

WHAT IS EQUALITY?

HOW EQUAL SHOULD WE BE?

"We hold these Truths to be self evident: That all men are created Equal..."

In what ways are "all men created equal"? How equal should we be?
What is the difference between "equality of rights" and "equality of outcomes?"
What is the relationship between equality and freedom?
Is it possible to establish true equality among humankind? Should we try?

The word "EQUALITY" seems to be second only to "freedom" as a buzz word in America. The two words are spoken in this country as if they were inseparable. It is said by some that we are in fact not equal in America, and until we achieve equality, we will never have a just society.

EQUALITY

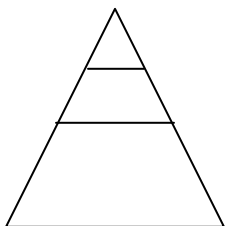
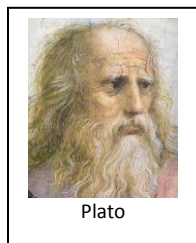
a condition in which all people have the same advantages, chances, opportunities, benefits, possessions, and conditions.

Webster's Dictionary:

- 1) being the same as another in quantity, degree, value, number, or quality.
- 2) evenly proportioned or balanced.

Based on the above definitions, it's easy to see that in fact we are not equal much at all. Salaries are not equal. Housing is not equal. Neither are schools, teachers, students, sports teams, jobs, modes of transportation, attitudes, values, or just about any things that we have to deal with in life.

I. EQUALITY REJECTED: HIERARCHISM, ELITISM

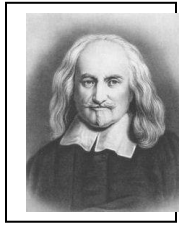


An old, long lived approach to the idea of equality is to outright reject any notion of it. This view holds that some individuals or groups are inherently of greater value, dignity, and importance than others. This elevated position is usually enjoyed by a relative few, whose elite credentials are determined by birth. The best thing that could happen to the "pathetic unwashed masses" of society is for these few ubermensch to be in complete control. Remember Plato's ideal *Republic*? Wise "Guardians" should rule "auxiliaries" and "producers." Not for their own gain, but for the Greater Good.

Another approach to hierarchism may put half the population (males) or a majority of it (a racial or religious identity) in a superior position, enjoying more rights and status than the groups deemed inferior. For example, a **patriarchal** society is generally characterized as one based on the assumption of male superiority and even of **misogyny**: ingrained prejudice and hostility against women.

HIERARCHISM AND COLLECTIVISM.

Elitist or hierarchical societies are almost always based on a collectivist assumption: the stratified society is best for the greater good of the whole, or the greater good of the favored group. **Philosopher Thomas Hobbes:**



*"I Authorize and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to his Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou that give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in like manner. This done, the Multitude so united in one Person, is called a COMMON-WEALTH, in latine CIVITAS. This is the Generation of that LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speake more reverently) of that Mortall God, to which we owe under the Immortal God, our peace and defence.
Leviathan, The Second Part, Chapter 17, p. 87*

In what can be termed the **far right** of the political spectrum, various collective identities are assigned higher or lower status. For people considered far right in much of the world, one's own **national and/or religious group** must maintain a privileged status in society. Depending on the country, this also means patriarchy: male dominance.

The individualist exception: Welcome to the jungle.

Elitism or hierarchism can also be based on a Nietzschean **pure individualism**: survival, success, and dominance for the "fittest", who climb to the top by any means necessary.

Is any of this fair?

II. EGALITARIANISM.

Egalitarianism is a philosophy which holds that any form of inequality is unjust, and that **total equality must be established**. True equality will be achieved when no one has or is more or less of anything, than anyone else.

Egalitarianism argues that **inequality causes all the problems of the world**.

"With, Without. Who'd deny it's what the fighting's all about?" –Pink Floyd, Us and Them

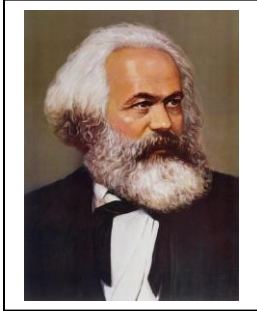
Having more money, property, smarts, talents, looks, charm, or anything else desirable inevitably leads to the envy of others. The result is hate, struggle, strife, violence, war. By eliminating the reasons for these horrible emotions, we can achieve harmony.

In addition, why should one person have any advantage over another? Why should some live in mansions while others sleep in homeless shelters? Why should some make the team while others get rejected? Why should some few be recognized for their achievements while most others merely sit in the audience feeling inadequate?

It's not FAIR. Either everyone should have the honors, or no one.

Egalitarianism can be applied in different ways. Equalization of wealth, politics, social recognition, culture, race, gender, sexuality, or other aspects of life can all be goals of egalitarians. One or a few of such areas can be the focus, or egalitarianism can be pursued in all possible ways.

It's all about Marx.



“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” The most important philosopher impacting many present day contests over equality is Karl Marx. This communist thinker discussed **human societies as always divided between oppressor groups and victim groups**. Egalitarianism today usually reflects this basic premise even if Marx is not directly referenced or even acknowledged. Marx focused more on material or economic inequalities than on other kinds, but his narrative of **class conflict** can be applied in many other areas by **neo-Marxists**. Bourgeoisie v proletariat can be replaced with male v female, heterosexual v homosexual, white v black... and the point remains basically the same. For neo-Marxists, the **victim group**, struggling for equality, must end the power of the **oppressor group**.

A house may be large or small; as long as the neighboring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirement for a residence. But let there arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut. The little house now makes it clear that its inmate has no social position at all to maintain, or but a very insignificant one; and however high it may shoot up in the course of civilization, if the neighboring palace rises in equal or even in greater measure, the occupant of the relatively little house will always find himself more uncomfortable, more dissatisfied, more cramped within his four walls. —Marx, Wage Labour and Capital (December 1847), in Marx Engels Selected Works, Volume I, p. 163.

EQUALITY OF CONDITIONS

Egalitarianism seeks to level results, conditions, and outcomes to make people as similar as possible socially, politically, economically, and culturally. This can be applied in degrees - or pursued completely. Examples include communism, socialism, contemporary American progressivism, and radical or post-modern feminism. Typically, **for communists the goal is complete economic equalization** through the abolition of private property, with the aim of a “classless society”; **for American progressives it is something along the lines of reducing the “income gap”** through adjustments in the tax code, and the use of “**political correctness**” to equalize beliefs and culture. Many **Post Modern or Left-feminists** reject the idea of a biological difference in the genders, and seek to end, in varying degrees, all differences between the sexes, be they in clothing, careers, lifestyles, and even demeanor. “Masculine and feminine” are seen as inherently exploitative and unfair, unless, perhaps, they are “fluid.”

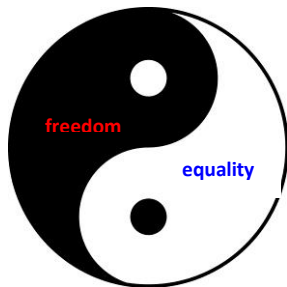
EGALITARIAN COLLECTIVISM

Egalitarians usually base their philosophy on collectivism, and collective identities. For the egalitarian collectivist, the individual person does not have a right to be understood as different from (better than) others. The one right each individual has is to be seen as the same as everyone else, as much as humanly possible. The lone person must submit to the greater good and must conform to the condition of all others. Individual identity itself is either replaced entirely or subordinated to **group identities** based on victim or privileged status; one is either part of the heroic, moral victim group or the oppressor group.

BUT not all collectivists are egalitarian. Fascism, one of the more dramatic expressions of collectivism, does not call for the redistribution of wealth or most other equalizations. As long as each individual understands that he or she exists for the greater good and acts accordingly, it's OK if she or he makes profit besides. And fascism in all its forms divides humans into hierarchies of higher and lower levels, based on one collective identity or another. Tribal systems tend to be collectivist, but are usually based on the inherent **INEQUALITY** of tribal members: the chief and his kin are superior.

PURE INDIVIDUALIST EGALITARIANS?

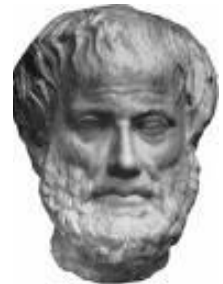
Despite the seeming contradiction, the call for equalization could be for personal, selfish reasons. If certain individuals are unhappy that others have higher income, or if frustrated by their own inability to compete, or find they are outside the mainstream, or want power and status over others, demands for equality could provide a solution. Thus, other people with greater abilities could be “leveled down” through higher taxes, to make one feel less inadequate about oneself, in the name of fairness. The majority could be denied public celebration of a custom the minority doesn't like, in the name of equality. Denying certain groups their status or success is a way of exercising power over them.



III. NATURAL EQUALITY

“The worst form of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal... The only stable state is the one in which all men are equal before the law.”

-Aristotle



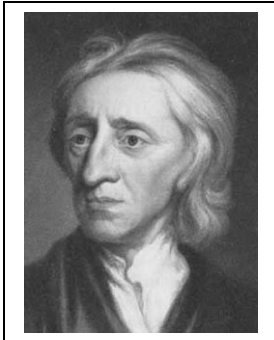
A philosophy of Natural Equality comes from the premises of **Natural Law and Mutual Individualism**. The idea of **natural equality** probably originated with Aristotle and the stoic philosophers and was developed over time by other Natural Law thinkers. It is based on the premise that **all people, as humans, are by nature born equal in dignity and human worth**. This means all artificially imposed hierarchies must be ended, and every person must have the equal right to pursue their interests. All people, therefore, must be equal before the law. But in addition, all people also have **natural inequalities**. Each of us has his/her own special talents, interests, personalities, abilities. As a result of this natural condition of inequality, people will achieve success in different areas, and in different degrees. Some will reach great heights of achievement, wealth, and fame. Others will be less successful. Results should be determined by individual choices, actions and levels of motivation. As long as all people have their **“RIGHT TO TRY”** protected, and opportunities are open to all, then the resulting inequalities will be just.

EGALITARIANISM LEADS TO HATE.

Natural Equality accuses egalitarianism of being both unjust and extremely divisive. The demands for equalization that declare the successful, or certain groups such as straight white males, to be inherent oppressors, lead logically to a **resentment of “oppressors.”** Likewise these premises lead to a sense of victimhood in the accusers despite their actual situations (such as attendance at elite Ivy league universities). This sense that one is a victim and others are oppressors obviously leads to hate against the perceived oppressors, again regardless of actual circumstances. Hate is bad.

EQUALITY OF RIGHTS.

John Locke argued all people have an absolute right to the fruits of their honest labor and the results of their natural gifts: they are by nature equal in some ways and unequal in others. Another aspect of natural inequalities manifests itself in gender differences. Liberal (as in liberty-based) feminism is the idea that women should be able to compete with men for any job, and pursue any pastime or lifestyle they want. But unlike PoMo feminists, liberal feminists think it's absurd to deny the real physical and biological differences between the genders that result in gender generalities in certain areas, from career choices to fashion preferences. Many liberal feminists see much of Pomo / Left feminism as **misandry**: dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against men.



(Equality is ...) "That equal right which every man hath, to his natural freedom, without being subjected to the will or authority of any other man". (John Locke, Second Treatise, chapter 6).

"He, who appropriates land to himself by his labour, does not lessen but increase the common stock of mankind... Different degrees of industry were apt to give men possessions in different proportions". (Locke, Second Treatise, Chapter 5).

EXCESS EQUALIZATION DESTROYS FREEDOM.

"Human beings are born with different capacities. If they are free, they are not equal. And if they are equal, they are not free."

— **Soviet dissident and Gulag survivor Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn**

From the Natural Equality point of view, freedom is destroyed by pure or excessive equality. Since we will naturally produce and achieve at different levels, and have natural differences, **the only way to achieve real equality is to**

- 1) **Confiscate** all that is produced and redistribute the wealth evenly. This is, of course, impossible without totalitarian government. And this brings us back to the issues of dependence, power, and control.
- 2) **Force** people to ignore or even surrender their own values and opinions, and their special talents, abilities, natural abilities, and individual interests that make them unique from (and unequal to) everyone else. Make scientists into street sweepers... force people to surrender the results of their own efforts...equalize attitudes and opinions... **CONTROL**.

19th Century French liberal Alexis de Tocqueville: *"There is indeed a manly and legitimate passion for equality which rouses in all men a desire to be strong and respected. This passion tends to elevate the little man to the rank of the great. But the human heart also nourishes a debased taste for equality, which leads the weak to want to drag the strong down to their level and which induces men to prefer equality in servitude to inequality in freedom. It is not that peoples with a democratic social state naturally scorn freedom; on the contrary, they have an instinctive taste for it. But freedom is not the chief and continual object of their desires; it is equality for which they feel an eternal love; they rush on freedom with quick and sudden impulses, but if they miss their mark they resign themselves to their disappointment; but nothing will satisfy them without equality, and they would rather die than lose it" (Democracy In America, Mansfield & Winthrop ed, p . 52).*

Individual Identity. Natural equality philosophy rejects the Marxist premise that automatically divides people into victim and oppressor groups based on identity. In a free society, people are the product of their own choices and **“native talents.”** Labeling a person a victim merely for being black, female, or working class; or privileged for being white, male, or bourgeoisie, ignores the circumstances of that persons’ life and choices. It also defines and categorizes people according to groups: the very essence of **racism and bigotry.** Proper equality treats each person as an individual, to be judged by the **“content of their character”** and their actions alone.

A **pluralistic society** is one composed of people with different lifestyles and points of view who live together in a spirit of tolerance. It is therefore, by definition, based on the idea of natural equality in human worth, and natural inequality among individual characteristics. From this point of view, modern forms of egalitarianism often corrupt pluralism in the name of equality for the **“victimized,”** the marginalized, the minority, or the **“otherized.”** Rather than pushing for the equal rights of such people, egalitarians often attack those in the majority or those deemed **“oppressors,”** attempting to suppress or replace them. In working to create a new society deemed more **“fair,”** egalitarians practice intolerance, and demand freedom-crushing conformity. They also promote a new form of group-based hate.



WHO ARE THE EQUALIZERS? A paradox of egalitarianism that seems to make its implementation impossible at the practical level, is that it is self-destructive. The ideals cannot be pursued without hypocrisy. To achieve equality of outcomes in society, some people have to have more power than the rest. The government officials, enforcers, and bureaucrats who are the redistributors will inherently be unequal to the rest of society: **a new elite.** These **Controllers** always have greater power, and historically greater wealth, than their fellow citizens. This can be observed comparing members of communist parties to the citizens of those countries, and it is also nearly always true of socialist politicians as well (hence the term **“martini socialists”**). Those who seek to equalize wealth and status in society always seem to view themselves as uniquely suited for the task of social redesign- unlike those unsophisticated knuckle-draggers who disagree. This problem was addressed by **George Orwell** in **Animal Farm**, when the pigs revised the revolutionary motto to **“all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”**

Natural Law/Natural Equality theory calls on people to treat all others as equal in human dignity and worth. It also asks us to accept the reality that some are better at some things, while others are better in other areas, differences will always be with us, and **envy** is a destructive emotion that we must keep under control. The issue is not what class you belong to, but what your standard of living is. It's not about what someone else can do- it's about what you can do.

[In the Race of Life] *“Don't waste your time on jealousy. Sometimes you're ahead, sometimes you're behind. The race is long and, in the end, it's only with yourself.” - From Chicago Tribune essay by Mary Schmich, June 1, 1997. Adapted into “The Sunscreen” Song.*