

## The Future of Liberal Equality

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### Abstract

What is the future of liberal equality? Liberty is the most important value in liberal theory. Understanding liberalism requires knowing why it remains under attack from the day it was reinvigorated by the publication of *A Theory of Justice*. The view of most conservatives is that it is wary that governments are burdened by overspending. Protectionist policies threaten the poor in developing countries. Internally, the middle class are too anxious about paying for social justice. Liberalism espouses the notion that the government exists to serve the worst off. The apparent gap between the rich and the poor is morally disturbing. Has liberalism failed as a model of justice? The paper explores several positions: the claims of libertarianism against the position of Rawls, the idea of utility versus the intuitive idea of justice as fairness, Amartya Sen and Thomas Pogge's view on equality, and Derek Parfit's critique of the levelling off theory. The idea of equality implies that each person must have equal opportunities. But what is more fundamental is that Rawlsian liberalism is not just about equality in terms of primary social goods, but more importantly, Rawls's position supports the equal dignity of persons.

**Keywords:** Equal Dignity; Liberalism; Liberal Equality; Libertarianism; Levelling Off

### Introduction

In a thoughtful essay, David Martinson (2006, p. 78) echoes the fear of James Madison about the fact that a democratic government might come "to be viewed as a means of legitimizing majority rule." While it is a thoroughly difficult issue, political philosophy must ultimately respond to this quandary. The only way for any democratic society to exist is to insure that the political and civil rights of people are guaranteed. Precisely, a government that puts its constituents to a disadvantage has no reason for its existence. Inequality cannot be justified if it results to a greater

burden on the part of people. Indeed, poverty is one of the biggest scandals of modern life. In an affluent world that is fueled by advances in science and technology, nothing is more worrying than the reality of poor children living in the streets. If we must establish a just society in which people cooperate with each other, the pursuit of the public good must not only benefit the majority but everyone.

The problem, however, is that liberalism nowadays appears to be marginalized in terms of the operative principles used by policy makers and governments. Politicians who espouse liberal values now appear unelectable. Bernie Sanders is an example. The reason is that conservatism seems to force people to embrace a position that secures firstly the protection of property rights, tradition and authority, rather than the promotion of social justice and equality. Liberalism has less of an appeal in a world that has seen the threat of losing what one works hard for to benefit the health care, for instance, of other people. Universal health care is viewed as a way of passing the burden on individuals. Liberal equality is rooted in the fair treatment of individuals. What this means is that liberalism begins with a conception of the human person in which the direction and pursuit of justice must be aligned. In this way, the Rawlsian theory of justice is not just concerned with resource redistribution but more fundamentally, it is about the respect for the equal dignity of persons.

### **Framework of the Study**

This study is anchored in the concept of modern liberalism as espoused by its most prominent theorist, the American philosopher John Rawls. The philosopher studied under the great Isaiah Berlin as a Rhodes Scholar. Rawls would change the course of political philosophy in the 60s. Analytic philosophy has taken over after the war but with the political upheavals around the world, philosophy once again ventured into issues that are of political value and significance. It can be said, in this respect, that Rawls revived political philosophy. At that time, the utilitarian moral doctrine, anchored on the idea of welfare and the rule of the majority, dominated political thought. Rawls, like his predecessors Rousseau, Locke, and Kant, follows the contractarian tradition. Rawls (1999) believes, and rightly so, that the moral worth of persons is more fundamental than the economic efficiency in society. For this reason, Rawls thinks that fairness is both about formal procedures and the substantive meaning of being a person. The philosopher writes in *A Theory of Justice* that “historically, one of the main defects of constitutional government has been the failure to insure the fair value of political liberty.” (Rawls 1999, p.198)

Unjust structures mean that justice is not served rightly. The lack of opportunity of people is due to the fact that they are voiceless. Those in position of power take advantage of the authority bestowed to them by the public. The issue appears to be systemic since most of the time, even well-meaning people become corrupted by the culture of corruption in government. It can be said that liberalism is good on paper but not good enough when it comes to the kind of politics practiced by governments. Rawls (1999) contends that inequalities in society may be allowed if they are to the benefit of the worst off. But that is not happening. In this paper, we desire to address the meaning of liberal equality. To be able to do so, this study intends to analyze some of the critical aspect of the Rawlsian principles of justice and pay attention to his critics when it comes to the idea of justice as fairness.

### **Methodology**

This study uses the interpretive analysis method. It draws from the insights of various texts and books that discuss modern liberalism. The interpretive method is rooted in philosophical assumptions about particular beliefs or principles. In the case of this study, the principles of Rawlsian liberalism are examined and analyzed based on the discussions and arguments of authors and philosophers who have argued for or against its basic tenets and assumptions. The views of the authors and their philosophical insights have been drawn from the books and articles in which the same have been elaborated. To advance our insight on the future of modern liberalism, the paper pays attention to its most prominent interlocutors, notably John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Thomas Pogge, Amartya Sen, and Derek Parfit. The study assesses their arguments by juxtaposing them and/or pursuing assumptions in order to arrive at further claims on the future of liberal equality.

### **Results and Discussion**

In what follows, this study will present the arguments of the critics of Rawls. These critics provide the counterarguments to his position. These ideas, this study thinks, do not devalue the beauty and depth of Rawlsian liberalism. Rather, these philosophical expositions substantiate the claims that Rawls has made when it comes to the idea of justice as fairness. Given the philosophical contexts and political perspectives that the interlocutors of Rawls have, these commentaries are a critical way of putting forward the difficult questions of Rawls about the meaning of justice, liberty and equality. The critics bring out the assumptions that Rawls might not have considered in his theory. Nevertheless, the points that his critics present are a way

of redefining what modern liberalism is and perhaps, these provide the readers of Rawls a direction toward the future of his theory.

### **Basic Liberties and the Values of the Community**

Robert Nozick (1974) argues in *Anarchy, State and Utopia* that respect for individual rights is the moral standard for evaluating state action. For Nozick (1974, p.ix), the only legitimate state is “a minimal state that restricts its activities to the protection of the rights of life, liberty, and property.” He argues that individuals possess rights that are prior to the existence of the state. Nozick believes that such rights belong to man’s state of nature. Political institutions are constrained in their actions by the same rights. The government, in this regard, has a limited function. For Nozick (1974, p.ix), it has “the narrow functions of protection against force, theft, fraud, enforcement of contracts, and so on.” The state cannot interfere with the affairs of individuals nor restrict the pursuit of whatever profits their basic liberties afford them. One cannot, for instance, tax the rich in order to educate the poor. The Republican Party in the US refuses to pass the legislation that pays for President Joseph Biden’s massive infrastructure program if it means raising taxes for the most affluent Americans.

But Rawls only wants to protect individual rights while pursuing the good of all in society. The sacrifice freedom for the sake of equality would defeat the ability of individuals to pursue and enjoy the fruits of their talents. It can be said that the libertarian emphasis on personal freedom without a sense of social obligation to others on matters like education and health might undermine the welfare of those who do not deserve their disadvantaged position in the first place. In this way, “justice as fairness” advocates the commitment to freedom and equality. (Maboloc 2015) It argues for a theory of justice that protects the basic liberty of each while at the same time, it also seeks to redistribute the primary social goods in society in order to allow the worst off to improve their lives. The basic idea is a kind of social arrangement where the individual can enjoy his basic liberties while the state tries to fulfill its task of insuring that the poor in society will not be cheated of their equal share. Modern liberal states have profited from the talents of their constituents. Modern industrial societies are an outcome of innovative ideas from talented individuals like Steve Jobs more than a collective effort for the public good.

The problem of equality, however, takes a different turn because of the idea of culture. As a response to Rawlsian liberal equality, communitarianism argue that

persons are not atomic beings. Societal values are embedded in the person's conception of justice. In this way, the definition of the common good cannot be the same for all. Basically, it argues that there is a social context to the meaning of justice. It criticizes the liberal point of view in which justice is limited to the distribution of social primary goods, which may be considered as economic in nature. Communitarians argue that the meaning of the good cannot be imposed by the majority on the minority. In this way, history and culture will matter more in a community. The politics of nation states is rooted in a search for an identity. Hence, the minority will demand representation rights. (Kymlicka 2007, p.330) Minority groups cannot accept the fact that they are beholden to the values imposed by the majority.

To explain, Michael Sandel (1998), says that the self is situated in a particular culture and possesses an identity formed by tradition, belief, or religion. This sense of belongingness to a community helps define the political values of the individual. Sandel in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, suggests that people cannot actually be divorced from their cultural or social values. According to Sandel (1998, p.88), the Rawlsian theory of justice does not seek to reward individuals on the basis of their cultural or personal virtues. The concern of Rawls when it comes to justice is grounded in the establishment of just institutions where the rights, duties and moral responsibilities of people are defined. The point is that justice is a function of the basic structure. To be charitable, in this respect, is not a matter of justice. For Rawls, it is about having fair rules and procedures. What this means is that it is the function of the basic structure to ensure that the rights of people are guaranteed under the principles of procedural justice.

Following the above, one can make distinctions about the atomistic conception of man in contrast to the communitarian idea of man. In the atomistic conception, the individual is clearly conceived to be independent. The autonomy of the person is the primordial value. The basic structure is established to secure and protect the good of the human person as a citizen of the state. The state consists of individuals who exist only for themselves. In this type of society, self-determination is construed as the highest moral value. The person defines the concept of the good on the basis of his freedom. Every norm in the state, in this regard, is based upon reason. Reason, for Rawls, is a source of agreement. In the first place, social cooperation actually exists because of the capacity of persons to discuss, deliberate and agree.

But the individual may be viewed on the basis of a social identity. (Sandel 1998, p.133) There is no identity for the individual outside the group. In this theory, there exists a distinct way of life that characterizes the group. The individual in this regard is nothing but an extension of the society in which he belongs. Society is like a big organism and the individual is nothing but one of its component parts. The individual is a sociological object. What is to become of the individual is determined by the social and economic hierarchy in society. Freedom, in this way, is an abstraction. The person assumes a role in society and performs his functions in accordance to the norms set by the organization of society itself. The human person is formed by values that are already embedded in society. While it is often said that people make choices and these choice make them, the social, physical, moral, and cultural environment a person is informs the way one views the meaning of life. The individual is a by-product of a tradition that is handed down to him in which he assumes certain characteristics that will ultimately define the manner by which he relates with people. Culture, in this respect, defines the individual's conception of what is right or wrong, what is fair and just.

Communitarians have criticized the notion of autonomy. They object to a neutral state. (Kymlicka 2007, p.220) The state for them instead should pursue a concept of the common good that is interpreted by virtue of a social context. But this is not to say that liberalism does not have a sense of the common good. Liberalism interprets the common good as the public good. However, Sandel would say that the idea of the common good is grounded in a commonality of culture, social practice, and history. The self realizes itself by way of a sense of social identity. Will Kymlicka (2007, p.221) explains, for instance, that the idea of an “unencumbered self” is a mere illusion for the self is always embedded in a social context. As Michael Walzer (1983) suggests, there is no way for the individual to step outside the context of a community. Walzer (1983, p.39), maintains that there cannot be a universal theory of justice. In this regard, we have to broaden our perspective to accommodate difference.

### **Subjective Sentiments and the Role of Justice**

According to Martinson (2006, p.163), “one of the most perplexing quandaries that has continually confronted proponents of democratic governance centers around the question of how to protect the right of the majority to govern while simultaneously protecting the fundamental rights of those who are, at least temporarily, in the minority.” Indeed, the solution to this comes from the lexical

priority of liberty which is an attempt to elevate the status of autonomy as above the interest of the collective or the majority. The contention of Rawls is that no amount of good in society is of equal value to the moral worth of persons. To secure the good of everyone in society, we need to establish just institutions. If we leave to our sentiments the task of helping others, we cannot be neutral in the way we redistribute the goods of society. For this reason, we have to abide by the rules set up in order to secure the fair share of all. For example, in the Philippines, people began to set up community pantries as means of helping others. Some have criticized the government for its inadequate response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it must be noted such approaches are not a question of justice. It is rooted in the values that people embrace, including the compassion for others. The question against the incompetency of the government lies somewhere else.

Political morality may be rooted in our subjective feelings. Man's ultimate motivation is always his subjective sentiment. Morality is an outgrowth of the nature of the human being which can be cultivated. Man is motivated by both external and internal sanctions. External sanctions can come in the form of peer pressure while internal sanctions can come in the form of a social conscience. Both provide man with the proper motivation to do the good. What this means is that morality should appeal to the inner sentiments of people. The individual's higher intelligence implies that man's interest in his community is also his interest, which means that when man values happiness or utility as the greatest good, he will recognize that other people have the same inclination on utility that he must also acknowledge. Thus, to be concerned of one's happiness is also to be concerned of the happiness of others, making utility in this regard a moral standard.

Utility, which is rooted in the pleasure principle, refers to basic welfare or well-being. For utilitarianism, it is the criterion for right and wrong. Pleasure is defined as good and pain is characterized as bad. (Mill 2007, p.6) The good in this sense consists in increasing pleasure or utility and avoiding pain. Politically, the good refers to the greatest happiness for the greatest number. What this means is that the good of the majority should be the basis for what is to be considered as right. Life boat ethics best defines the meaning of such. If there are 27 people on a boat that is good only for 25, then two persons will have to be sacrificed to save the majority. The solution to the above is a matter of procedure. Rawls has not elaborated a substantive approach to this problem. However, any legitimate decision with respect to it must be arrived at on the basis of fair rules from duly constituted bodies in government.

Liberalism is critical of the concept of utility. As it is founded in the dual commitment to freedom and equality, it therefore cannot allow the sacrifice of one for the benefit of the many, which is what utilitarianism is supposed to espouse. To provide a better theoretical starting point for social cooperation, Rawls asks what sort of political arrangement will allow people to pursue their life plans without sacrificing their basic liberties and at the same time, allow the worst off to have opportunities for self-improvement. Liberal equality then does not mean “the removal of all inequalities, but only those that do not benefit the worst off.” (Kymlicka 2007, p.55) The reason for this is simple. Rawls is trying to justify what a property-owning democracy is all about. Society cannot preclude individuals from gaining wealth for that would defeat the essence of his idea of distributive justice.

The Rawlsian theory of justice is ahistorical. Rawls (1999. P.3) says that his theory does not begin from any historical situation or fact. Rather, it is imagined or hypothetical. It is thoroughly grounded in the ‘social contract’ argument. Rawls admits that it is not different from the traditional contractarian theories that one may find in Jean Jacques Rousseau or John Locke. The role of the social contract is the establishment of the state as a political community where people can pursue things, develop relations and fulfill their obligations toward each other. For Rawls, justice is realized in the basic structure. The basic structure is concerned with the division of advantages or benefits in society and the obligations arising from the same. (Rawls 1999, p.6) While individuals pursue acts of charity to make meaningful changes in society, the basic institutions of society are geared toward structural reforms meant to benefit everyone. This means that justice is also a question of structure. Where the rules appear to favor those who are in positions of power, society cannot be just.

Rawls’s ‘veil of ignorance’ is a methodic device is to be entered into between rational [thinking according to one’s best interests] and equal persons. It is founded in the idea of impartiality where people choose the principles of justice on equal or fair terms. Impartiality deems that the rules or procedures are not to anyone’s favor or advantage. John Boatright (2003, p.81) says that “certainly, no one could rationally choose a system of slavery without knowing who would be the masters and who the slaves.” This is insured under the Rawlsian device where one does not know his status or position in an initial position of equality. As such, justice comes as a result of a fair procedure. Rawlsian justice is more procedural than substantive. It does not discuss the content of justice. What it does is lay the foundation for the



fair principles of social cooperation. The question of fairness, in this respect, is a matter of instituting acceptable rules that do not undermine individual liberties.

Rawlsian justice is about the idealization of social institutions. He is trying to develop a way upon which institutions can be the perfect drivers of fairness and equality. When Rawls (1999, p.3) says in *A Theory of Justice* that “justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others,” he means to say that liberty is the highest virtue that social institutions must protect. In this way, fair procedures would not allow that “the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many.” (Rawls 1999, p.3) The above position is rooted in the Kantian ideal of the individual as an end in itself. Rawls simply puts forward the priority of liberty as the main point of his theory. Freedom, of course, is under assault from socialists. The purpose of justice as fairness is to secure first and foremost the freedom of the individual by means of the institution.

The liberty principle of justice governs the basic design of political institutions whereas the second principle applies to the design of economic institutions. Rawls is committed to individual rights. (Maboloc 2019, p.43) As such, Rawls’s first principle, which takes a lexical priority over the second principle, affirms the basic liberties of citizens, which include the freedom of conscience, freedom of association, freedom of speech, the right of suffrage, the right to education, including the right to hold public office. These basic liberties guarantee the equality of all citizens before the law. It is the liberty or autonomy of the person that defines his moral worth. For this reason, the respect for the freedom of man is the hallmark of liberal equality. Social institutions, as well as laws, exist for the good of man. That no man is above the law implies that the moral authority in the state is rooted in the respect for the freedom of man.

Rawls’s second principle of justice has two parts. The first part of the second principle [fair opportunity] requires that every citizen should have the same opportunities to pursue self-improvement through education regardless of whether one is born rich or poor. Opportunities for self-improvement should not be based on one’s natural endowments. In this sense, the idea of fair opportunity requires that decisions that affect people’s lives should not be morally arbitrary. We must respect and value the moral worth of persons above all else. Fair opportunity simply means that no person should be barred from enjoying his political rights. If society undermines the freedom of people, then such a society cannot be just since the very foundation of justice is the respect for the autonomy of persons.

The second part of the second principle [difference principle], regulates the manner by which income is redistributed. The difference principle deems that the social arrangement should be favorable to the worst off. Inequalities in terms of income can only be allowed if it is to the greatest benefit of the disadvantaged. For instance, it is not unfair that doctors earn more than teachers. However, it would be unfair for doctors to charge exorbitant fees as this would be harmful to the well-being of the poor. The difference is that while the first arrangement is deserved, the second arrangement is not since it is already motivated by greed. It is a question of outcomes, in this regard. Social arrangements are just not only because they benefit the least advantaged. The other side of the story tells us that excessive wealth on the part of some is unacceptable because that would deprive others of their fair share.

The fair opportunity principle in its original formulation reads that “each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others,” which has been revised to, “each person has the same infeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all.” (Rawls 1999, 302) The key to the reformulation are the words “most extensive” and “adequate scheme.” The distinction is crucial. Extensive liberties might run counter to other liberties. As such, reformulating it to a “fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties” is meant to satisfy the priority of people “fully” and “equally enjoying” their basic liberties because for Rawls, the basic liberties must fit together as a whole, as one coherent system. (Rawls 1999, p.203) The coherence of such a system means that the principles of justice become relevant for everyone. However, in instances where the heterogeneities of people might come to affect the possible outcomes, the foundation of Rawls’s theory itself can be put into question. Rawls, for example, sets aside the question of disability when it comes to his hypothetical starting point. It is not a difficult problem for Rawls can simply assign a special consideration for people whose conditions require such types of treatment, for example, when we talk about persons with mental or cognitive disabilities, who also deserve equal respect.

### **Non-Recognitive Reactions to Rawlsian Redistribution**

Nozick criticizes the above Rawlsian redistributive scheme. His justice as holdings theory of entitlement asserts the primacy of liberty in terms of one’s absolute right to property. Nozick says that it is wrong to use people for the benefit of others. Against Rawls, Nozick says that no one is entitled to anything that a person has or owns. Rights for Nozick (1974, p.33) affirm our “separate existences” and for

this reason, it takes as serious “the existence of distinct individuals who are not resources for others.” Nozick emphasizes the superiority of human liberty as value. But while Rawls thinks that the protection of human freedom also means using it to benefit the least advantaged in society, Nozick believes that such an obligation does not exist.

Nozick explains his position by advancing the idea of the free market. His theory assumes that if people’s holdings are justly owned, then the only allowable form of distribution is free market exchange. Kymlicka (2007) says that Nozick’s position means that the government cannot tax a person against his will. Nozick does not say that the government cannot impose any taxes. What he is saying it is that it is wrong to coercively tax people. Nozick (1974) says that the only legitimate form of taxation is that which maintains the background institutions that protect free market exchange. Nozick is opposed to the Rawlsian scheme of redistribution or other government interventions in market exchanges because, according to Kymlicka (2007, p.116), it is “incompatible with recognizing people as self-owners.” In a way, libertarianism believes that “recognizing people as self-owners is crucial to treating people as equals.” (Kymlicka 2007, p.116)

What is the basis of Nozick’s argument? It is an intuitive one, which can be illustrated through the Wilt Chamberlain thought experiment. (Nozick 1974, p.161) Nozick thinks that some people are born with natural talents and that others are not. Whatever Chamberlain gets out of his natural skill is something that he justly owns. This is called the self-ownership argument. Kymlicka (2007, p.120) says that Nozick’s argument suggests that “people own themselves.” Nozick (1974, p.xi) says that “individuals have rights, and there are things which no individual or group can do to them without violating these rights.” As such, for Nozick, helping the poor cannot be forced on the rich. He argues that it is not morally right to force the rich to do something against their will. Nozick (1974, 30-31) thinks that society must respect these rights because “individuals are ends in themselves and not means to an end; they may not be used to for the achieving of other ends without their consent.” Indeed, it may said that Nozick’s critique of Rawls is a classic non-Recognitive position against the Rawlsian conception of equality.

Another of such position comes from Thomas Pogge. But here, Pogge reacts firstly to Nozick’s position. Pogge uses sociological and economic data on human poverty. Pogge (2007, p.2) traces the root cause of poverty to unjust economic structures, both internal and global. Pogge says that human rights require that people

should have access to the resources needed in order to realize these rights. From a global perspective, Pogge questions how the rich have acquired their holdings. Pogge (2007) mentions, for instance, the notion of unjust historical acquisition, e.g. colonialism. His theory of human rights also advocates for a scheme that comes as a form of historical compensation. Pogge (2007) argues that the imbalance in terms of global economic structures favor rich countries and has a debilitating effect on the poor regions of the world, thereby seriously aggravating massive global inequality. Pogge (2007) advocates for intermediary duties that are meant to rectify past mistakes.

Against Nozick's view, what Pogge is saying is that the global rich have no historical basis for the absolute right to their wealth. It was not originally theirs in the first place. The developed economies, including multinational corporations, use oppressive policies that exploit the resources of Third World societies. For Pogge, the reality is that rich societies have to recognize their moral obligation beyond the duties of charity. Rich countries, Pogge argues, have the negative duty not to harm the poor. Pogge says that duties of assistance are not enough and that rich countries have failed to deliver on their promises. Pogge advocates for a global difference principle, extending the Rawlsian principle to the global poor. For Pogge, the unjust economic structures in the world require a certain level of global redistribution where a global resource dividend [his version of the Marshall Plan] should be implemented on a global scale. The issue of global poverty, he believes, is structural and cannot be reduced into a matter of throwing money into problem. (Pogge 2007, p.14)

Amartya Sen explains a position that is egalitarian in a different focal space. This is the space of capability. Development, Sen (1999, p.3) argues, can be seen as "the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy." Human well-being is about the freedom or capability of people, or what they are able to do and become. (Sen 1999, p.75) Sen puts to question the limited concept of equality in terms of income. In asking about "equality of what?" he argues that it is not the equality of income but equality in terms of capabilities that should be used to assess human well-being. Sen, like Rawls, is critical of utilitarianism which only sees poverty in a narrow sense as income deprivation. For Sen, income is not enough as an informational basis in evaluating the standard of living of people since income does not reflect the other aspects of deprivation a person suffers from. Sen writes that there are heterogeneities that affect the people's well-being – personal, environmental, variations in the social climate, relational perspective, and

distribution within the family. (Sen 1999, p.88-90) For example, people may suffer from political persecution or cultural violence which may stifle their overall well-being achievement.

For Sen, freedom is not merely instrumental. Freedom is both the end and means to human development. (Sen 1999, p.36) Income is only instrumental in terms of value, so it cannot give a full picture of people's lives. Freedom, according to Sen (1999, p.74), is about the capacity to live a life that "one has reason to value." This is intrinsic to the person. Sen has responded to the debate between egalitarians and non-egalitarians by asserting equality in another space, and that is equality in the sphere of human capability. Sen believes that a more responsive approach to human development or the lack thereof must be evaluated on the basis of how structurally dominant regimes and dictatorships can stifle the basic freedom of people to do the things they find meaningful in human life.

Derek Parfit presents a telic view as against a deontic view of equality. Is inequality essentially bad? On one hand, telic egalitarians think that equality is good and inequality is evil. Telic egalitarians say that morality proceeds from consequences. The basis of judging what is morally acceptable is equality of outcomes [utilitarian]. Parfit (1997, p.206) says that "if we are telic egalitarians, we would say that while it is good that people are on average better off, it is bad if some people are worse off than others." On the other hand, deontic egalitarians say that inequality is not in itself bad if some people are worse off than others. (Parfit 1997, 2007) The deontic view suggests that people should not be treated differently. It is therefore unjust if some people are well-provided whereas others are denied of their fair share. Parfit (1997, p.207) says that in this view, "fairness may require that, if certain goods are given to some, they should be given to all."

Parfit rejects both notions on the basis of his priority view. Parfit (1997, p.213) describes the priority view: "benefiting people matters more the worse off these people are." On this view, benefits to a person because he is worse off matters more. (Parfit 1997, p.213) It is important to benefit some person more than another because of his condition. For Parfit (1997, p.214), "the greater urgency of benefiting the worse off does not depend on his relation to another person, but only on his lower absolute level." Parfit cites the leveling down objection. You cannot make situations better by taking one eye from others in order to give it to those who are blind. Such will result to a dual disaster in which one is made blind to equalize with the position another blind man. Two blind men does not make the world more just. What is

important is that you do something that will prevent the worse off to be in an undeserved worse position. In this sense, what is more pressing or more urgent is to help the worst off. Parfit is against the levelling down argument. Parfit (1997, p.210) describes the above leveling down objection:

If inequality is bad, its disappearance must be in one way a change for the better, however this change occurs. Suppose that, in some natural disaster, those who are better off lose all their extra resources, and become badly off as everyone else. Since this change would remove the inequality, it must be in one way welcome, on the telic view. Though this disaster would be worse for some people, and better for no one, it must be, in one way, a change for the better. Similarly, it would not be in one way an improvement if we destroyed the eyes of the sighted to benefit the blind, but only to make the sighted blinded. These implications can be more plausibly regarded as monstrous, or absurd.

If society were homogenous, or meaning to say, if there were no differences in talents, then people would look the same and will no longer strive for creativity. If all talents are equal, there is a natural restriction on people in so far as they would become unimaginative. Social and natural contingencies affect the outcomes of the lives of people. People do come up with different income levels because of these contingencies. But without these basic differences in people, society will not flourish. If people are forced to have equal income levels, then no one would aspire for something entrepreneurial. In this regard, society's wealth would not grow. Equality cannot be an end in itself in this regard; every human person is. The point is that we actually do not desire inequalities because they manifest injustice.

Total equality can result to a catastrophe. It is one false ideal that is dangerous and not worth aspiring for. Citizens cannot make themselves dumb and those who are talented cannot undo their talents. It makes no sense for the beautiful to untidy herself in order for somebody else to appear pretty. It is not good to achieve total equality at the cost of freedom or the suffering of those who are gifted. You cannot mutilate or incapacitate the strength of the intelligent in order to appeal to the mentality of the masses. The trait of individual freedom should instead be optimized in order to promote achievement rather than handicap. History has examples as to how totalitarian regimes have decapitated the capacities of people in the desire to equalize the position of all. The famine in Ukraine during the time of Joseph Stalin,

which was a result of a collectivization policy, killed a million just for the sake of propaganda.

The basic argument that should be put forward is that social institutions, however just, cannot be relied upon in terms of making the distribution of goods in society fair. While it is possible that laws protect everyone, it is sometimes the case that laws are actually the expression of the desires of the majority. For this matter, while there are consultations and representation in the state, the force of the majority is expected to prevail. The voice of those in the margins, in this respect, may not be heard. This explains why it is not necessarily wrong to allow street vendors to sell stuff on walkways. Justice is about that intuition in which we realize that laws are meant to serve and protect the powerless. Laws cannot be used to suppress their right to live in a decent way.

Equality in terms of income only measures the lack the material deprivation of people but it cannot tell the extent of people's deprivation. (Sen 1999) There are other aspects of human existence which matter to human development, for instance, ending restrictions in terms of the political or the cultural. For example, women are unable to achieve a full human life due to the prejudice against them. If person A and person B are given an equal amount of money, say 1,000 pesos, their welfare cannot be considered as equal since A may choose to spend it on leisure whereas if B is a pregnant woman, she is expected and therefore constrained to spend it for the baby's future needs, thus denying herself to enjoy some things she might desire. (Sen 1992, p.27) Thus, person A and person B's level of well-being achievement is not the same.

Equal opportunity cannot be assured in the basic structure in so far as there are positional differences in the social hierarchy. Meaning to say, an employer is always in a position of power over the employee, so the opportunity to access financing is only available to the rich. As they say, to be have more wealth, you must have wealth. Public positions are also not equally available to people even though they are qualified for office. The reason is that the children of political clans are unfairly at a position of advantage. This means that a starting point that is neutral is not really the case in the real world. Rules, which are often decided by those who influence the lawmaking process, are deceptively the policies of those who want to dominate the masses. The basic point in every exposition when it comes to social justice is the recognition of the fundamental right of every person to be treated as an equal on the

basis of one's fundamental attribute as a human being who is endowed with moral worth.

There are consequences that people deserve. But there are situations that people do not also deserve. Disability, for instance, is one of them. Merit, or that which allows us to enjoy something on the basis of desert, is not always fair because there are those whose attributes disadvantage them, or what Iris Marion Young deems as the "lack of fit" between those attributes and the social structures. Justice, Young (2011, p.136) says, is a collective rather than a personal type of responsibility. Intelligence or economic endowments by reason of the natural lottery are not things that people morally deserve. If they have these, it is because these should be used to advance not their own interest but that of the common good, which means that one's intelligence should be for the greater good of others and not of oneself. Indeed, when it comes to the question of social and economic inclusion, it is best that society look into those structures that impede the growth and development of persons. Unjust structures undermine not only the procedures in the state but the freedoms of people as well who are excluded from opportunities to achieve the good life in the state.

### **Conclusion**

This study started with an examination of the claims of libertarianism. The position of fiscal conservatives appears appealing given the present economic predicament people are into. It also seems attractive as a position knowing that a lot of money is thrown to waste with the failures of some government programs meant to help the people. The libertarian position seems to be in a strong position until we realize that rampant inequalities in the world today, both internal and external, are not actually a consequence of the choices people make but rather, by the unjust structures that supervene the already prevalent condition of the poor. For this reason, we have presented the idea of just redistribution to counter the conservative view of the state. However, equality in terms of income does not make the situation of people less unjust. The reality is that people need more than money. They need to expand the value of their freedoms for them to be able to enjoy the fruits of democratic life. Against the idea of equality of opportunity, Young also explains that there are types of inequalities that impede people from improving the quality of life. Structural injustices reveal that people are excluded from society which prevent them from any authentic democratic participation. The rule of the majority in this sense is no more than a cover up for the nefarious motives of those who are taking advantage of their



position in the socio-political hierarchy. Parfit is right in disagreeing with the idea of levelling off. It is not a simple matter of reducing everything into the concept of equality. Equality, in this respect, cannot be reduced to the business of politics. Political theory is at the same time the pursuit of moral and just arrangements in society. The future of liberal equality, in this way, rests upon the fundamental claim of liberalism that persons possess equal moral worth. The position of utilitarianism remains unresponsive when it comes to the intuitive idea of justice as fairness. This study disagrees with the idea that the only role of society is to secure the property rights of persons alone but not the public good. Rawls maintains the moral role of the state to promote the good of the worst off in society without compromising the value of liberty. Social institutions are established to protect and promote the dignity of all persons. Basic respect as a moral claim is something that we should accord to every individual. The most important role of institutions, in this sense, is to insure that no person is subordinated to the interests of others.

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