

THE IDEA OF EQUALITY AND ITS
BEARING ON EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Racial and political struggles throughout the world today seem to be partly an expression of the pressing demand for human equality, and suggest that the idea of equality needs urgent examination.

The writer attempts, through a study of relevant, selected material, to arrive at some meaningful interpretation of this idea of equality, then examines the bearing of the idea on education.

The first chapter of the paper analyses four theories which state some particular respect in which men are held to be equal. All the examined propositions asserting the equality of men are found to be either indefensible or meaningless.

The second chapter studies W. T. Stace's argument that men are of equal worth, and the conclusion is reached that equality can be meaningfully interpreted only as an ideal. A significant element in struggles for the realization of the ideal of equality is found to lie in the demand that persons similarly situated should be similarly treated and that any discrimination should be based on relevant differences.

It is also contended that the economic, legal, political and educational aspects of the problem of equality are inextricably interwoven.

The third and the fourth chapters are specially devoted to a study of the relevance of the ideal of equality to the educational process. It is argued that the school has an indispensable part to play in the struggle for equality.

The general conclusion of the thesis is that the idea of equality is a dynamic one needing continual reinterpretation, not in isolation, but in conjunction with other social ideals such as liberty and altruism; nowhere is this constant re-examination more necessary than in the field of education.

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THE IDEA OF EQUALITY AND ITS BEARING ON EDUCATION

CHAPTER I

FOUR THEORIES EXAMINED

The question of human equality is one of the current vital problems in the conduct of human affairs, both at the national and international level. The racial struggles and conflicts in many parts of the world, notably in South Africa, Southern Rhodesia and the United States of America; the astounding difference between the conditions and circumstances of the rich and the poor in most countries; the tension between nations great and small, all bear witness to the urgent necessity for a clear and sound interpretation of the idea of equality, and a common acceptance in attitude and behaviour of the principles suggested by this idea.

The purpose of this study is to select and analyse a few statements and interpretations of the idea of equality, not necessarily in an historical perspective. It is hoped that the process of analysis will bring into

clear relief some significant elements which can contribute to the formulation of an ideal of equality. Finally, the implications of this ideal for education will be examined and its suitability as an educational objective studied. (Education is used in this paper to mean initiation into some body of knowledge and modes of conduct, including modes of thought, considered valuable in a society, and the term is used with special reference to the school context.)

a. Problem of equality perennial

The problem of equality, indeed, is not a new one. Euripides' Jocasta articulately counsels her son Eteocles:

".....better to honour, son,
Equality, which knitteth friends to friends,
Cities to cities, allies to allies.
Nature gave men the law of equal rights,
And the less, ever marshalled foe against
The greater, ushers in the dawn of hate."¹

In similar vein Pericles declares in his funeral oration:

"Because in the administration it hath respect not to the few but to the multitude, our form of government is called a democracy. Wherein there is not only an equality amongst all men in point of law for their private controversies, but in election to public offices, we consider neither class nor rank, but each man is preferred according to his virtue or to the esteem in which he is held for some special excellence."²

1. George L. Abernethy (ed.), The Idea of Equality (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1959), p.36.
2. Abernethy, op. cit., p. 38.

The French Revolution and the American War of Independence are more commonly known expressions of the human quest for equality.

Throughout the perennial struggle for equality some declarations of equality as a fact have continually recurred. Four of these will be examined:

1. Men are born equal.
2. Men are equal by virtue of their capacity to reason, or by virtue of equal capacity of attainment.
3. Men are equal in the eyes of God.
4. Men are equal by virtue of common natural rights.

b. Two types of propositions concerning Equality

It should be noted at once that propositions concerning human equality fall generally into two classes, namely, those that purport to be statements of fact, and those that are clearly intended by their authors to express an ideal. Even many of the latter, however, are deceptive or loose in their verbal expression often resembling factual statements, but appearing in contexts which make any factual interpretation unverifiable. In such cases one is no doubt expected to catch the spirit of the author rather than to take him too literally.

In his book "Equality", R. H. Tawney clearly

indicates the double sense in which Equality is spoken of.

He writes:

"It is obvious that the word 'Equality' possesses more than one meaning and that the controversies surrounding it arise partly, at least, because the same term is employed with different connotations. Thus, it may either purport to state a fact, or convey the impression of an ethical judgment. On the one hand, it may affirm that men are, on the whole, very similar in their natural endowments of character and intelligence. On the other hand, it may assert that, while they differ profoundly as individuals in capacity and character, they are equally entitled as human beings to consideration and respect." 3

The authors of the American Declaration of Independence appear to be asserting philosophical ideals as factual propositions in stating:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights....." 4

Similarly, the first clause of the French document, Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, reads:

"Men are born, and always continue, free and equal in respect of their rights. Civil distinctions, therefore, can be founded only on public utility." 5

3. R. H. Tawney, Equality (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), p. 35.
4. Abernethy, op. cit., p. 147.
5. Ibid., p. 156.

2

Of the American Declaration of Independence, Lincoln observes that the authors "did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects."⁶ He went on to say that they did not mean to assert the obvious untruth that all men were enjoying the equality of the inalienable rights but that they "meant simply to declare the right, so that enforcement of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit."⁷

Thompson refers to the principles put forward in the French and American documents as "doctrinaire equality" which he describes as:

"an ideal put forward by prophets, philosophers, men of vision and insight, and dreamers of dreams, historically conditioned by the system of ideas and social organisation which they are protesting against."⁸

There are, nevertheless, many who feel strongly that men are in fact equal in some respect. Engels notes:

"The idea that all men, as men, have something in common, and that they are therefore equal so far as these common characteristics go, is of course primeval."⁹

Some of the efforts to explain in what sense this conviction must be understood will now be studied.

6, 7. Ibid., p. 185.

8. David Thompson, Equality (Cambridge: University Press, 1949), p. 152.

9. Friedrich Engels, Anti-Dühring (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1954), pp. 143-144.

c. Examination of the idea that men are born equal.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man begins by asserting that men are born equal in respect of their rights. The authors of the Declaration at least limit the respect in which men are born equal, deriving their ideas partly from Rousseau's theories of society.

(Rousseau states that all men are "born free and equal"¹⁰ and expresses the view that it is our social structure and organisations which cause suffering, evil and inequalities, thus destroying the equal freedom, innocence and rights with which men come into the world.)

If the proposition that men are born equal remains unqualified, it is clearly impossible to maintain. It is pointless to object that there are variations in height, weight, and colour and other physical characteristics among men, for it hardly seems likely that the authors of the Declaration and other notable historical documents intend such a literal interpretation. Then what exactly is intended? Arguments concerning a basic biological structure do not seem to be of much help for at least two reasons:

1. What constitutes basic features is a pseudo-scientific, valuative, and ultimately arbitrary consideration, and one would be equally justified in selecting those

10. Jean Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, trans. G. D. H. Cole (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1961), p. 4.

attributes possessed by the entire family of animals to proclaim the equality of all animals, an obviously meaningless declaration.

2. It has long been recognised that a man is not merely a biological entity. Of equal importance is his membership of a society or his relationship with other men and with his environment. It was perhaps with this thought in mind that man was described by Aristotle as a "political animal", and by St. Thomas Aquinas as a "social animal". John Dewey was more articulate in emphasizing the social aspect of the life and environment of man. In view of the difficulty which confronts us in determining basic features of human nature, therefore, we rest our case on very shaky foundations when we claim that men are born equal because they come into the world with common biological features.

d. Examination of the idea that men are equal by virtue of their capacity to reason

A slight variation of the foregoing theory is that men are equal by virtue of their capacity to reason, or by virtue of equal capacity of attainment. Some writers include "the capacity to feel pain",¹¹ but who knows whether a harpooned whale experiences such pain as man has never endured!

11. Bernard Williams, "The Idea of Equality", Philosophy, Politics and Society, ed. Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 112.

Hobbes settles for what one may call approximate or compensatory equality in the "Leviathan". He writes:

"Nature hath made men so equal, in the faculties of body and mind; as though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man and man is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others..." 12

The idea of what has been labelled "compensatory equality" has a special significance which will be discussed in another context.

Granted that one were allowed the use of the concept of equality in discussions about man's capacity to reason, it could be shown that psychological studies have revealed how varied and unequal this capacity is. True, the idea of intelligence is constantly undergoing modification, but has so far not changed so drastically as to erase the distribution curve from text-books in Psychology and Learning.

It is sometimes claimed, however, that the equality of men consists in their possessing to some degree the faculty of reason. The American philosopher, Ralph B. Perry, for example, appropriately dismissing as irrele-

12. Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. M. Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), p. 80.

vant and frivolous those objections to the claim of equality which proclaim men's unequal stature, strength, fingerprints or cephalic indices, himself goes on to express the doctrine that "all men are equally men - which means not that they possess human attributes in the same degree, but that they possess the same attributes in some degree".¹³ But to make this assertion is no more helpful than to state that men are equal because they have clearly recognisable heads. Perhaps it is more reasonable to assert, as does Dr. Alburey Castell,¹⁴ that man's equality consists in his being born ignorant !

e. Examination of the idea that men are equal in the eyes of God

Some thinkers with a religious bias have found an easy way out of the problem of equality, affirming that men are equal in the sight of God and are created equal by Him.

There are other religious expressions of the notion of equality. Jacques Maritain, for instance, considers equality a prerequisite for Christian thought and life. He writes:

13. Ralph Barton Perry, Puritanism and Democracy (Vanguard Press, 1944), p. 551.

14. Alburey Castell, "Position Papers in the Philosophy of Education", Curriculum Bulletin, No. 241, Vol. XX, Feb. 1964 (Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon) p. 2.

"There must be in man a natural love for his own kind without which the love of the gospel for men of every race and every condition would be contrary to nature rather than its exaltation. How should we all be called upon thus to love one another in God if we are not all equal in our condition and specific dignity as rational creatures?" 15

And Maritain quotes the following from Pope Pius XII:

"Marvellous insight which makes us contemplate the human race in the unity of its origin in God; in the unity of its nature similarly composed in all men of a material body and a spiritual and immortal soul....in the unity of its supernatural end - God himself...." 16

Within the limits of this paper one cannot make any appropriate and satisfactory comment on these religious expressions of the idea of equality. It may be noted, though, that in an age when communication brings not only communities but nations into lively contact, and when events in one region make a significant impact on others, men need, metaphorically (and even literally perhaps), to speak a common language and to embrace some common premises and rules for the conduct of their lives. We cannot continue to debate with our brothers in a language which we alone understand - granted of course that we wish to be understood, or that we wish to influence others. For this reason, then, difficulties which are of universal interest

15. Jacques Maritain, Ransoming the Time, trans. Harry Lorin Binsse (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), pp. 18-19.

16. Ibid., p. 19.

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must seek solutions that will be universally understood and, however formidable this may seem, universally accepted. The religious interpretation of the idea of equality hardly meets these requirements and has not been gaining strength historically.

Moreover, an answer to a sociological problem is unintelligible and useless if it contains elements which are more inscrutable than the original problem.

Not that men of religion have not excited our imagination from time to time and inspired us with a feeling of oneness. Sometimes their mystical and poetic expressions of faith in human equality can fire us with hope and resolve. It may be helpful to illustrate this belief.

To catch the beauty of his thought and his prose we must quote a fairly long passage from Maritain:

"The equality in nature among men consists of their concrete communion in the mystery of the human species; it does not lie in an idea, it is hidden in the heart of the individual and of the concrete, in the roots of the substance of each man.

"It is the natural love of the human being for his own kind which reveals and makes real the unity of species among men. As long as love does not call it forth, that unity slumbers in a metaphysical retreat where we can perceive it only as an abstraction.

"In the common experience of misery, in the common sorrow of great catastrophes, in humiliation and distress, under the blows of the executioner or the bombs of total war, in concentration camps, in the hovels of starving people in

great cities, in any common necessity, the doors of solitude open and man recognises man. Man also recognises man when the sweetness of a great joy or of a great love for an instant clears his eyes. Whenever he does a service to his fellow men or is helped by them, whenever he shares the same elementary actions and the same elementary emotions, whenever he truly considers his neighbour, the simplest action discovers for him, both in others and in himself, the common resources and the common goodness - primitive, rudimentary, wounded, unconscious and repressed - of human nature. At once the realness of equality and community in nature is revealed to him as a very precious thing, an unknown marvel, a fundamental basis of existence, more important than all the differences and inequalities superimposed upon it. When he will have returned to his routine pleasures, he will have forgotten this discovery."¹⁷

What Maritain has done in this passage is what we declare to be necessary in any human struggle. The concept of equality has evolved through separate struggles. Man's enthusiasm and support for an ideal and for an encounter need to be won by emotional appeal. Equality is an evolving ideal which is gradually achieved and maintained by struggle, hence by such persuasive eloquence as Maritain's. Nevertheless, a cause must have more to recommend it than the eloquence of its advocates. It will be the purpose of the next chapter to define equality as an ideal and to seek its justification.

17. Ibid., pp. 17-18.

f. Examination of the idea that men are equal by virtue
of common natural rights

There is one other proposition that must be brought up for scrutiny in this chapter, one that has been asserted again and again; in effect, it is that men are equal by virtue of common natural rights, as was suggested for instance in the American Declaration of Independence, implied by Locke, and positively affirmed by Thomas Paine.¹⁸

This theory was evidently not meant literally by its proponents, but it contains two areas of confusion which some people take seriously and which will be presently revealed. The two sources of confusion are the terms "natural" and "rights".

The question 'What is natural?' is not merely a question requiring empirical observation; it is one demanding an expression of idealistic preferences. In the former case 'natural' is a most inappropriate epithet to prefix before 'rights', and in the latter case it is redundant.

18. Paine writes that all men are born equal and with equal natural right. He defines natural rights as "those which appertain to man in right of his existence. Of this kind are all the intellectual rights, or right of the mind, and also all those rights of acting as an individual for his own comfort and happiness, which are not injurious to the natural rights of others." ("The Rights of Man", in The Writings of Thomas Paine, ed. M. D. Conway, Vol. II, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1892) pp. 305-306.)

The matter turns, then, on the notion of rights. (It is significant that all similar ideas used to explain the idea of equality, when they are not patently absurd, fall within the realm of valuing.) 'Right', like 'natural', can be used in many senses. It can mean, for example, a privilege or benefit which has been prescribed to someone, or it can mean a privilege or benefit which we think someone ought to have.

The authors of the Declaration could never have intended the first meaning as Lincoln clearly noted. Taken in the second sense, the term has no fixed content but needs to be continually redefined with the change of the circumstances of social living. In this sense, therefore, it cannot be consistently qualified by the actual interpretation of "natural". 'Rights' have a social origin and development. Norman Wilde expresses this point of view quite well in "The Ethical Basis of the Modern State". He observes that what are called fundamental rights are not determined by human nature in the abstract, but by the customs and expectations of a given age and people and that

"in every growing society there is as much need for the revision and reinterpretation of its rights as there is in the growing child for alteration of its clothes."

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19. Norman Wilde, The Ethical Basis of the Modern State (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1924), p. 83.

The consequence of all this is that to say that men are equal by virtue of common natural rights is either meaningless, or obviously false. If the statement is charitably interpreted, it becomes tautological, meaning men ought to be equal because they ought to be prescribed equal benefits and privileges.

Myers raises a further point which needs to be mentioned. He contends that the doctrine of natural rights though once an effective weapon in the fight for freedom "furnishes ammunition to extremists on both the right and the left..."²⁰ and had it not been for this doctrine, "judicial interpretations of the American Constitution...might have been more responsive to the popular desire for economic progress".²¹ It is suggested, therefore, that the two terms 'natural' and 'rights' should not be used together.

g. Equality as an ideal

One emerges from this analysis of selected and widely representative theories proclaiming human equality as a fact with the feeling that one has to look elsewhere for an intelligible explanation of the concept.

20. Harry Alonzo Myers, Are Men Equal? (New York: Great Seal Books, Cornell University Press, 1959), p. 135.

21. Ibid., p. 134.

The proponents of the theories discussed seem to be trying to assert and sometimes to prove that there exists what may be called a common humanity; i.e. a common class of beings called man, sharing some common characteristics. These characteristics are then used, somewhat circularly, to establish the common humanity of man. Thus a universally accepted premise of our thinking comes to be filled with content that purports to be factual, and an ideal which has developed historically comes to be declared as a fact.

This argument can be expressed in another form. Even if we were to draw upon all the resources of science to establish the fact of a common blood structure of man and a mental potentiality regarded to be constant, we would still be left with the problem: how should the demands of those people who clamor for equality be met? In other words, we still have to define some social ideal of equality, which cannot be inferred from factual statements about human anatomy and physiology for example.

It is not being contended that matters of fact are wholly unrelated to the formulation of ideals. There is usually much relevant factual data of significance to any moral problem, and such data should not be ignored. But with the present state of our knowledge, we are unable, it seems, to infer answers to moral questions from empirical

premises with the logical rigidity characteristic of a hypothetico-deductive system of pure mathematics. Whether there are facts not yet available to us that would, if discovered, change our view of the relation between logic and ethics and relieve us of the responsibility of choosing our goals is another matter. The theories studied, however, were not expressions of fact nor were they inferences from factual data.

An appeal to biology and other studies about man and his environment has a special usefulness not yet mentioned. There are fanatics of the doctrine of inequality who misuse science and cite faulty scientific doctrines to promote their cause and assuage their conscience. In such a situation, we need to defeat bad science by better science. For this reason studies and researches in comparative anatomy and psychology will remain necessary in the struggle for any ideal of equality, but these studies cannot suffice alone to define any ideal.

It seems necessary, then, to agree with Stace, who writes:

"So far as I know, there is not a single human quality or characteristic in regard to which men could be said to be equal. Clearly we have to seek the meaning of the doctrine of equality - if it has any meaning - along some entirely different line."

22

22. W. T. Stace, The Destiny of Western Man (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942), p. 152.

It will be advanced in the next chapter that equality can best be understood as an ideal. An attempt will be made to formulate an ideal of equality, after a consideration of the argument produced by Stace and Myers that men are of 'equal worth'.

CHAPTER II

TOWARDS AN INTERPRETATION OF THE IDEAL OF EQUALITY

a. The notion of infinite worth

In the "Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals" Kant formulates what he calls a 'supreme practical principle' or a 'categorical imperative':

"So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only."¹

Stace comments that Kant recognises in this law the fact that men have to treat each other as means, but the law enjoins that we always remember that men are also ends in themselves. Stace next deduces from this law that each man has two kinds of value, his value as an end, which is an intrinsic, absolute and infinite value, and his value as a means. The latter value is instrumental, relative and finite, and "can be placed in a scale of higher and lower".² As means then, men are clearly unequal.

The doctrine of equality is then stated to be:

"Men are equal in respect of their intrinsic values as ends, unequal in respect of their instrumental values."³

1. Abernethy, op. cit., p. 155.

2. Stace, op. cit., p. 153.

3. Ibid.

His 'proof' of equality runs thus: The satisfaction of my personality is to me of infinite value; the satisfaction of another person's personality is to him of infinite value. Therefore, "I ought to treat the satisfaction of his personality as having the same infinite value for me as has the satisfaction of my own personality."⁴

Myers has a similar argument:

"....Such is the true meaning of human equality. It may be stated coldly, almost geometrically. Each man is to himself equal to the great world of his own experience. In what matters most to men this world has the same import to all; it teaches each the lesson of his own infinite worth. And so men, who are equal to the same thing, are equal to each other. One being of infinite worth cannot be greater or less than another of infinite worth."⁵

Gregory Vlastos in an Essay, "Justice and Equality" refers to the equality of individual human worth as the basis for the equality of personal rights which are not proportioned to merit and could not be justified by merit. It is interesting to note how Vlastos defends the equality of individual human worth: Translating human worth in terms of human well-being and human freedom he argues:

"In all cases where human beings are capable of enjoying the same goods we feel that the intrinsic value of their enjoyment is the same. In just this sense we hold that one man's well-being is as valuable as any others....' one man's freedom is as valuable as any others'."⁶

4. Ibid., pp. 154-155.

5. Myers, Loc. cit., p. 32.

6. Gregory Vlastos, "Justice and Equality", Social Justice ed. Richard Brandt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1962), p.51.

Now we seem at last to be hot in pursuit of some meaningful interpretation of equality, but we should beware of the dangers which lie in our track. One of these dangers is the pseudo-logical approach of Stace and of Myers, the latter of whom thought he was proving his case 'coldly, almost geometrically'.

Myers was neither cold nor geometrical in his argument, and Stace's argument was a mixture of logic and fiction.

Note that Stace's argument proceeds from premises about what each man thinks about himself to the 'conclusion' made by Stace himself that men are equal. The equality of A and B cannot be logically inferred from the two propositions:

A feels that he has infinite worth; and

B feels that he has infinite worth.

The situation becomes more serious when Stace pretends to draw inferences about how each man ought to behave to the other. The reasoning of Myers exhibits similar fallacies. But Myers was careful to posit a major premise of his judgment that "what matters most to men in this world has the same import to all,"⁷ and did not rely solely as did Stace on the premise concerning what each man felt about himself.

7. Myers, loc. cit.

Vlastos is an improvement on Stace and Myers in that he clearly sets out a series of propositions as premises and he does not pretend to infer one from another.

It would seem up to this point that beliefs about the equal worth of individuals are hypotheses only or convictions and cannot be derived from other principles; that these beliefs are best established by appealing after the manner of Maritain perhaps or of Myers (in spite of his claims) to the imagination and feeling of each person.

This question of the justification of whatever is settled upon as the ideal of equality will be considered again. At this point two difficulties that one must face in such an appeal need to be stated:

1. It is not impossible for some people to deny that others are of infinite worth, while they make this claim for themselves.

2. The term "worth" opens up new areas of perplexity. It may be seriously contended by the apostles of inequality that 'worth' cannot be used in any absolute sense, that something must be worth something, and consequently that any criteria used to measure worth will reveal marked differences between any two persons. And if we try to answer this by talking about the worth of a human being qua human being, we are right back where we started a long time ago. What started out as an apparently prescriptive use of equality ends up descriptively, and the description has proven unreliable, to say the least.

The idea of infinite worth no doubt rouses the enthusiasm of equal rights champions, but far from justifying the ideal of equality it merely expresses this ideal in a new form. A little reflexion convinces one that the idea of worth is even more inscrutable than the idea of equality.

Where then do we turn for an answer to the question: What is the meaning of equality?

Perhaps the best direction to turn is away from the question. It may well be that we are asking a bad or unintelligible question, that is a question with no clear meaning; or we may be interpreting an honest question badly.

To give "the meaning of human equality" and to prove that "all men are equal" are equally invidious tasks.⁸ It is certainly more productive to study the evolution of the idea of equality and the role which this idea plays in our society today. It may well be that equality is like a banner which we use in marching for a cause. On noticing a group of people marching with a banner we normally enquire what the event is all about. In an efficient trade union

8. See J. L. Austin, "The Meaning of a Word", Philosophy and Ordinary Language, ed. Charles E. Caton (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963). Austin argues that there is no simple and handy appendage of a word called 'the meaning of (the word) "x"', that only sentences have meaning; words do not have denotation; attention must be paid to the facts of actual language, but efforts can be made to describe events or experiences in better language than that which is ordinarily used.

demonstration we get a rough idea of the nature of the grievances suffered or of the goals sought, but only further investigation into the particulars of the demonstration can give us all the necessary information.

b. Fundamental principles involved in the struggle for equality

At different times in different places oppressed people march under the banner of equality. In each situation different sets of circumstances are involved but very often have much in common. It is a proper task for historians to describe the various circumstances which saw the evolution of our ideals of equality; this paper has the humbler purpose of giving expression to the prevailing characteristics in the contemporary struggle for equality.

The object, of course, is not to explain fully what the ideal of equality constitutes, for this is a tremendous and continuous undertaking demanding much empirical enquiry and sociological research in particular cases, to discover any theoretical foundations that may exist of the concrete struggles for equality.

In legal disputes, in political agitation, or in day to day social rebellion, certain human desires or demands are evident: the demand not to be discriminated against on irrelevant grounds, the demand not to be deprived of the rights and privileges which others enjoy without

possessing any extra relevant claim, the demand that some should not for unjustifiable or irrelevant reasons be relieved of responsibilities which others are required to fulfil, the demand that one should not be used by others for their personal advantage only, without regard to one's choice or feeling, or without regard to what is honourable in human relations. Benn and Peters in "Social Principles and the Democratic State" seem to have summarized all that is said here by asserting that what men really demand when they claim equality is that "none shall be held to have a claim to better treatment than another, in advance of good grounds being produced", that all men should be treated alike "except where there are relevant differences between them."⁹

A serious objection can be raised immediately to this formulation of principles underlying the ideal of equality: terms like "honourable" do not solve our problem but merely express it in new guise - or perhaps in disguise. Similarly too, the use of such ideas as relevance and "good grounds" is not very instructive.

Such an objection, however, brings out a salient point, that is, that actual cases of alleged inequality or

9. S. I. Benn and R. S. Petters, Social Principles and the Democratic State (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1959) p. 110-111.

of irrelevant discrimination need to be examined on their merit;¹⁰ out of such examination, an ideal of equality can emerge. (And by 'examination' is meant an objective study of all available evidence with a view to making reasonable conclusions.)

The attempt will be made to give some substance now to the principles outlined by dividing the study into three areas, political, legal, and social, and by studying how these principles apply.

c. Political equality

The problem of political equality can be translated in terms of "the common good". The idea of the common good, or as R. J. Rowan calls it, "the interest of the community as a whole", while it does not provide any concrete or positive goal for political action, furnishes us with a "condition, which law and policy must satisfy as they are directed to whatever specific objects agents deem worthwhile."¹¹

Rowan continues:

"Thus procedures and tribunals are established in order to secure, insofar as mechanics can provide, that public authority shall not be turned to exploitive, private, discriminating use, that no one special shall receive special consideration for it."

12

10. "Out of context," write Benn and Peters, "equality is an empty framework for a social ideal; it has content only when particularised". - (Op. cit., p. 115)
11. R. J. Rowan, The Common Good (Unpublished Lecture), p.3.
12. Ibid., p. 4.

All rights that are guaranteed any person because of the sole fact that he is a member of the community must be allowed to all members, and any responsibility required of one must be required of all. (Rowan suggests that some rights must often be allowed to non-members as well. While there is some merit in this suggestion and cases can be imagined in which it can be reasonable, there is some danger in accepting such a view; for once non-members are allowed privileges which are granted to persons solely because they are members, it can without greater inconsistency be argued that some members may have to be denied these privileges. What is needed instead is a specific definition of 'members' and a careful determination of member-rights which will take care of those cases which Rowan is concerned about.) It is necessary to add, too, that the rights should really be allowed to all under genuinely common conditions, that is, without any specific stipulations in particular cases. For example, it can be claimed that in the United States of America some states allow the right to vote to all members. But this claim is rendered farcical by the fact that Negroes alone have to meet peculiar requirements before they can exercise the franchise.

It may also be noted that in the international sphere political equality demands that rights which are allowed to some non-members must be allowed to all non-members, without any clever regulations surreptitiously

calculated to penalise some foreigners because of irrelevant considerations. It is not to be imagined that political legislation in this sophisticated era is openly discriminating. In most cases delicate and shrewd classifications are made which are ostensibly reasonable but in fact intensely wicked.

Next comes the thorny subject of the relation between principles of equality and the mechanics of politics. Rowan very astutely observes:

"....men seem to assume that all or most of their political difficulty is inherent in the political system, and is therefore necessary, whereas one might argue that a large portion of the difficulty is traceable not to the system, but to the way in which it operates."¹³

Dewey refers to the ballot box and majority rule as "external and largely mechanical symbols and expressions" of democracy, commonly regarded as the system best affording political equality, "expedients, the best devices that at a certain time have been found."¹⁴ Alas, this is too often forgotten particularly in emergent territories where politicians commit themselves irrevocably and inflexibly to particular alien or text-book forms of government, believing that all political difficulties can thereby be eradicated.

13. Rowan, Political Obligation and Political Purpose (Unpublished Lecture), pp. 61-62.

14. John Dewey, "Democracy and Education in the World Today", Problems of Men (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1946.), p. 36.

Perhaps it is even unfair to lay this charge only against politicians in emergent countries, for in the great nations of the world today there are many fanatical leaders who consider iniquitous any political system other than their own. There are, of course, iniquitous political systems; but what is being contended is that no particular form of government guarantees that policies and legislation will regard the "interest of the community as a whole." There are some guides as to the degree to which political equality is enjoyed. Dewey considers that two fundamental ideas underlying the mechanical symbols of American democracy are:

"the opportunity, the right and the duty of every individual to form some conviction and to express some conviction regarding his own place in the social order, and the relations of that social order to his own welfare," 15

and

"the fact that each individual counts as one and one only on an equality with others so that the final social will comes about as the cooperative expression of the ideas of many people." 16

Whether or not one admits the possibility or makes sense of "the cooperative expression of the ideas of many people", the essential point remains sound, viz. that the interest of each member of the community is fairly regarded in deliberation upon policy and in the formulation and execution of plans.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

It is important to note that to the idea that each individual should count as one and only one, Dewey adds, "on an equality with others". The reason is of course that in any society some persons are more influential than others and can form pressure groups that can make a mockery of the most theoretically laudable voting system or other political machinery. This possibility raises another problem, that of the control of wealth, communication, and decision making, which will be considered later.

What Dewey writes of democracy can be appropriately said of political equality; that is, it requires that:

"every individual must be consulted in such a way, actively not passively, that he himself becomes a part of the process of authority, of the process of social control; that his needs and wants have a chance to be registered in a way where they count in determining social policy. Along with that goes...mutual confidence and mutual consultation and arriving ultimately at social control by pooling, by putting together all of these individual expressions of ideas and wants." 17

Such notions as the "pooling of individual expressions of ideas and wants" can be interpreted to mean, simply, taking into account the interest of the community as a whole or the common good.

17. Loc. cit., pp. 35 - 36.

It has been frequently suggested that any classifications and distinctions made in the treatment of different members of a community must be made on relevant and justifiable grounds. The question then arises for each particular case, what is relevant and what is justifiable? This question introduces the legal aspect of the study.

d. Legal equality

Much of what has been said about political equality holds good for legal equality. But the law has a specific role to play as the watch-dog for the preservation of all rights and equalities. Equality under the law can best be understood to mean that a country's laws should apply equally to all its members, and all should be equally protected under the law.

Tussman and ten Broek criticise such an expression of legal equality. They write:

"It is clear that the demand for equal protection cannot be a demand that laws apply universally to all persons. The legislature, if it is to act at all, must impose special burdens upon or grant special benefits to special groups or classes of individuals." 18

Now it is banal to argue that some rights of some people must be withheld under specific circumstances not merely that the rights of others may be maintained (for this

18. Joseph Tussman and Jacobus ten Broek, "The Equal Protection of the Laws", California Law Review, Vol. XXXVII, Sept. 1949, No. 3, p. 343.

alone would be a dangerously inadequate justification) but chiefly that the body politic may be kept intact. If this is what Tussman and ten Broek mean, then the point is too obvious to deserve comment. What is interesting is the condition under which such inequalities should be allowed. It is suggested by the authors that the answer lies in the legislative right of reasonable classification and that "the reasonableness of a classification is the degree of its success in treating similarly those similarly situated."¹⁹

Much the same idea is expressed by Benn and Peters who consider it essential that the categories created by law be determined on relevant grounds and that whoever would make distinctions "justify the criteria in terms of more general rules, and ultimately of a balance of advantage to all concerned".²⁰

While we still do not have positive conditions for the justification of privileges or penalties - at any rate it is impossible to supply these in vacuo - we have at least one of the ground rules governing their distribution. It is for the administrators of the law to assess whether the rule is observed.

What has been called irrelevant considerations Tussman and ten Broek would refer to as "forbidden classi-

19. Ibid., p. 344.

20. Benn & Peters, op. cit., p. 112.

fication";²¹ so that to say that one's sex is irrelevant to whether one should be allowed to exercise the franchise is equivalent to saying that a 'forbidden classification' has been made of those who are eligible to do so.

It may be noted in passing that once the classification is made and accepted, equality under the law has an exact meaning and does not have to be explained in metaphorical terms. It means simply that if X or Y falls within the categories delineated by any particular law, then $X = Y$; and the two can be interchanged with the same results.

Tussman and ten Broek also raise the important question of the function of the court with respect to the laws themselves passed by legislative bodies. They assert that "the equal protection of the laws is a pledge of the protection of equal laws".²² Benn and Peters similarly distinguish between "unjust administration of the law and an unjust law".²³

It is even doubtful whether there can be at all equal protection of the laws without the protection of equal laws, whether, that is, the two principles are not two sides of the same coin.

21. Tussman and ten Broek, op. cit., p. 353.

22. Ibid., p. 344.

23. loc. cit.

The implication of all this is that for legal equality to be guaranteed as far as is humanly possible, it seems that the courts must have jurisdiction over laws and policies enacted by the legislative authority when these are reasonably challenged.²⁴ But just as it is possible to have a legislative body enacting unequal laws, is it not possible for the court deliberately to make unjust decisions?

This possibility makes it appear obvious that there is a responsibility for any society through some agency or other to attempt to inculcate habits of thought and behaviour on which its continued and peaceful existence depends. More will be said in this direction in the proper place. For the moment it is suggested that the court is one of the last bastions of defence against inequality and injustice. Its authority for interpretation of the law at least, must be therefore unlimited, its scholarship unquestionable, and its morals beyond reproach. It must, in short, be devoid of all those impediments to free and fearless thought and impartial judgment. Consequently, when decisions of the court are tampered with by political bodies as in the Mandela trial in South Africa,²⁵ or recent

24. The writer admits, and even cautions, that the implications of this view render it highly dangerous and debatable.

25. See, "Facts on File", Volume XXIII, No. 1201, Oct.31-Nov. 6, 1963, 392B.

trials in Ghana²⁶ which have disturbed the moral conscience of people all over the world, then we must tremble with the premonition of impending social disaster. In some sense or other, people will always remain the victims of circumstances, and, as Hume argues so passionately in his "Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding",²⁷ or as Mannheim observes in an essay, "The Problem of a Sociology of Knowledge",²⁸ our decisions will always be influenced by our particular experiences and conditions. For this reason, it is all the more necessary that the ultimate guardian of a nation's rights and noble principles must be that body which is least likely to have a vested interest in (or one can say, which is likely to have the least vested interest in) the decisions it makes concerning these matters. It seems that such a body is a judicial rather than a political one. Not that it is forgotten that the real guardians ultimately are individual persons, but

26. See, "Facts on File", Volume XXIII, No. 1209, Dec. 26-Jan. 1, 1964, 473B.
27. Hume Selections, ed. Charles W. Hendel, Jr. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927); see especially "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding", pp. 107-194.
28. Karl Mannheim, "Historicism", and "The Problem of a Sociology of Knowledge", Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952).

one has to pay attention to the formal arrangements which are made to fill the breach when the wisdom, sympathy, kindness and rationality of John Brown collapse.

e. Economic equality

The application of general principles of equality to the economic sphere of our life is a most formidable and embarrassing task, and ideals of economic equality are extremely difficult to define. Even Karl Marx was content for specific reasons to settle for conditions of economic equality which he himself considered to possess 'unavoidable shortcomings'.

Marx, indeed, did offer what he regarded as an ideal interpretation of economic equality. Marx's view on this matter runs as follows: encumbered with 'bourgeois limitations' the right of producers is proportional to the labour they supply; equality therefore "consists in measuring this right by an equal standard: labour," all other considerations such as class distinction being irrelevant. "Equal right is an unequal right for unequal labour..... It is therefore a right of inequality, in its substances as is all right."²⁹

But while right can only consist in the application of an equal standard the unequal individuals can be

29. Karl Marx, "Criticism of the Gotha Programme", Capital and Other Writings, ed. Max Eastman, Modern Library Edition (New York, Random House Inc., 1932), p. 5.

measured by an equal standard only from one definite point of view among many others, in this case as workers. As a result right would have to be unequal, because with an equal share of the social consumption fund a worker who is married and has children will be actually less well off than an unmarried childless worker.

"But these shortcomings are unavoidable in the first phase of Communist society Right can never be on a higher level than the economic state of society and the state of social civilization conditioned by it.

In a higher phase of Communist society after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour shall have disappeared.... when, with the development of the individual in every sense, the productive forces also increase and all the springs of collective wealth flow with abundance - only then can the limited horizon of bourgeois right be left behind entirely and society inscribe upon its banner: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!' "

30

The following criticism of Marx's theory can be made at once:

1. Even the most markedly capitalist countries today have long left Marx's 'bourgeois right' behind them adopting a more humane approach both in theory and practice than that of equating privileges with production. Not that the ultimate has been achieved in this direction or even theoretically accepted, but "To each according to his labour" is not the most respectable principle of

Capitalist governments.

2. It is not necessary that the struggle for equal rights should wait on or be seriously delayed by the phenomenon of economic scarcity which will ever be present with us. Economic scarcity certainly renders the struggle more acute but it also makes the struggle more urgent.

3. Marx's ideal, "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!" appears attractive, but even with 'the springs of collective wealth flowing in abundance', the ideal is unjust and inadequate, for needs will have to be delimited and controlled by some other principle such as 'the common good' or 'the public interest' for example, while there always comes a point when a person should be allowed to decide for himself whether he wishes to contribute more to society regardless of his capacity to do so. In other words, conflict between personal sacrifice and personal well-being is a distinct possibility, such a conflict being best resolved by the individual himself. The substitution of 'work' for 'need' makes the maxim even more pernicious.

Let us examine a few well-known maxims of distributive justice and see if they can enlighten us on the question of economic equality. Vlastos lists the following:

1. To each according to his need.

2. To each according to his worth.
3. To each according to his merit.
4. To each according to his work.
5. To each according to the agreements he has made.³¹

And if one thinks in terms of responsibilities or duties, one may add

6. From each according to his ability.

The first, second and sixth maxims have already been commented upon.

'Worth' and 'merit' are very tenuous and suspicious criteria for the distribution of a society's resources, however the two terms are defined. The main reason, apart from difficulties of definition and identification, is that worth and merit are correlatives of, or dependent on, cultural values, on taste, on the laws of supply and demand; and men are frail and selfish enough to regard their particular contributions or social role to be of unsurpassed significance and to demand the highest rewards. In this respect, what has been called Hobbes' notion of "compensatory equality" is useful to remind us, as someone remarked, that the nightingale was placed in the fourth class at the fowl show; to complete the picture one may observe that the standing of the crow

31. Loc. cit.

should be pretty high among the scavengers of the earth. For similar reasons, any oppressed people who claim one kind of superiority or another over the rest of their fellow men seem to be destroying their cause. One could hardly commend the attitude which prompted one of Onokpasa's characters in "The Hero of Sharpeville," Gazo, to exclaim to his mother: "Who fears white men? Did my father not flog Mr. Johannes on his farm?"³²

It may take some time and perhaps some blood before such spurious criteria as 'worth' and 'merit' and 'production' cease to be measures of income or before the notions as presently conceived undergo the drastic overhaul that they require; but, like Tawney, one can be hopeful though not sanguine of the prospect.

Nor will the fifth maxim withstand scrutiny. In his Socratic dialogue on Political Obligation & Political Purpose, Rowan makes his main character, Hobbes, admit that "a large portion of the citizenry are themselves party to a misuse or a distortion of public purposes and procedures".³³ In the present text this means that people often do make unfair agreements which rob them even of a due reward for their labour. Among the many reasons are improper education and inadequate knowledge of relevant

32. B. E. Onokpasa, The Hero of Sharpeville (Ibadan: the Augustinian Publishers of Nigeria, undated), p. 39.

33. Op. cit., p. 59.

conditions, indolence, resignation to or acceptance of a hard core of traditional practices and beliefs - like the serf who would question: Who am I to rise up against my Lord? - and various pressures such as fear of losing or not obtaining a means of livelihood.

It seems as though an impasse has been reached in this search for some understanding of economic equality. Two ways of escape are suggested: One may, like Tawney, recommend a supple interpretation such as "equality of environment, of access to education and the means of civilization, of security and independence, and of the social consideration which equality in these matters usually carries with it";³⁴ or one may submit that equality is a grossly inadequate or inappropriate ideal for the distribution of economic benefits. At any rate we must be able to accommodate such humane practices as the granting of security to the unemployed and unemployable, which such maxims as "to each according to his work" cannot justify.

By the same token, wages cannot be left or trusted to adjust themselves to the laws of supply and demand and to the dictates of arbitrary standards of merit.

Laski has some interesting remarks on these and other matters. For Laski, equality "involves, up to the margin of sufficiency, identity of response to primary

34. Tawney, op. cit., p. 32.

needs". Since the common welfare includes the welfare of the weak as well of the strong, the weak must be protected from their own weakness or inadequacy which causes them to limp after the vanguard of society.

"The urgent claims of all must be met before we can meet the particular claims of some. The differences in the social or economic position of men can only be admitted after a minimum basis of civilisation is attained by the community as a whole."

35

One man is not entitled to a house of twenty rooms until all people are adequately housed.

Instead of the unqualified maxim "to each according to his needs", then, Laski might substitute, "to each equally according to the common need of a citizen".

Laski's formulation of economic equality is in many respects sensible and humane. Strictly speaking, it departs in one sense from any normal meaning of 'equality' asserting more or less "equality at least up to a point", or minimum equality. In another sense, however, it is a remarkable embodiment of the strictest form of equality in that it recommends that the well-being of each person must be equally regarded. We still need to ask, however, what is the point or margin of sufficiency up to which there should be identity of response to primary needs? And what are primary needs? What constitutes well-being?

35. Harold J. Laski, A Grammar of Politics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), p. 157.

These questions bring the discussion right back where it started. However, the following conclusions can now be drawn:

1. Equality has no static meaning in practice but constantly changes with the change of social, economic and political circumstances. Each case of alleged inequalities needs to be judged on its own merit and each struggle for equality examined for its justification.

2. The division of the subject into its economic, political and legal aspects must be recognised as a division only of convenience. The problems in any one sphere throw their numerous tentacles out in all other directions and the spheres soon become indistinguishable. Hardly anyone needs to be reminded of the influence of economic wealth on political decisions. One may not wish to go as far as Laski in asserting that political equality is never real unless it is accompanied by virtual economic equality, that political power is otherwise bound to be the handmaid of economic power; but one cannot help thinking that this is very nearly the case. At any rate unless industry is democratised and the means of communication are controlled by the public, for public purposes, and in the public interest, any conditions of political equality gained will be precariously maintained, with the dignity and well-being of a section of the community on the brink of destruction.

3. Equality is not the only ideal of importance in the conduct of human affairs. As has been shown, it is sometimes an inadequate ideal needing to be supplemented or supported by other ideals, some of which have been expressed as justice, liberty, brotherhood, humanitarianism, human happiness and even self-actualization which has been looming large in recent literature on 'mental health'.

So far nothing has been said about what was referred to as 'social equality'. It can be said that social equality has been discussed throughout this chapter. What is involved, however, are not cases which can be covered by legislation, or by any political or economic arrangements, but the ordinary day to day informal relations between man and man. One may think of those instances in which the way a person is addressed, treated, or responded to in general depends on his social status, on how many thousands he makes a year, on the fabric of his attire, on his accent and a host of other external trappings of culture and wealth which sometimes are an indication of coarseness, mental and aesthetic obtuseness, and a very low level of consciousness.

The writer has had the experience of receiving a rough condescending kind of treatment while being mistaken for a porter, a sailor or an illiterate, and witnessing a complete metamorphosis of behaviour, a dramatic onset of

affability and deference, as soon as it was discovered that he was a university student. This observation is not very profound, to be sure, for there are simple sociological forces at work here. Yet these phenomena are symptoms of serious inequalities which exist in our society.

To attempt the removal of these symptoms by education and propaganda is both possible and necessary, but insufficient. We need to commit ourselves to an ideal of equality which forbids the distribution of special privileges of any kind to special people, on the basis of irrelevant and unjustifiable criteria; an ideal which demands that the happiness or the well-being of all people alike becomes the concern of public and private agents; an ideal which enjoins us to respect the life and dignity of the human person.

f. Justification of the ideal

At the beginning of this work it was claimed that the ideal of equality demands urgent attention, and in the last chapter it was stated that we 'need' to commit ourselves to the ideal. The question is now asked, what makes the problem of equality urgent, and how can this need of commitment be justified?

To deal with the latter question first, it may be argued that 'need' in this context is an ambiguous expression, either connoting an indispensable requirement

for the maintenance of life, or of some other condition, or issuing a recommendation.

In the first case the need is rooted in some fact about human makeup that can be empirically verified. What about the second case? Is it reducible ultimately to a question of need in the first sense? This is asking in effect whether the demand for such equality as has been described is justifiable.

Let us begin the enquiry by supposing that the demand is unjustifiable and then try to unravel the consequences. If the struggle for no form of equality can be justified, then one cannot on logical grounds defeat such advocates of inequality as Dr. Verwoerd who declared in the South African parliament:

"If the native in South Africa today is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake." 36

But another term 'logical' has been spirited into the discussion, which must turn for a moment on what is meant by "justifying".

In spite of a long and turbulent history as a target for philosophical assault the processes of verification remain, simply, reason and experience. It seems that rational and empirical criteria can be applied to any matter worth discussing. No attempt shall be made to

36. Hansard VII, 1953, cited by Onokpasa, op. cit., p. 44.

define 'reason' and 'experience' in general, but their application in this particular enquiry will be explained.

'Experience' refers to the feelings of men, the pain and joy they live through, the fears that haunt them, and the hopes they entertain.

'Reason' refers to the activity of drawing correct inferences from propositions or of recognising the logical relations between propositions.

In a wide sense experiencing can include reasoning, and reasoning can include experiencing, observing or perceiving relations between objects, but limits have been set on both terms for convenience and clarity.

When we reason about propositions, we reach conclusions about propositions, while the continuum of experience never in itself reveals, embodies or implies any recommendations for the use of words in the propositions or the making of inferences. It seems, then, that we constantly stipulate deliberately or unwittingly, rules for communicating our experiences, for 'ordering' them in a communicable form, or for organising them in a manner that is intellectually or emotionally satisfying.

It is tempting, then, to join forces with Dr. Barnett Savery against the ethical absolutists and intuitionists, and assert that since our circumstances, hence our experiences, are different, the resulting systems we organise will vary at least in some details that matter.

"The system of value we adopt (or our ideals) will depend upon the kind of individuals we are."³⁷ There are limits, then, to the justification of an ideal. But within these limits one can be illogical or unreasonable by making inferences inconsistent with principles (if any) which one considers or declares to be fundamental.

Any ideals must be justified only on the basis of these and similar criteria. While it may not be possible then to justify ideals in any strictly logical sense, one can be reasonable about the ideals one forms, or allows to grow into one's system. In social matters there is need for careful empirical study of human need and aspiration, but such a study when it is required to issue in action must always be supplemented or completed by what may be called an 'idealistic leap'.

It is neither necessary nor desirable to indulge in daring dogmatism about man's social nature as does Stace in his 'Concept of Morals', or Myers who confidently speaks of man's need for the society of other men, and asserts that the answer to this need can come only from equals. It is sufficient only to declare ourselves in favour of an ideal and thereafter be as consistent as we can. But our ideals must in some way survive the pragmatic test. We are

37. Barnett Savery, "Relativity vs. Absolutism in Value-Theory", The Journal of Philosophy (Vol. XXXVIII, No. 6, March 13, 1941), p. 162.

therefore required to seek to come to terms with the desires and aspirations of one another. One would tend to conclude, then, that there is not much that can be said to Dr. Verwoerd and his disciples unless everyone is willing to show sympathy for the happiness of others and is eager to strive for peace. Such altruism and desire for peace lie at the root of the recommendations of this paper. Even if it is true to state, as does Henry George, that 'what has destroyed every previous civilisation has been the tendency to the unequal distribution of wealth and power',³⁸ there still has not been found a justification for equality unless the principles suggested here, defined differently perhaps, are cherished.

If these principles are held very dearly, then the problem of equality is urgent not only at this period of history but as long as destruction and misery threaten or prevail.

If one should be pressed to justify the objectives which one considers fundamental, one might begin to count noses, but it should be made quite clear what procedure is adopted.

What is beyond doubt, however, is the fact that all men have desires and hopes which they seek to realise.

38. Henry George, Progress and Poverty (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883) p. 475.

Very often there is a conflict of desire and a clash of wills when some are denied the opportunities open to others for the attainment of goals. In such situations, we have to decide whether we shall rely ultimately on physical force to resolve our conflicts. If we do not place the highest premium on peace, happiness, and human life, then reason and sympathy are unnecessary and uneconomic, and any ideal of equality is humbug. If we do, however, then certain other principles must be cherished and observed, and the ideal of equality seems to be one of these.

CHAPTER III

EQUALITY AS AN AIM OF EDUCATION

There are many educational problems that one encounters in any thorough study of the idea of equality. Some of these problems relate to educational organisation, to the distribution of educational resources, and to the provision of adequate opportunity for the development of individual capacities.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relation between equality and education by attempting to answer the question whether equality can be one of the aims of education. The last chapter will be more specifically devoted to the idea of equality of educational opportunity.

a. Can education have aims?

It should first be considered whether education can be said to have aims, and if so, in what sense.

The term "education" is itself a source of much confusion, possessing at times a strong emotional appeal, conjuring up different ideas to different people according to their social circumstances and desires. The term will be used here in R. S. Peters' sense as "initiation",

involving essentially "processes which intentionally transmit what is valuable in an intelligible and voluntary manner and which create in the learner a desire to achieve it, this being seen to have its place along with other things in life."¹ Peters adds that initiation is always into some body of knowledge and mode of conduct. 'Initiation' will be considered, too, specifically within the school context.

In other words, then, the term 'education' will be confined in this paper to the explicit or latent functions of the school; so that to ask whether education should have aims is to ask whether the schools should try to fulfil any definite function.

Perhaps no one would give a negative answer to a question put in this manner. All intelligent human activity is directed to some end, and the activities carried on within the school fall generally into this category. However diffuse the teacher's roles are, the teacher sets out to fulfil many specific purposes. There is indeed much difference of opinion as to what these purposes should be, and much educational debate centres around not the necessity for aims but the kinds of aims necessary.

1. Richard Stanley Peters, Education as Initiation (London: Evans Brother Limited, 1964), p. 34.

Even when Dewey asserts that "it is well to remind ourselves that education as such has no aims,"² and that it is "literally and all the time its own reward,"³ we must understand him to be condemning special types of aims which are formulated without due regard to the needs, the nature and the potentiality of the child, aims which are "imposed upon a process of action from without".⁴ Dewey pleaded for aims that are suggested by the circumstances of individual schools and students, aims that are tentative, not ultimate and general, that represent the freeing of activities and are capable of translation into a method of cooperating with the activities of those undergoing instruction.

Peters throws much light on this question of aims. He notes that

"to ask questions about the aims of education is ... a way of getting people to get clear about and focus their attention on what is worthwhile achieving. It is not to ask for the production of ends extrinsic to action."

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2. John Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 107.
3. Ibid., p. 109.
4. Ibid., p. 110.
5. Op. cit., p. 19.

b. Types of aims feasible

Alburey Castell proposes that "to educate is to liquidate ignorance".⁶ He does not deny that teachers have an indirect interest in the question of 'valuing' and associated behaviour, or that it is worthwhile to ask "What is the purpose of education?", but he strongly asserts that the teacher's main business is with the child's 'getting to know'.

Sir Richard Livingstone, however, in his book, "Some Tasks for Education" expresses his enthusiastic acceptance of Ruskin's view that:

"Education does not mean teaching people what they do not know; it means teaching them to behave as they do not behave."⁷

Some reconciliation can be effected between these two apparently different positions. While it is certainly arguable that knowledge of a course of action generally recognised to be good does not guarantee appropriate behaviour, it seems that such knowledge at least tends to inspire us to choose and act in the desirable manner, though we may not and often in fact do not. The 'liquidation of ignorance' and the training in specific behaviour patterns can be seen, therefore, as mutually

6. Loc. cit.

7. Sir Richard Livingstone, Some Tasks for Education (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 28.

accommodating educational aims; but both must involve understanding and voluntariness on the part of the person initiated.

c. Equality as an educational aim

It remains to be investigated whether the teaching of principles of equality and the promotion of behaviour required by such principles are feasible educational aims. The following considerations suggest an affirmative answer:

1. The school seems to be the social institution that affords the best opportunity for fostering the idea of the common dignity of man. Children may be born victims of economic and other social inequalities but only acquire from their social groups the sophistication or resignation necessary for the acceptance or recognition of the stratification of human beings. Provided that its teachers have been able to rise above the discriminating practices and attitudes of the wider society, the school offers abundant opportunity for children to play together, to suffer together, and thus to come to value a relationship with one another on a basis of equality. While it must be granted that the success of the school in promoting desirable habits of thought or behaviour is not inevitable, small victories in this direction are in fact

won on occasion, with quite far-reaching and happy results.

2. The school is a specialist institution for the task of initiation. It has resources of time, technique and material not normally available to parents within the home, for example, who possess the added disadvantage of being too emotionally involved in their relation with their children. It is true that teachers themselves can be similarly afflicted, but it is also possible that a sense of professional responsibility can help them to achieve the degree of affective neutrality necessary for the performance of their role.

3. The ideal of equality satisfies the best among Dewey's criteria for good aims (mentioned earlier) for the following reasons:

a. It is not an ultimate aim, since equality was given a dynamic interpretation.

b. The behaviour and play of children already contain all the elements of brotherly feeling, compassion, and mutual regard, together with an absence of studied and irrelevant stratification of human beings. These conditions are all consistent with the ideal of equality.

c. The more a society aspires to conditions of political, legal and economic equality, the more possible it is to devise methods of training that ensure "the freeing of activities of those undergoing instruction", since restriction and oppression are reduced to a minimum.

Perhaps one can be daring enough to argue not only that the schools can help to prepare a nation's children to eradicate inequalities in their society, but that such training is an appropriate responsibility of the schools. Indeed there is too great a tendency to saddle the school with the responsibility of eliminating each new misfortune experienced by members of a society. There is no justification for burdening the school with any responsibility which cannot be discharged to children and which does not directly involve the growth and socialisation of children. Since the school is in a uniquely privileged position to promote pupil growth under conditions which encourage pupils to respect one another, since mutual respect is the basis of all kinds of equality, and since inequalities in a society restrict the growth of some, then the responsibility suggested here is an appropriate one for the school.

Rowan recognises the part that the school needs to play in fostering attitudes necessary for creating conditions of equality.⁸ He observes that no political or other mechanical arrangements can prevent public agents from diverting public resources towards private ends or can prevent citizens from acquiescing to such treason. So, like Tussman, Rowan sees the only possibility of

8. Loc. cit.

creating greater and greater conditions of equality to lie fundamentally in the attitudes of the individual. He accordingly suggests that a democracy has a great stake in adequate civic education. Tussman considers education for political life a "crucial and indispensable enterprise".⁹ There seems no doubt that both would have these tasks undertaken, not exclusively of course, but at least in part and with seriousness by formal educational institutions.

d. Method of fulfilment

That the school has among its roles encouraging acceptance of some principle of equality is clear. What is more difficult to decide and more debatable is how its role of initiation should be fulfilled. The whole question of the formation of attitudes has been the centre of too much theoretical controversy and too little practical investigation or action research. In fact it has even been suggested by some that the inculcation of attitudes is not a proper function of the school. It is quite evident, however, that the social organisation within the classroom and the teacher's techniques have definite consequences in the growth and behaviour of the child. Therefore, it would

9. Joseph Tussman, Obligation and the Body Politic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 10.

seem necessary that the relationship between teaching techniques or organisation and attitudes should be studied. Out of such a study may arise testable and proved methods for the deliberate transmission of habits of thought and behaviour.

In the meantime, it seems possible to outline briefly some broad rationale underlying any attempt (subject to restrictions already imposed) to secure children's commitment to ideals of equality.

1. Since faulty biological doctrines and inaccurate anthropological history are utilised to justify inequalities, the findings of modern scholarship on such questions as ethnic origins and political rights and responsibilities should be presented to pupils whenever relevant and appropriate.

2. Despite the fact that men seldom behave with rationality the school must not give up the attempt to make children not only capable of rational judgment, but willing to judge rationally, with a profound respect and yearning for evidence.

3. It follows that a rational morality as a basis for conduct should be the aim of both teacher and pupil alike. In the absence of even minimum rational support for a belief or course of action, it is very likely that communication, tolerance and negotiation will break down and any kind of behaviour and belief will be regarded as being as sound as another.

There should be no doubt about the legitimacy of the teacher's concern with morality. Durkheim observes that a society such as ours cannot content itself with,

"a complacent possession of moral results that have been handed down to it. It must go on to new conquests; it is necessary that the teacher prepare the children who are in his trust for the necessary advances." 10

Instead of transmitting wittingly or unwittingly the moral gospel of our elders as "a sort of closed book",¹¹ the teacher must excite in our children "a desire to add a few lines of their own, and give them the tools to satisfy this legitimate ambition".¹² These 'tools' can best be understood to be a spirit of altruism, a willingness and ability to examine evidence before coming to conclusions, and a capacity for social living.

4. The organisation of school activity can be most effectively designed for the promotion of almost any type of social attitude. It is not beyond the scope of educational experiment and research to discover what types of school and classroom organisation are most conducive to the development of respect and concern for the well-being of others.

10. Emile Durkheim, Moral Education (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961), p. 13.

11. Durkheim, loc. cit.

12. Ibid.

The social and organisational structure of the school is so important that the relationship between the ideal of equality and educational organisation needs to be specially studied. The following chapter will be devoted, then, to the more inclusive problem of equality of educational opportunity.

CHAPTER IV

EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

a. Various forms of discrimination

A reputable scholar of Comparative Education, E. J. King, writes:

"It is always recognised, of course, that any stage of education is more valuable if it is linked with an opportunity for further development; but many of us are shocked if we are confronted with the plain statement that schooling is also a sort of filter - a device for keeping coarse elements back while only the finer material passes through. Yet that is what it is in many countries, and to some extent it is so in all countries even where such an intention is repudiated." 1

In 'World Perspectives in Education', King argues that filtering has taken place in the form of selection which is a practice that exists in various forms in different educational systems. He observes,

"The more open society becomes to the upward and downward migration of individuals, who thus change their status, the more it is likely that those who relish their class position will apply increasingly subtle criteria to remind themselves and the interloper of his social bastardy." 2

1. Edmund J. King, Other Schools and Ours (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1958), p. 52.
2. Edmund J. King, World Perspectives in Education (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962), p. 137.

Selection and differentiation, King believes, have been utilised at various times as instruments of discrimination and exclusion.

Of course, discrimination or the denial of equal educational opportunity has not always been too subtle. In the Appendix to his play, "The Hero of Sharpeville", the South African writer, Onokpasa cites the following from the 1936 Report of the Departmental Committee on Native Education:

'The Education of the white child prepares him for life in a dominant society and the education of the black child for a subordinate society the limits of native education form part of the social and economic structure of the country'.³

Onokpasa also cites:

'We should not give the natives an academic education, as some people are too prone to do. If we do this, we shall later be burdened with a number of academically trained Europeans and non-Europeans, and who is going to do the manual labour in the country? I am in thorough agreement with the view that we should so conduct our schools that the native who attends those schools will know that to a great extent he must be the labourer in the country.' - Mr. J. N. LeRoux, Minister of Agriculture (Hansard, VII, 1945).⁴

Nor has irrelevant discrimination in education been directed only against racial groups. R. H. Tawney observes: "The hereditary curse upon English education

3. Onokpasa, op. cit., p. 42.

4. Ibid.

is its organisation upon lines of social class."⁵ He also notes that historically 'elementary school education' meant a cheap education for a certain section of English society.

With the increasing complexity and sophistication of society discrimination in the provision of educational opportunity becomes more and more subtle. In many instances, though, such discrimination is not deliberate, but is an inevitable concomitant of misguided educational theories as well as of economic scarcity. The examination system within an educational structure can also help to deprive many people of opportunity for further education by requiring performance not relevant to later training, or by being unnecessarily biased in favour of some members of the community. This state of affairs is rendered more serious when, through policy or through scarcity of resources, those who fail a limited set of specific examinations are automatically shut out from any further avenue of educational development, while those who succeed are automatically on the way to positions of privilege in the society. One might call the type of *élite* produced in such a situation an "examination *élite*".

5. Op. cit., p. 154.

b. Inequality of educational opportunity

The constant clamour for equality of educational opportunity is not unwarranted or insignificant, but the greatest difficulty lies in interpreting what such equality can reasonably mean. Perhaps it would be helpful to approach this problem by noting some cases of inequality which violate the main principles suggested in the previous chapter:

1. There is first the obvious denial of educational facilities to some people on irrelevant grounds or on the basis of a 'forbidden classification', to use Tussman and ten Broek's expression. This point has already been illustrated.⁶

2. There is the subtler exclusion of specific categories of people from facilities open to others either through economic considerations or through unsound educational principles. The division of eleven-year-old children into three different classes of people said to be fitted for 'Grammar', 'Technical', and 'Modern Education' - once a common practice in secondary education in England - is a case in point.⁷ (This practice has been modified in

6. See, too, Hobert W. Burns, "Social Class and Education in Latin America", Comparative Education Review, Vol. 6, No. 3, February 1963.

7. King, Other Schools and Ours, Ch. 4.

some counties; Leicestershire, for example, has abandoned the 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ examination as well as selection at the age of eleven).⁸

British Guiana still retains the method of selection for Secondary School on the basis of an examination at 11 $\frac{1}{2}$, partly because of shortage of facilities and partly because the tradition, inherited from Britain, dies hard. No actual research has been made into the relative chances for selection of upper and lower class children, but a rational analysis suggests that the examination favours the children of upper class families. (From a survey dealing with a similar problem in France, in 1954, A. Girard concludes that:

"children of varying home backgrounds do not have equal chances of selection at eleven or twelve, or, in particular, of gaining admission to secondary schools."⁹)

It should be noted, however, that the Minister of Education in the present British Guiana Government proposed abandoning selection for secondary schools altogether as well as segregation of schools into types in order to achieve "equality of opportunity and an expanding area of

8. A. G. Joselin, "Changing Patterns of Secondary Education in England", The New Era in Home and School, Volume 44, Number 10, Dec. 1963.
9. A. Girard, "Selection for Secondary Education in France", Education, Economy & Society, ed. A. H. Halsey, Jean Floud and C. Anderson (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), p. 193.

common educational and social experience for the country's youth."¹⁰

Another type of inequality of opportunity immediately suggests itself: selection and differentiation are not in themselves unjust discriminatory devices; they become so when the selection is based on irrelevant criteria, or when some categories of students get the best treatment and most lavish attention while the remainder have to make do with whatever teaching staff, library facilities and other physical equipment are left available, their talents stifled and their aspirations frustrated.

An interpretation of equality of educational opportunity is implicit in the foregoing analysis. The theory that is proposed is indeed a very simple one, and will be briefly stated.

c. Equality of educational opportunity defined

It is clear that equality of opportunity cannot mean identity of opportunity. Any educational practice based on the principle of identity of opportunity would certainly be most inhuman and unjust for the simple reason that people are different in interest and capabilities.

10. Memorandum by the Minister of Education and Social Development on Education Policy, February, 1963, p. 7.

Such difference is due partly to environment, partly to heredity, and partly to the response which the individual makes to the stimulus provided by his environment. Both society and the individual would stand to lose if the same treatment or opportunity is provided to everyone: the individual would be frustrated if he is denied chances which can be of benefit to him while he is allowed facilities which he cannot put to advantage; the society would suffer the wastage and misdirection of its resources.

Tawney observes that equality of provision is to be achieved not by treating different needs in the same way, but by devoting equal care to ensuring that they are met in the different ways most appropriate to them. Tawney writes:

"The more anxiously, indeed, a society endeavours to secure equality of consideration for all its members, the greater will be the differentiation of treatment which, when once their common human needs have been met, it accords to the special needs of different groups and individuals among them."

11

Many parents in their understandable ambition for their children are suspicious of any differentiation of training within the school organisation, linking differentiation with inequality of opportunity. Of course any differentiation based on tenuous criteria and on theories no longer regarded to be tenable is to be forthrightly

11. Op. cit., p. 39.

deplored and rejected; in this respect, one can only rely on the integrity and wisdom of educational theorists, administrators and researchers. As G. I. Sanchez emphasises, in this matter of securing equalisation of educational opportunity which is in fact the securing of personal and community growth and development,

"it is necessary that the services of those leaders - political scientists, sociologists, philosophers and the like - most conversant with the field of knowledge involved in these aspects of life be enlisted in the formulation of a sound basis for the equalization plan." 12

While a community should keep under continuous scrutiny the policies and actions of political, civil and educational authorities, it should be careful lest in the clamour for equality and democracy it objects to educational practices which have sound theoretical and empirical foundations and are more likely than any other measure to promote the very principles which the community holds dear. E. J. King writes, for example, that to many pragmatic and practical Americans,

".....to give special attention to special children is usually stigmatised as undemocratic - at any rate when it would result in accelerated courses....." 13

And he adds the interesting comment,

12. G. I. Sanchez, The Equalization of Educational Opportunity - Some Issues and Problems (New Mexico, University of New Mexico Press, 1939), p. 6.
13. World Perspectives in Education, pp. 147-148.

"yet no one in the United States quarrels with special coaching for athletes or with special adulation for the handsome, the heroic or the commercially venturesome. Unreflecting and repressive egalitarianism is preached against intellectual eminence as against no other distinction." 14

Though equality of educational opportunity does not mean complete identity of provision, it may be that a common minimum provision should be made to all on the basis of some fundamental concept of common humanity, as is suggested by Laski and Tawney, and that institutions should be established "which meet common needs, and are a source of common enlightenment and enjoyment".¹⁵ But beyond this common point, equality of educational opportunity requires that the environment in general, and the formal educational structure in particular, should allow adequate varied opportunity for the full development of the special talents and capacities of all members of the community. In more general terms, Tawney writes that equality of opportunity requires,

"that what are commonly regarded as the prizes of life should be open to all, but that none should be subjected to arbitrary penalties; not only that exceptional men should be free to exercise their exceptional powers, but that common men should be free to make the most of their common humanity." 16.

14. Ibid., p. 148.

15. Tawney, op. cit., p. 47.

16. Ibid., p. 112.

d.

CONCLUSION

Two final remarks are necessary to caution against any over-optimism which might have been inspired by this interpretation of equality of educational opportunity, remarks which at the same time summarise the main conclusions reached in this thesis.

Firstly, in no practical situation can the principle of equality of opportunity outlined be completely realised since economic resources are always limited and choice of priorities has to be exercised. Besides, the attainment of conditions of equality in general is thwarted not only by economic scarcity but by the restrictions and difficulties imposed by the limitations of human knowledge and goodwill, as well as by the imperfections of our existing institutions, legal, political and social.

Secondly, there exist in any society people with serious handicaps, who are not able to avail themselves of opportunities which are in theory open to all; equality of educational opportunity in particular, and equality in general, are inadequate ideals to strive after if these people are not to be neglected. One can of course argue tortuously that equality requires that the handicapped receive full attention, but it is more apparent that the ideal of equality needs to be supplemented by other ideals, by humanitarianism, for example, not only for the reason

just mentioned but for more general reasons suggested in earlier chapters. In short, no attempt should be made to subsume under a single, eternal aim, the diverse dynamic purposes of education and other human activities.

Finally, though it is implied here and has been contended that equality needs to be continually re-interpreted, as inequalities will always prevail, no society should give up the effort to win as many victories as possible against inequality. Tawney very eloquently advises that,

"a society which is convinced that inequality is an evil need not be alarmed because the evil is one which cannot wholly be subdued. In recognising the poison, it will have armed itself with an antidote. It will have deprived inequality of its sting by stripping it of its esteem." 17

17. Op. cit., pp. 47-48.