept of social citizenship accorded rights to basic standards of education, health and social care, housing and income maintenance (Marshall, 1950). These social rights had been referred to by Tawney (1931[1964]) as *practical equality* – a platform on which meaningful equality of opportunity could be built. Post-war social welfare was thus based on concepts of positive as well as negative liberties.

Until 1970 ideas of the purpose, functions and ambitions of the welfare state remained rooted in varieties of Keynesian social democracy, although, as Powell (1999, 2000) points out, equality was not necessarily an objective of the welfare state and certainly never the only objective of it, equality, equity and social justice did strongly influence post-war politics in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. The ways Beveridge, Titmuss and Tawney viewed these issues are reviewed in the next section.

If equality was not the objective of the welfare state, what was? Dean (2003) identifies and reviews three parallel discourses about the objectives of social welfare systems. The discourses are those of human rights, well-being and needs satisfaction.

Foundations of equality and inequality: Beveridge, Titmuss and Tawney

Beveridge's report on Social and Allied Insurance contained a largely implicit model of equality. The model was clear about the desirability of greater equality of opportunity and condition between men, and enunicated the usual post-war commitment to non-discrimination.

Beveridge (1942) argued that the post-war welfare state needed to grant to all citizens 'irrespective of race, religion or colour, full and equal social rights'. His argument was couched in terms of appeal to the self-interests of the middle and elite classes; that is he argued the system needed to be 'equalitarian' in order to prevent and contain potential post-war disorder and social breakdown. This was a fundamentally negative or defensive view of social provision in relation to equality.

As Abbott and Bompass at the time and many commentators since have noted, Beveridge had no conception of what we would today recognise as the principle of gender equality. The fiscal system Beveridge introduced was based firmly on a 'different and unequal' gender division of labour (see Pascall, 1986; Millar and Glendinning, 1990; McLaughlin, 1995; Williams, 1999 for just a few of the analyses of gender inequality in the British welfare system). The building of the post-war British welfare state around the needs and rights of a hypothetical white able-bodied, working-class heterosexual man – the male breadwinner (Lewis, 1997) – was critiqued by Titmuss in the 1950s but by few of his contemporaries (Titmuss, 1955[1963]). Titmuss's predecessor at LSE, T.H. Marshall, had also been guilty of gender equality 'blindness' in his analysis of the rights of citizenship (Pascall, 1986; Turner, 1996).

Tawney referred to *practical equality* by which he meant a policy environment that provides citizens with a sufficiently equal start in terms of goods, services and conditions of life, and subsequent fair access to relevant resources to allow them to make use of their individual capacities. Practical equality also implied a commitment to social and intergenerational mobility. It implies that material inequalities should be constrained at least to the point where equal worth and equal respect are not invalidated by the ability of the better off to 'exclude' themselves. Tawney's approach to social justice influenced Labour party thinkers and policymakers for the greater part of the post-war period (Ellison

and Ellison, 2006: 143–4). Tawney argued that public spending is the most effective way of redistributing resources. The aim, he argued:

> is not the division of the nation's income into eleven million fragments, to be distributed, without further ado, like cake at a school treat, among its eleven million families. It is, on the contrary, the pooling of its surplus resources by means of taxation, and the use of the funds thus obtained to make accessible to all, irrespective of their income, occupation or social position, the conditions of civilisation which, in the absence of such measures, can only be enjoyed by the rich. (Tawney, 1931[1964])

Titmuss was clear that redistribution, universality, non-discrimination and reduction of inequality of condition were the political and social issues and values that should drive public policy and planning (Alcock *et al.*, 2001). Although Titmuss was as strongly normatively driven as Tawney, he did not share his Christian socialism. Titmuss 'Social welfare and the art of giving' was the introduction to the edition of Tawney's *Equality* published in 1964, but it was also published in Eric Fromm's *Socialist Humanism* in 1965. Internationalist and secularist in his outlook, Titmuss had remarkable breadth and modernity of vision and analysis for his time and place, London (1942–1973).

Beveridge adopted a defensive position in support of redistribution, equality and universal social welfare. Titmuss in contrast subscribed to the discourse which we would today probably refer to as that of human well-being and human development. Regarding what to do with the nation's wealth, Titmuss rejected the equivalence of progress with material wealth; rather human development was the objective and measure of social progress.

Titmuss saw social policy very much as about the relationships between social groups and categories in society (the divisions of welfare). He was unusual for his time in appreciating that these 'group relations' were not only relationships of social class but also relationships between the sexes, races, the sick and disabled and the rest of society and so on.

Titmuss argued for two principles as the basis of the welfare state: first non-discrimination (Titmuss, 1955[2001]:106) and second redistribution. Titmuss believed the combination of these could alter and equalise life chances:

> all categories of social policy [and the provision of social welfare including that within the private and occupational category] are concerned with changing pattern[s] of current and future claims on resources set by the market, the possession of accumulated past rights and by the allocations made by government to provide for national defence and other non-market sectors . . . social welfare changes the patterns of claims by for instance directly providing in kind [social services] either free [at the point of use] or at less than market cost. Fiscal welfare . . . changes the pattern of claims by taking less in tax [than would otherwise be the case, or by paying out cash income supplements in specified circumstances]. (1955/2001:107)

Titmuss was critical of the biased nature of the universalism underlying the British social welfare system, but, like Tawney, was a firm believer in the necessity and desirability of the provision of social services on a universal basis (that is not means tested etc.). The

failings of the social welfare system in Britain, which were later attributed for instance by Williams, Lister and others to the biased type of universalism embodied in the British welfare state, were thought by Titmuss to arise from an incompleteness of implementation of a fundamentally sound system.

In *The National Wealth*, Titmuss critiqued the reduction of the concept of security to money wealth alone. In *The Social Divisions of Welfare*, Titmuss (1955[2001]) rejected the kind of classifications of welfare states which much subsequent scholarship in the subject engaged in. During the 1980s and 1990s analysis of equality and welfare tended to focus on either the overall impact of regime type or on specific types of inequality, such as gender or social class. The works of Korpi and Palme (1998) and Esping-Anderson (1990) on the one hand and Sainsbury (1990) on the other typify these two trends. The 1980s was a period of aggressive neoliberalism, when opposition to equality of condition was expressed in terms of a distaste for social engineering and the Nanny State. Green's *Equalising People* (1990) rejected the pursuit of distributive justice as excessively materialist and market oriented and as involving the 'politicising of every walk of life'.

Neither the political economists nor Fabianists understood the fundamental importance of inequalities of 'race', nation and gender for the structures, processes, politics and outcomes of the welfare state. Service provision is often of more significance to female that male citizens, given customary familial roles and the gendered division of labour. In this genre of research, equality concerns have focused on the extent to which public interventions have succeeded in eliminating social class gradients and/or the influence of family of origin on life chances. What kind or type of equality is assumed to represent success for welfare systems is often left unspecified in these analyses.

Universalism, social services and equality

Foreshadowing the later analyses of feminist and disability scholars, Titmuss recognised the key role of public service staff in delivering or in practice restricting the equality potential of public services. Thus:

> in the modern world, the professions are increasingly becoming the arbiters of our welfare fate; they are the key holders to equality of outcome, they help to determine the pattern of redistribution in social policy. These generalisations apply particularly when services in kind are organised on a universalist, free on demand basis. When this is so, we substitute in effect the professional decision-maker for the crude decisions of the economic market place . . . we have learnt from fifteen years' experiences of the NHS (1948–1963) that the higher income groups know how to make better use of the service; they tend to receive more specialist attention; occupy more of the beds in better equipped and staffed hospitals; receive more elective surgery and are more likely to get psychiatric help and psychotherapy than low income groups. (Titmuss, 1955[1963], Appendix on the NHS)

Two aspects of Titmuss' analysis are worth picking up on here. First his awareness that the everyday encounters with social services and social institutions involve exposure to 'hidden' cultural messages, particularly to social constructions of service users/clients. McLaughlin (1997) analysed the cultural messages given to service users in relation to welfare-to-work schemes. The stigmatising nature of some social services, especially those 'reserved for the poor' (Deacon and Bradshaw, 1992), may compound other negative

cultural representations of minority social groups. In the education service, the social construction of merit tends both to legitimise existing privilege and to devalue the achievements and knowledge of minority groups and individuals (see Lynch and Baker, 2005; Baker *et al*., 2004). Thus public services may increase as well as decrease inequality through their role in the social and cultural representation of social groups, such as the disabled, disadvantaged youth, children, poor parents and so on.

The second point to pick up on is the issue of the regressive rather than progressive nature of public services. The fact that the middle classes received more than their fair share of public services was not in Titmuss's view an argument against universal services, rather it was an argument for supplementing universal services with special initiatives, 'extensions' to ameliorate the failings involved and to finally achieve the ambition of extending social welfare so as to include the poor.

> Universalism in social welfare though a needed prerequisite towards reducing and removing formal barriers of social and economic discrimination does not by itself solve the problem of how to reach the more difficult to reach with better medical care, especially preventative medical care. Much the same kind of general conclusion can be drawn from Britain's experience in the field of education. (Titmuss 1955[2001]: 111)

In contrast Le Grand (1982), Titmuss' student, concluded that the disproportionate benefits gained by the middle classes from public education and health services meant Tawney's stategy of equality had failed, and he endorsed the neoliberal viewpoint that a mixed economy was preferable to public only social services.

It is important however not to lose sight of the profound contribution education and health services make to equality and democracy through the positive liberties and capabilities they develop. Competence in literacy and numeracy for example is not only required by citizens in relation to earning a livelihood, it is required by citizens to them to exercise their civil and political rights and to satisfy their need for autonomy. Enabling citizens to be autonomous and to participate in the political system underlies the United Nations' approach to the eradication of poverty and inequality. Hunt *et al*. (2002) thus classed basic education and health and the capabilities they provide as core capabilities which they recommended all governments should be required to guarantee as human rights in respect of all citizens.

One strand of the discipline has involved measurement of the equalising impacts of welfare systems as a whole. In this approach, which is typically comparative and dominated the 1980s scholarship, measurement has tended to be restricted to pre- and post-transfer household incomes or to index measures, such as commodification or replacement ratios. This genre of research has only recently begun to take account of the differential presence or absence of social services (see Bambra, 2005; 2006). Overall assessments of the equality impact of post-war welfare regimes have tended to be disappointing. One reason for this is the paradox of redistribution identified by Korpi and Palme:

> The more we target benefits at the poor only and the less concerned we are with creating equality via equal public transfers to all, the less likely we are to reduce poverty and inequality. (Korpi and Palme, 1998: 681–2)

The rediscovery of poverty

By 1970 the high hopes of Fabian socialism had been tarnished by the realisation that the Welfare State had not fundamentally changed the 'pattern of claims in society'. To use Titmuss's language: Unmet need continued to exist and even to rise despite substantial increases in public spending. Titmuss described the post-war government of 1951–1964) as 'not [being] entirely committed to the concept of the welfare state' (Titmuss 1955[2001]:106). Whether that was so or not, by the late 1960s the political and scholarly consensus was that the Welfare State was failing.

Worldwide recession, the oil crisis of the 1970s, the fall of the Callaghan government and the intervention of The World Bank, all contributed to a number of enquiries in Britain into aspects of the social welfare and fiscal systems. Evidence of their failings included the rediscovery of poverty. Although a relative definition of poverty was introduced that was not restricted to money or material wealth alone, the main focus of attention in the new poverty studies was not social participation and social inclusion but rather income levels and thresholds; in addition the focus was on household rather than individual incomes, with the result that women's poverty was hidden behind that of the household as a whole. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s feminist scholars redressed the masculinist bias of materialist studies, and of poverty, and revealed the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and gender inequality by and in social welfare systems and services through the 'compulsory altruism' underlying social and health care systems of 'community care' as well as the male breadwinner model of fiscal policy. Fiona Williams' (1999) radical reappraisal of the British welfare state applied feminist social theory and experiences of social action to what had become a masculinist, social classist body of scholarship.

Key texts have dotted the road map of scholarship of (in)equality and the development of the new egalitarianisms. Tawney's *Equality* (1931), Titmuss', *Social Divisions of Welfare* (1963), Le Grand's *The Strategy of Equality* (1982), Williams', *Social Policy A Critical Introduction* (1989), The Commission on Social Justice (1994), Pascall's *Women and Social Policy* (1997), Green's *Equalising People* (1990), Cavanagh's *Against Equality* (2002). Diamond and Giddens' *The New Egalitarianism* (2005).

The UK and Ireland's class structures remained relatively unchanged since the start of the twentieth century. Studies of social mobility have shown that the life chances and final positions of individuals in the 'competition for advantage' in Britain and Ireland remain more closely tied to the 'accident of birth', that is the status of one's family of origin and to one's gender, than to the efforts, achievements and capabilities individuals have shown during their lifetimes (see Marshall *et al*., 1997; Reed and Robinson, 2005).

> While governments were encouraging more people to engage in competitive attempts to improve their human capital potential, large numbers were still excluded from entering the competition on equal terms and class structures were proving remarkably resilient. (Tomlinson, 2001: 261)

Social justice, old and New Labour

The establishment of The Commission on Social Justice in 1992 by the then leader of the Labour Party, John Smith, and the subsequent publication of its report 'Social Justice Strategies for National Renewal' (1994) were significant events both analytically and in

terms of the politics and analysis of social welfare. The Commission was charged with 'going back to Beveridge' and a fundamental reappraisal of the Welfare State. This was an attempt by the Labour leader to break out of the straightjacket of neo-liberal thought about inequality, which had by then gripped British culture and society and to solve the puzzle of the apparent lack of impact of a welfare state by the spending of a third of the nation's wealth.

> The Commission's Final Report, 'Social Justice: Strategies for National Renewal', was a landmark document. [It] contained a compelling account of social injustice in Britain, a clear diagnosis of the forces shaping social economic and political change and a comprehensive vision of ideas on key issues such as the relationship between rights and responsibilities. Many of its recommendations have since been implemented by the Labour government, perhaps the most important mark of its influence. (Pearce and Paxton, 2005: x)

The egalitarianism of old Labour was criticised by the Commission on Social Justice (CSJ) for being unduly focused on material redistribution and for downplaying individual's responsibilities. The Commission recommended a more active approach to social welfare. A more active approach in which paid work is not the antithesis of welfare, but its partner. The Commission emphasised the way many social groups – mothers, disabled people etc. – had been denied equality and opportunities in the labour market. Together with the OECD Jobs Study (1996), the CSJ report was one of the first expressions of what has since become known as the social investment approach (Jensen and dubrowski, 2000). Within the social investment approach, investment in children and families is viewed as fundamental both to the achievement of social justice and to prudent government – reducing defensive public expenditure in the long run. Consequently, New Labour's approach to social justice has been strong in discourses of well-being and need but weak in terms of discourses of rights and social solidarity. Both Blair and Brown were quick to take up the individual responsibility baton. Both have denied the structural causes of inequality and engaged in victim blaming discourses. The government's position, as represented by the outputs of the Social Exclusion Unit, is that opportunities exist for everyone who wants to take them up, except for a small number of people living in deprived areas. The government's approach to social justice was first to target additional programs to deprived areas, for example Surestart, and subsequently to mainstream successful programs. More recently the approach has targeted the 88 most deprived localities in England and Wales. Fiscal redistribution has been low key and, although families with children have gained overall, child poverty eradication targets have not been met. A strong emphasis on the individual's responsibility to invest in their own human capital, 'education, education, education', has paralleled narrow definitions of equality of opportunity and discrimination. The insistence on spatially targeted policies and provision has proven a major constraint (see Alcock, 2005; Ellison and Ellison, 2006; McLaughlin and Monteith, 2006). The absence of a coherent framework in relation to equality and social justice has been a major weakness of New Labour's Third Way, not rectified by Diamond and Gidden's (2005) exposition of what they claim to be the new equalitarianism.

Social Policy is inescapably concerned with questions of redistribution and the social values which direct that redistribution. Titmuss, Burchardt, Ellison and Ellison (2006) all emphasise the desirability of social policies being based on coherent and explicit value

systems: 'in this [sphere of social justice] we should not seek a technical fix [instead we need] a substantive theory of social justice' (Burchardt, 2006: 158–9).

For this we survey recent developments in the field of political theory.

Developments in normative theories of social justice

The Rawlsian paradigm

Theories of social justice were dominated for many years by John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1971), which transformed contemporary political theory from being dominated by utilitarianism and by philosophers who maintained that no constructive, normative theory was possible at all. Although Rawls's work has many fertile avenues, the central idea from the point of view social policy and social justice is his endorsement of what he calls the two principles of justice. Principle 1 is the principle of equal basic liberties, guaranteeing to each person traditional 'basic' negative liberties, such as freedom of conscience and freedom of expression. Principle 2 has two parts: part (a), the difference principle, states that other 'primary social goods', such as income and wealth, should be distributed in whatever way maximises the goods held by the worst-off group (tentatively identified by Rawls as unskilled workers). Part (b) states that social positions should be open to everyone under the principle of fair equality of opportunity. Rawls says that principle 1 has priority over principle 2, and 2(b) over 2(a). He thinks that the difference principle justifies some inequalities, because these may be necessary to provide incentives for people to act in ways which benefit the worst off. Despite this qualified endorsement of inequality and the justification it has provided to and for 'trickle down' theories of economic development and growth, Rawls's theory is broadly egalitarian and has set the terms of debate in egalitarian theories of social justice for the past 35 years.

Issues broadly within the Rawlsian paradigm

Rawls's work has generated an enormous literature and it would be impossible to try to summarise it here. For present purposes, we concentrate on the difference principle and the two key issues it raises.

The first issue is about the relation between the difference principle and socio-economic inequalities. The principle focuses entirely on the situation of the worst-off group: if substantial inequalities are necessary to maximise their prospects, they are thereby justified. The principle has a powerful appeal, because it tells us to prioritise the interests of the poor rather than to make a fetish of equality for its own sake. How could anyone disagree with that? To do so would seem to involve the danger of 'levelling down'. In response, some authors have questioned the difference principle itself, by arguing that there may indeed be reasons for preferring greater equality to higher living standards for the worst off. For example, perhaps even poor people would rather have more equality together with a sense of social solidarity with others than to have more material goods in a more divided society (Crocker, 1977). Another line of criticism asks whether it is consistent with a belief in the difference principle for better-off people to insist on being given incentives in the first place (Cohen, 1991). If, as Rawls maintains, the members of a good society are committed to its basic principles, surely they cannot both claim that they want

to maximise the prospects of the worst off *and* insist on being paid incentives for doing so. A third, related line of criticism is to maintain that it is not in fact necessary to offer people material incentives and therefore that even if the difference principle is theoretically correct, it does not necessitate or justify substantial inequalities of condition (Carens, 1981).

The second issue has to do with the 'space' or 'currency' we should use in thinking about social justice and equality. According to Rawls, justice is about the distribution of 'primary social goods': basic rights and liberties, freedom of movement and occupation; the powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of responsibility, income and wealth, and 'the social bases of self-respect' (Rawls 1993: 181). Rawls describes primary social goods as 'all-purpose means' for achieving one's ends, whatever they happen to be, and therefore the appropriate basis for defining a just distribution among citizens with very different aims. Amartya Sen has argued for only one possibility, i.e. distribution, but there are in fact several legitimate answers to the question: 'equality of what?'. Sen's own answer is that we should seek equality in people's capabilities to achieve valued 'functionings' (Sen, 1992). His argument is that primary goods are only a means to an end, and that the same primary goods confer very different capabilities on different individuals and groups. Other authors have suggested other answers to 'equality of what?', for example: overall well-being (Landesman, 1983; Mortimore 1968), 'resources' in a relatively broad, technical sense (Dworkin, 2000), opportunity for welfare (Arneson, 1989), 'access to advantage' (Cohen, 1989) and 'real freedom' (Van Parijs, 1995). Among authors broadly sympathetic to Rawls, there has been a tendency to expand his list of goods to include power, meaningful work and cultural and educational opportunities (Nielsen 1985; Norman 1987; Peffer, 1990), as well as 'the goods both to be cared for. . .when one is unable to care for oneself, and to meet the dependency [sic] needs of others without incurring undue sacrifices oneself' (Kittay, 1999: 103).

Sen's answer to 'equality of what?' has had a significant policy impact as the basis of the UN Development Programme's Human Development Index, which is based on life expectancy, education and per capita income, rather than on income alone. But as Sen himself has stressed, there are many important human capabilities, even at the level of 'basic' 'central' or 'core' capabilities. This generates at least two key challenges for the approach. The easier of these is to try to identify a relatively complete set of basic capabilities that can be used for defining minimum standards of well-being within or between countries. A leading example of this approach is the work by Martha Naussbaum (2000, 2005). Naussbaum has developed a list of ten categories of 'central human functional capabilities'. This list has been widely debated and queried, suggesting that the task of developing a consensus even at this level is far from straightforward, but it is closely related to work on the idea of basic needs (Braybrooke, 1987; Brock, 1998), where a number of relatively similar lists have been devised. Another example is that of Hunt *et al*. (2002), who in the context of poverty eradication identified and recommended eight 'core 'capabilities they believe should be individual human rights. Far more daunting, and arguably impossible, is the task of using the capabilities approach for a general measure of equality and inequality, since beyond the threshold of basic capabilities there are countless other valuable capabilities, on which people place very different values. At this level, it may be more relevant to define equality and inequality in a different space more akin to primary social goods.

Distribution versus relationships

The Rawlsian paradigm focuses on how a variety of goods – which may be as abstract as capabilities or opportunities for well-being – should be distributed among individuals. Iris Marion Young has argued that this is a fundamental mistake. Instead we should think of social justice in terms of the kinds of relationship people have with each other, and in particular in terms of relationships between social groups. Young criticises what she calls the 'distributive paradigm' for two reasons:

> First, it tends to focus thinking about social justice on the allocation of material goods such as things, resources, income, and wealth, or on the distribution of social positions, especially jobs. This focus tends to ignore the social structure and institutional context that often help to determine distributive patterns . . . [Secondly] when metaphorically extended to non-material social goods, the concept of distribution represents them as though they were static things, instead of a function of social relations and processes. (Young, 1990: 15–16)

This focus on social relationships, and particularly on mutual respect and recognition, is characteristic of a wide range of authors (Walzer, 1985; Taylor, 1992; Honneth, 1995; Miller, 1997; Wolff, 1998; Anderson, 1999; Fraser, 2000). Some of these theorists argue that the only reason that distributions matter is because of their effect on social relationships; others agree that distributions matter for independent reasons, but argue that social relationships are also important.

A framework for thinking about social justice and equality

The impact of Young's work has been taken forward by and applied to social policy by Ruth Lister (2004) and Fiona Williams (1989). The rejection of the distributive paradigm and acceptance and integration of individual agency and responsibility into and within egalitarian theory recognition are also present in the work of Baker *et al.* (2004). We conclude by presenting this framework for thinking about social justice and equality which responds to these debates. The framework allows for more and less minimal conceptions of equality by distinguishing between 'basic' equality, 'liberal egalitarianism' and 'equality of condition'. For present purposes, we focus on equality of condition.

'Equality of condition' is, broadly speaking, the belief that people should be as equal as possible in relation to the central conditions of their lives. Unlike Rawls's and other liberal egalitarian theories, it is not about trying to make inequalities fairer, or giving people a more equal opportunity to become unequal, but about ensuring that everyone has roughly equal prospects for a good life, that they are equally *enabled* and *empowered* in living their lives. This idea can be made more specific by focusing on five key 'dimensions' in which people can be equal or unequal in contemporary societies. These represent five major determinants of how well a person's life goes, in relation to a wide range of conceptions of what a good life looks like – five types of condition that enable people to lead successful lives. A brief account of these dimensions is as follows.

Respect and recognition

An important element of the idea of equal respect is the liberal idea that every individual is entitled to equal rights and privileges of citizenship in the country in which they live, and

indeed that we are all, in some sense, citizens of the world. But equality of condition is also about appreciating or accepting differences rather than merely tolerating them, and thereby questioning practices and cultures of majoritarianism and naïve universalism. This does not mean that we have to refrain from criticising other points of view. Members of dominant groups *do* have a particular obligation to try to understand the perspectives and commitments of members of other groups, and to open their own ideas to critical interrogation. But none of us has to give up the idea that some ideas and practices are unacceptable. What we should be willing to engage in, is a critical dialogue with others. This approach can be called 'critical interculturalism'. Equality of respect and recognition also involves setting limits to inequalities of esteem.

Resources

There are many kinds of resources, not just income and wealth, but things like social and cultural capital, access to public services, environmental conditions, free time and so on. Equality of condition is concerned with the whole range of these resources. No one could plausibly call for everyone to have exactly the same resources, because people have different needs and may take on different work burdens. Equality of resources would therefore involve a distribution of resources that, first of all, ensured that everyone's basic needs were met (an aim for which the capabilities approach is well suited), and beyond that would enable people to have roughly equal prospects of well-being. Although the resulting distribution of resources would be unequal, it would be much more equal than what we have now.

Love, care and solidarity

The third dimension of equality of condition is love, care and solidarity. Equality in this dimension is about everyone having ample prospects for these vital relationships. Of course we cannot institutionally guarantee that everyone's needs for love, care and solidarity are met, but we can try to arrange societies in ways which make this more or less likely, by paying attention to how both paid and unpaid work are organised, how transportation networks are set up, how children's homes and other institutions are structured, how criminals are treated and so on. The aim should again be an enabling one.

Power

Here the central aim of equality of condition is to reduce power inequalities as much as possible. Doing this would involve protecting traditional liberal civil and political rights, although with a more restricted conception of property rights. It would also involve supporting certain group-related rights, such as the right of groups to political representation in appropriate fora. Finally, equality of power would involve a more egalitarian, participatory politics and the extension of democratic principles to all areas of society, particularly the economy and the family.

Working and learning

The fifth dimension of equality is working and learning. In all societies, work plays a very important role not just in access to resources, but in shaping relations of status, power and love, care and solidarity. But work is also important in its own right, as a potential source of personal development, self-expression and achievement, and as a potential burden. All kinds of work, paid and unpaid, are important here, including the work done to sustain relations of love, care and solidarity. Equality in relation to work would mean that everyone would have a right to some form of potentially satisfying work, that there would be limits to inequality in the burdens of work and that people would be compensated for unequal burdens when they occurred.

These ideas have clear implications for learning, because they mean that everyone should have access to the education and training necessary for satisfying work. But learning is more than a preparation for work: it, too, is important for its own sake. So equality of learning would involve ensuring that everyone had opportunities for engaging and satisfying learning – learning that develops themselves as people. It would relate to the whole range of sites of learning, not just formal educational institutions.

This five-dimensional framework contains both distributional and relational elements, as well as incorporating an expanded list of the conditions (both distributional and relational) necessary for people to have roughly equal life prospects. It recognises both the 'group' and the individual aspects of human nature and is founded on a relational citizen rather than the atomistic citizen of neoliberalism. It therefore purports to be a more adequate framework for analysing inequalities and for developing just social policies than other theoretical approaches. At the same time, it remains relatively flexible in terms of the strength of egalitarian objectives and the constitution of equality within each dimension. That is, there is space and room for citizens to engage with the full range of equality questions along each of the five dimensions and so to identify and select the interventions they want the institutions of government to arrange on their behalf. Its liberal egalitarian component could be developed along broadly Rawlsian lines, by prioritising the worst off in the context of persistent inequality, or in accordance with the idea of a robust conception of a social minimum (e.g. Millar 2005), while, at the level of 'basic' as Human Rights equality, the focus could be on ensuring the most basic capabilities and functionings of all. McLaughlin and Monteith's (2006) elaboration of community Human Rights and social justice action plans provides a vehicle through which advocates of greater equality may identify and ensure the delivery of policy interventions across the five life dimensions identified by Baker *et al.* McLaughlin and Monteith emphasise the importance of bringing the full range of public policy and public bodies to bear on the achievement of social justice. McLaughlin (2003) pointed out that the full range of equality policy interventions extends well beyond the traditional one of material distribution and redistribution to include cultural policies and issues of governance, as the new egalitarianisms acknowledge.

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