

[These scattershot and somewhat incoherent remarks were excised from various chapters and assembled here for the reader interested in greater illumination regarding Hass's distaste of equality.

- Robert Von Stricker Beresford]

Rawls' 'justice as fairness' is just one of the numerous attempts to create a more equal society (which he misleadingly calls a fairer society). They all have two things in common. "The two ineliminable components of the concept of equality are a comparison among all individuals that negates irrelevant differences, and the postulation of a common humanity in which worth is commutable" (Freeden, p. 465). We are all essentially the same and we should all be treated as such. This notion has been around for a very long time. Perhaps since humans have been thinking about themselves. Proponents of this notion almost always do two things: they claim that there was a time – a golden age, as it were – when human beings really were equal and treated that way, and they claim that there will be a new time in the future when all people are equal again.

In recent political theory the idea is mostly associated with the various forms of socialism. Usually it is held up as the ultimate goal, above all other goals, but there are more practical variants that have merely attempted to create greater equality. Rawls' theory represents the culmination in a relatively recent liberal obsession with the concept, that can probably be traced back so far as John Stuart Mill in the latter half of the nineteenth century. But whether socialist or liberal, the idea clearly has a very broad appeal. It seems like many of us, except many of the rich perhaps, really would like everyone to be equal, *in theory*. When faced with the practical consequences of equality (if it were possible) many of us may not be so enthusiastic (though that clearly depends on your situation and upbringing).

What do we mean when we talk about equality? Political equality? Social equality? Economic equality? Well, most of the theories focus primarily on economic and social equality. Political equality is not usually considered "equality" any more. It was in the early days of liberalism, but since then suffrage it has lost its allure. Early liberals, more concerned with freedom, figured political equality

(which could be considered political freedom) and freedom would bring social equality, if not economic equality. It didn't and so what we tend to mean, in the developed world anyway, when we talk about equality is primarily economic equality but also social equality.

Even something as simple-sounding as political equality is more complicated than it at first seems. If we all have one vote are we all equal? Sure, why not? Well, it depends on the system we are using, for one thing. But certainly any politician anywhere has more influence if not more power than the average non-politician. If you are head of some Ukrainian organization in Bloor West Village, you have more influence than if you aren't. And the same thing applies, but to a much greater extent, to social equality. Social equality is less tangible than either political or economic equality. For me that makes it insignificant, but it is clearly something many of us would like. As some believed social equality would follow from political equality (and it has, to an extent, in the sense that there is less social differences between the richest person in Canada and the poorest than there was at Confederation, and it would be even more true of the difference between a peasant and the King in England a century or two before that), so some believe that social equality will come from economic equality. Let's assume that's true, for the time being.

The fact of the matter is, folks, we are not all equal. Think about it. Think about yourself; think about your friends; think about your family; think about the last person you saw on the street. We are not all the same, and we are not all equally attributed or equipped. And we don't act like it either. I mean, we say we'd like us all to be equal, but we don't live up to that (impossibly) high standard. We are animals and we have needs that must be met. We are in some kind of competition with each other to survive. How we handle this competition is an entirely different matter.

A former professor of mine has suggested that, as a result, equality is a myth – much like Plato's myth of The Body, by Ron Geesin and Roger Waters, that we use to prevent social upheaval and the success of communism. Well, do we need this myth? I don't know that we need a 'myth' but I think we need to call each other equal because we all have our strengths and weaknesses. They don't balance

out, and never will. We are all equal in our unique differences, in that we all have them. How do we determine who is better? Lots of people felt like they knew how. These folks are most often conservatives. Plato, Burke, Carlyle, Nietzsche, and many other equally disparate thinkers have suggested over time that there are ways of discovering who is better. But that's silly. One day Jeff Skilling is a genius. The next day he's resigned. Then a little while later he and his subordinates are all crooks. That is to say, circumstances often dictate who we think of as superior. Look at our culture now. Look who we 'celebrate.' Would anyone argue that a majority of these folks deserve what they get? Judging by the success of tabloids, I think not. We have no idea who's better, so we need to claim we are all deserving of relatively similar treatment. But we don't have a state to realize impossible goals, we have a state because we can't really live without one.

Recognizing that there is equality, and there is Aristotelian equality; treating everyone exactly the same, or treating everyone differently in order to treat them the same (equity), we must find a middle ground between the two; where people who need to be treated somewhat differently are treated differently in so far as they need it, whereas people who want to be treated differently, but do not need to be, are treated the same. Basically we must establish a criterion of need for Aristotelian equality. I guess doing that is still subscribing to Aristotelian equality. If we treat everyone differently, we obviously regress back to some kind of conservative system. If we treat everyone the same, we get bureaucratic nonsense up the ass.

But this no-man-rule, the fact that in an authentic bureaucracy nobody occupies the empty chair of the ruler, does not mean that the conditions of rule have disappeared. This nobody rules very effectively when looked upon from the side of the ruled, and, what is worse, has one important trait in common with the tyrant...arbitrary power (The Philosopher 2005, 78).

The line between Aristotelian equality and egalitarianism is something that must be adjusted regularly. How do we get that? Well, we get that through critiques of the system, through freedom of speech and popular elections.

In terms of our humanness, and what that leads to (the right to our lives), we are all equal. So,

some people need translators to get a fair trial, right? But I don't, at least not in this part of Canada. If I insist on a translator so that I am equal with the foreigner, than I am just a douche bag. Further, any lawyers and judges who decide that I am right in my insistence, and decide to change the laws for my benefit are candidates for *South Park's* "Biggest Douche in the Universe Award." I don't know if there is another way beyond ridicule. Maybe there is.

"The inequality of...things is not an evil, but a matter of order and degree." (Kolakowski 1978, p.20) It's the way things are. We shouldn't worry too much about it, we should just try to keep it reasonable. That's to say there's no reason to say "equality is a fact, let's let the poor starve to death" but there is equally no reason to say, "death to the rich!"

The idea of perfect equality, i.e. an equal share of all goods for everybody, is not only unfeasible economically but is contradictory in itself: for perfect equality can only be imagined under a system of extreme despotism, but despotism itself presupposes inequality at least in such basic advantages as participation in power and access to information...in real life more equality means more government, and absolute equality means absolute government (Kolakowski 1978, 1210).

It's like I keep saying, moderation, moderation, moderation. The answer isn't to level,¹ nor is it to divide as much as possible.²

Nobody has come up with a large framework for relating our large and vague hopes for human equality to the actual distribution of power in the world. The capitalists remain as greedy and shortsighted, and the Communist oligarchs as cynical and corrupt...as Orwell said they were...For nobody has come up with a plausible scenario for actualizing what Orwell called the "technical possibility of human equality (Rorty 1990, 175).

Whether we hear it from a conservative or a liberal, the message remains the same. It is yet another of these difficult moral lines that each and every society has to draw.

We are all the same and we are all totally different. We are all animals. We are all mammals. We are all human beings. We all have similar instincts (often in different proportions). At the same time, our circumstances differ completely. We have (moderately) different genes. We have different environments: ecological, familial, cultural, and all that. When I assert I am not like you, I am correct to an extent. But when I assert you are indeed like me, I am also correct to an extent. Whether we are comparable or not often depends on the particular situation.

1 "Those who attempt to level, never equalize" (Burke 1973, 61).

2 Editor's Note: Not that many people seriously advocate that.

What it comes down to is fairly straightforward, and not very exciting or happy: equality before the law (as much as possible) and plurality otherwise. By plurality I mean we recognize that people are of all kinds. They are all at base equal, at least until they transgress our rules, but they are also not the same. I'm not talking about the government affirming differences based on group membership or anything like that. I'm saying, people are all the same and all different. And it's up to them how they want to express that. And this fits in with the world.

There are, however, two distinct versions of pluralism, one liberal and one rather more existentialist. The liberal version states that there is a plurality of different goods among which one must choose without there being any single clear criterion for judging one good to be uniquely best. The tacit image of the world presupposed by the liberal version is of a place full of goodies with plenty for everyone...The existentialist version is less sanguine: it is not just the case that one must choose, but choosing one good carries with it a cost that goes beyond the mere opportunity cost of missing out on other goods; this cost may, and usually will, include inflicting pain or visiting evil on oneself, or on others (Geuss 2001, 155-156).

Some of us get shit we want while others don't. Some of us get what appears to be what we “deserve” while others don't. “In pluralist societies, where the connection between personal achievement and social position is fairly high, such 'privileges' may, in effect, be limited in favor of genetically inherited differences, but not completely abrogated. If we take the principle of an equal start in life seriously and wish to remain faithful to it to the end, we have one foot on the road to totalitarian slavery” (Kolakowski 1990, 170).

Equality is a nice idea. But trying forcefully to implement it (the only way we can implement it) results in political domination. This is a fact. I don't know how to get around it. If I tried theoretically, well that wouldn't help anyone anyway, because the problem is that it is a problem of the real world, and not of theory. Many people have come up with elaborate plans for equality (of some kind or other) but they don't work in actual fact. The only thing we can do, as far as I can see, is try to work on keeping the divide between rich and poor reasonable. I don't know what I mean by reasonable, but I know that 5 five per cent of the population having eighty per cent of the wealth ain't reasonable. There are two things we want here: we want to keep the rich with some sort of wealth so the system continues to operate, and we want to prevent some kind of insane revolution attempting to

instate some kind of “equal” society.

Some claim “equality of opportunity,” or equality before the law, that is the equality of liberalism “flattens difference.” That is to say, the poor are treated like the rich, and so in effect are treated worse than the rich. But a line must be drawn somewhere. Where? Physical lines? Financial lines? Intellectual lines? Equality flattens difference way more than liberalism ever will.

All attempts at equality tend to lead to horrible genocides. This is because absolute equality³ supposes utter stagnation, that is people never ever changing in any way. That isn't possible. As a result, things need to be done *constantly* in order to reset equality. This isn't possible through anything but force and violence on a mass scale. The causal link between equality (or any other equally unrealizable option) and genocide is that unrealizable ideals, if they are not modified, cannot be transplanted into the real world. When they fail this causes anger in their adherents (who believed they would succeed) and it also causes the adherents to force those who disagree (and there will always be people who disagree) to be reconditioned. They are angry and they are forcing people against their will. The next step isn't rocket science.

The ideal of equality – conceived of as identity, the absence of differences – is self-contradictory, to be sure, on the assumption that people are what they have been throughout history known to us. The utopians, nevertheless, keep promising us that they are going to educate the human race to fraternity, whereupon the unfortunate passions that tear societies asunder...will vanish. However, since Christianity has been trying to carry out this educational task for two millennia, and the results are not quite encouraging, the utopians, once they attempt to convert their visions into practical proposals, come up with the most malignant project ever devised: they want to institutionalize fraternity, which is the surest way to totalitarian despotism (Kolakowski 1990, 139).

Equality is only possible to a degree, there can be greater equality and lesser equality but there is no absolute “actual equality.” It is not possible for human beings. So the problem then is the degree of equality, not whether or not we can have actual equality. It is possible that punishment for crimes like theft, crimes where the individual criminal has little choice but to commit them or die, can be modified based on the circumstances of the victim. Conversely, violence shouldn't be the sole determining factor in something like theft. At some point, a white-collar fraud can be worse than

3 “The strictures boil down to this: first, a universal fraternity is inconceivable; second, any attempt to implement it is bound to produce a highly despotic society, which, to simulate the impossible perfection, will stifle expression of conflict and thus destroy the life of culture by a totalitarian coercion” (Kolakowski 1990, p. 138).

armed robbery. Certainly, putting forgiveness processes into the judicial system would aid this to some degree. But an institutional device that forced the judge and/or jury to take note of particularly distressing circumstances is very possible. I don't know how to make it a law, but it seems like something worthwhile. Maybe we could make the analogy, as the non-English or non-French speak needs a translator, so a person starving to death needs leniency.

It might be a theoretical conundrum to suggest “equality before the law,” but if it is it will remain that way. There are lots of unresolvable theoretical dilemmas. That doesn't really worry me, as I know of no alternate attempts to 'equality before the law' that are successful as forms of 'equality of opportunity.'

A community is not made out of equals, but on the contrary of people who are different and unequal. The community comes into being through equalizing...This equalization takes place in all exchanges, as between the physician and the farmer, and it is based on money. The political, noneconomic equalization is friendship (The Philosopher, 2005, 16-17).

However I may dress, you will probably serve me if I have money. And vice versa. And we all have to pay taxes, which makes us equal, too. Though with taxes it definitely makes more sense to base them on the Aristotelian notion of equality.