

NOTE: *This is the original version before the accepted manuscript version* - please cite the published version. The original place of publication is *The Philosophical Quarterly*.
Citation: Arthur Schipper; The Equal Society: Essays on Equality in Theory and Practice. Philos Q 2016 pqw063. doi: 10.1093/pq/pqw063
Url: <https://academic.oup.com/pq/article-abstract/doi/10.1093/pq/pqw063/2623133/The-Equal-Society-Essays-on-Equality-in-Theory-and?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

The Equal Society: Essays on Equality in Theory and Practice. Edited by George Hull. (London: Lexington Books, 2015. Pp. vii + 354. Price £70.00.)

The Equal Society collects fourteen new essays with the general aim of improving the orthodox distributive approach to egalitarianism. It applies it to real-world issues (e.g., poverty-based, gender, racial, educational, epistemic, and workplace inequalities) and connects it with recent currents in egalitarian thought, including African ethics and relational egalitarianism, which takes social relations rather than distributable goods as primary for understanding the nature of equality and the sources of inequality.

Fricker (§3) argues that without the capacity to epistemically contribute to one's community (75–76), one will be *effectively excluded* from being an equal participant and, as a result, not safeguarded from relations of domination (i.e., both actual and counterfactual oppression and coercion). In the case of rape (86), for instance, victims' (and potential victims') epistemic contributions must be respected both for them to be able to learn and then use the concept *rape* to make sense of their experiences, and then to have their testimony taken seriously by the police and in court. She argues that it is thus a necessary condition for equality and for respecting the equal standing of fellow citizens (84) that such epistemic capabilities are equally distributed. Putnam (§4) extends this line of thinking by making explicit that epistemic notions such as intelligibility and *understanding another's interests* are essential for *respecting* other persons *as persons* (108) with interests which must be given their appropriate weight in one's practical deliberation (e.g., in contexts of civic, and other interpersonal, deliberation). It seems dubious, however, that intelligibility and epistemic capa-

bilities are *necessary* conditions of equality. It is indeed an unequal community which excludes its members from equal participation on the basis of their inability to epistemically contribute to it, and of course, it is important to give members the opportunity to contribute. But because there are cases where such contributions are impossible or unlikely (e.g., non-human animals, and those physically or psychologically incapable of epistemically contributing), an intelligibility condition seems too strong, and a more fundamentally egalitarian policy would be to treat others with equal respect *whether or not* they have the capability either to make their lives intelligible to others or themselves.

Wolff (§1), Mills (§2), Cudd (§12), and Néron (§14) each argue that a policy of redistribution (of say wealth or power) is insufficient to address the inequalities of *relative* poverty (as opposed to *absolute* poverty [24–26]), historically unjust race-relations, and those permeating higher education and the workplace (respectively). What is needed is an understanding of the basic relations and relational structures that *constitute* and *perpetuate* these inequalities. However, I would add that this must be addressed in a context-sensitive and not just pluralist manner, for it is doubtful that there are any determinate ideals which can address every historically persistent relation of inequality in the same way. Further, the social ills of inequality are sometimes not caused by hierarchical structures. Instead they can be found, for instance, in the fundamental loss of solidarity or mutual- and self-respect which Angier (§7) claims can be exacerbated in societies *lacking* recognised class distinctions, and, as Schouten (§13) points out, in the non-hierarchical wrongs of gender inequality, such as the entrenchment of gender roles/specialisations.

The concern for “treat[ing] people as equals and with respect” (199), as Alais (§8) argues, can be traced back at least to Kant. It is so fundamental to his political philosophy that it is posited as a *precondition* for each indi-

vidual enjoying political freedom, and thereby serves as a legitimisation for state coercion (191). Metz (§9), implicitly disputing Allais’s reading of Kant, takes the Kantian distributive approach to be Western orthodoxy, and in response sketches an apparently rival sub-Saharan political outlook he calls “Afro-communitarianism”. However, according to Afro-communitarianism, one’s identity as part of a community, and one’s friendliness and solidarity especially to other members within it, are taken to be essential elements of a fulfilling and good human life (208). Despite Metz’s claim that this is distinctively African (205), one wonders whether Afro-communitarianism is all that different from non-African communitarian views which also place an emphasis on solidarity (e.g., most forms of socialism). Further, it seems firmly in line with the relational egalitarian approach insofar as one’s identity within a community is *essentially a relational* form of identity, and since friendliness and solidarity are potentially egalitarian social relations.

With a focus on post-Apartheid South Africa, Glaser (§11) reveals a tragic tension between the redress of historical injustices and distributive equality. He argues that the distribution of esteem, which is often central to addressing these injustices, depends on *qualitative* factors such as subjective interpretations of the wrongs, and can hence fail to be properly distributed even with an *objectively* and *quantitatively* equal distribution of goods (259). Mills aims to address these kinds of worries by focusing on historically perpetuated racial injustices. He argues that a revised distributive Rawlsian approach can *redress* the *structures* of racial oppression perhaps only by justifying formally unequal distributions required by policies of affirmative action and reparations, but which are aimed at “equaliz[ing] an unfairly tilted playing field” (54). This justification, however, requires a *radical* revision of the Rawlsian basic structures, racialising them and supplementing them with “principles of transitional justice” (66).

However, not all the essays are concerned with relational equality. Bilchitz (§10) argues that it is legitimate for a community's *constitution* to enshrine the equal distribution of resources necessary for survival, but that the distribution of resources necessary for flourishing beyond survival should be up to democratic processes and individual choices. Hull (§6) introduces important analytical distinctions to restructure the debate *amongst* liberal egalitarians revealing a central, three-pronged problem. Active *well-doing* is distinguished from *well-faring*, well-doing's cross-cultural, environmental pre-conditions, which together contribute to one's overall *well-being*. He then argues that in their aim to provide a universal *metric* of *well-faring*, liberal egalitarians always fail to satisfy at least one of three constraints fundamental to the liberal project: *determinateness* of well-faring, *covariance* of well-faring and well-being, and *pluralism* about well-being. The most promising suggestion he explores in response is somehow to narrow down the list of conceptions of well-being that are compatible with liberalism without rejecting pluralism. However, neither an adequate universal metric nor a clear rule for identifying which conceptions of well-being are incompatible with liberalism are forthcoming.

The Equal Society is a timely contribution, written in an engaging way accessible and of interest to lay-readers and researchers alike, that makes connections between several different strands in egalitarian thinking, gives voice to African egalitarianism, and generally offers a more applied and broader perspective than the recent relational egalitarian discussions, such as Fourie et al.'s (eds.) *Social Equality* (OUP, 2015). If it ends up inspiring others to take a similarly applied and comparative approach to egalitarianism, exploring local real-world issues rather than purely universalist, ideal ones, then egalitarians can continue to be hopeful about the prospects of a more equal society.

Institute for Philosophy, Leiden University

ARTHUR SCHIPPER