



What is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare

Author(s): Ronald Dworkin

Source: *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Summer, 1981, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Summer, 1981), pp. 185-246

Published by: Wiley

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2264894>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Wiley is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Philosophy & Public Affairs*

RONALD DWORAKIN

What Is Equality?
Part 1: Equality of Welfare

I. TWO THEORIES OF EQUALITY

Equality is a popular but mysterious political ideal. People can become equal (or at least more equal) in one way with the consequence that they become unequal (or more unequal) in others. If people have equal income, for example, they will almost certainly differ in the amount of satisfaction they find in their lives, and vice versa. It does not follow, of course, that equality is worthless as an ideal. But it is necessary to state, more exactly than is commonly done, what form of equality is finally important.

This is not a linguistic or even conceptual question. It does not call for a definition of the word “equal” or an analysis of how that word is used in ordinary language. It requires that we distinguish various conceptions of equality, in order to decide which of these conceptions (or which combination) states an attractive political ideal, if any does. That exercise may be described, somewhat differently, using a distinction I have drawn in other contexts. There is a difference between treating people equally, with respect to one or another commodity or opportunity, and treating them as equals. Someone who argues that people should be more equal in income claims that a community that achieves equality of income is one that really treats people as equals. Someone who urges that people should instead be equally happy offers a different and competing theory about what society deserves that title. The question is then: which of the many different theories of that sort is the best theory?

In this two-part essay I discuss one aspect of that question, which might be called the problem of distributional equality. Suppose some

© 1981 by Princeton University Press
Philosophy & Public Affairs 10, no. 3
0048-3915/81/030185-62\$03.10/1

community must choose between alternative schemes for distributing money and other resources to individuals. Which of the possible schemes treats people as equals? This is only one aspect of the more general problem of equality, because it sets aside a variety of issues that might be called, by way of contrast, issues about political equality. Distributional equality, as I describe it, is not concerned with the distribution of political power, for example, or with individual rights other than rights to some amount or share of resources. It is obvious, I think, that these questions I throw together under the label of political equality are not so independent from issues of distributional equality as the distinction might suggest. Someone who can play no role in determining, for example, whether an environment he cherishes should be preserved from pollution is poorer than someone who can play an important role in that decision. But it nevertheless seems likely that a full theory of equality, embracing a range of issues including political and distributional equality, is best approached by accepting initial, even though somewhat arbitrary, distinctions among these issues.

I shall consider two general theories of distributional equality. The first (which I shall call equality of welfare) holds that a distributional scheme treats people as equals when it distributes or transfers resources among them until no further transfer would leave them more equal in welfare. The second (equality of resources) holds that it treats them as equals when it distributes or transfers so that no further transfer would leave their shares of the total resources more equal. Each of these two theories, as I have just stated them, is very abstract because, as we shall see, there are many different interpretations of what welfare is, and also different theories about what would count as equality of resources. Nevertheless, even in this abstract form, it should be plain that the two theories will offer different advice in many concrete cases.

Suppose, for example, that a man of some wealth has several children, one of whom is blind, another a playboy with expensive tastes, a third a prospective politician with expensive ambitions, another a poet with humble needs, another a sculptor who works in expensive material, and so forth. How shall he draw his will? If he takes equality of welfare as his goal, then he will take these differences among

his children into account, so that he will not leave them equal shares. Of course he will have to decide on some interpretation of welfare and whether, for example, expensive tastes should figure in his calculations in the same way as handicaps or expensive ambitions. But if, on the contrary, he takes equality of resources as his goal then, assuming his children have roughly equal wealth already, he may well decide that his goal requires an equal division of his wealth. In any case the questions he will put into himself will then be very different.

It is true that the distinction between the two abstract theories will be less clear-cut in an ordinary political context, particularly when officials have very little information about the actual tastes and ambitions of particular citizens. If a welfare-egalitarian knows nothing of this sort about a large group of citizens, he may sensibly decide that his best strategy for securing equality of welfare would be to establish equality of income. But the theoretical difference between the two abstract theories of equality nevertheless remains important in politics, for a variety of reasons. Officials often do have sufficient general information about the distribution of tastes and handicaps to justify general adjustments to equality of resource (for example by special tax allowances) if their goal is equality of welfare. Even when they do not, some economic structures they might devise would be antecedently better calculated to reduce inequality of welfare, under conditions of uncertainty, and others to reduce inequality of resources. But the main importance of the issue I now raise is theoretical. Egalitarians must decide whether the equality they seek is equality of resource or welfare, or some combination or something very different, in order plausibly to argue that equality is worth having at all.

I do not mean, however, that only pure egalitarians need take any interest in this question. For even those who do not think that equality is the whole story in political morality usually concede that it is part of the story, so that it is at least a point in favor of some political arrangement, even if not decisive or even central, that it reduces inequality. People who assign equality even this modest weight must nevertheless identify what counts as equality. I must emphasize, however, that the two abstract conceptions of equality I shall consider do not exhaust the possible theories of equality, even in combination.

There are other important theories that can be captured only artificially by either of these. Several philosophers, for example, hold meritocratic theories of distributional equality, some of which appeal to what is often called equality of opportunity. This claim takes different forms; but one prominent form holds that people are denied equality when their superior position in either welfare or resources is counted against them in the competition for university places or jobs, for example.

Nevertheless the claims of both equality of welfare and equality of resources are both familiar and apparent, and it is these that I shall consider. In Part 1 of this essay I examine, and on the whole reject, various versions of the former claim. In Part 2, which will be published in a future issue of this journal, I shall develop and endorse a particular version of the latter. I might perhaps add two more caveats. It is widely believed that certain people (for example criminals) do not deserve distributional equality. I do not consider that question, though I do raise some questions about merit or desert in considering what distributional equality is. John Rawls (among others) has questioned whether distributional equality might not require deviations from an equal base when this is in the interests of the then worst-off group, so that, for example, equality of welfare is best served when the worst-off have less welfare than others but more than they would otherwise have. I discuss this claim in the next part, with respect to equality of resources, but not in this one, where I propose that equality in welfare is not a desirable political goal even when inequality in welfare would not improve the position of the worst-off.

II. A FIRST LOOK

There is an immediate appeal in the idea that insofar as equality is important, it must ultimately be equality of welfare that counts. For the concept of welfare was invented or at least adopted by economists precisely to describe what is fundamental in life rather than what is merely instrumental. It was adopted, in fact, to provide a metric for assigning a proper value to resources: resources are valuable so far as they produce welfare. If we decide on equality, but then define

equality in terms of resources unconnected with the welfare they bring, then we seem to be mistaking means for ends, and indulging a fetishistic fascination for what we ought to treat only as instrumental. If we want genuinely to treat people as equals (or so it may seem) then we must contrive to make their lives equally desirable to them, or give them the means to do so, not simply to make the figures in their bank accounts the same.

This immediate attraction of equality of welfare is supported by one aspect of the domestic example I described. When the question arises how wealth should be distributed among children, for example, those who are seriously physically or mentally handicapped do seem to have, in all fairness, a claim to more than others. The ideal of equality of welfare may seem a plausible explanation of why this is so. Because they are handicapped, the blind need more resources to achieve equal welfare. But the same domestic example also provides at least an initially troublesome problem for that ideal. For most people would resist the conclusion that those who have expensive tastes are, for that reason, entitled to a larger share than others. Someone with champagne tastes (as we might describe his condition) also needs more resources to achieve welfare equal to those who prefer beer. But it does not seem fair that he should have more resources on that account. The case of the prospective politician, who needs a great deal of money to achieve his ambitions to do good, or the ambitious sculptor, who needs more expensive materials than the poet, perhaps falls in between. Their case for a larger share of their parent's resources seems stronger than the case of the child with expensive tastes, but weaker than the case of the child who is blind.

The question therefore arises whether the ideal of equality in welfare can be accepted in part, as an ideal that has a place, but not the only place, in a general theory of equality. The theory as a whole might then provide that the handicapped must have more resources, because their welfare will otherwise be lower than it could be, but not the man of champagne tastes. There are a number of ways in which that compromise within the idea of equality might be constructed. We might, for example, accept that in principle social resources should be distributed so that people are as equal in welfare

as possible, but provide, by way of exception, that no account should be taken of differences in welfare traceable to certain sources, such as differences in tastes for drink. That gives equality of welfare the dominant place, but it prunes the ideal of certain distinct and unappealing consequences. Or we might, at the other extreme, accept only that differences in welfare from certain specified sources, such as handicaps, should be minimized. On this account equality of welfare would play only a part—perhaps a very minor part—in any general theory of equality, whose main political force must then come from a very different direction.

I shall postpone, until later in this part of the essay, the question of how far such compromises or combinations or qualifications are in fact available and attractive, and also postpone, until then, consideration of the particular problems I mentioned, the problems of expensive tastes and handicaps. But I want to single out and set aside, in advance, one form of objection to the feasibility of compromises of equality of welfare. It might be objected, against any such compromise, that the concept of welfare is insufficiently clear to permit the necessary distinctions. We cannot tell (it might be said) how much any welfare differences between two people who have equal wealth are in fact traceable to differences in the cost of their tastes or in the adequacy of their physical or mental powers, for example. So any theory that embraces equality of welfare must pay attention to people's welfare as a whole rather than welfare derived or lost through any particular source. Obviously, there is much in this sort of objection, though how strong the objection is must depend on the form of compromise proposed. I want, however, to set aside for this essay all objections about the feasibility of distinguishing welfare sources.

I also want to set aside the more general objection, that the concept of welfare is itself, even apart from distinctions as to source, too vague or impractical to provide the basis for any theory of equality. I said earlier that there are many different interpretations or conceptions of welfare, and that a theory of equality of welfare that uses one of these will have very different consequences, and require a very different theoretical support, from a theory that uses another. Some philosophers think of welfare as a matter of pleasure or

enjoyment or some other conscious state, for example, while others think of it as success in achieving one's plans. We shall later have to identify the leading conceptions of welfare, and look at the different conceptions of equality of welfare they supply. But we may notice, in advance, that each of the familiar conceptions of welfare raises obvious conceptual and practical problems about testing and comparing the welfare levels of different people. Each of them has the consequence that comparisons of welfare will often be indeterminate: it will often be the case that of two people neither will have less welfare, but their welfare will not be equal. It does not follow, however, that the ideal of equality of welfare, on any interpretation, is either incoherent or useless. For that ideal states the political principle that, so far as is possible, no one should have less welfare than anyone else. If that principle is sound, then the ideal of equality of welfare may sensibly leave open the practical problem of how decisions should be made when the comparison of welfare makes sense but its result is unclear. It may also sensibly concede that there will be several cases in which the comparison is even theoretically pointless. Provided these cases are not too numerous, the ideal remains both practically and theoretically important.

III. CONCEPTIONS OF EQUALITY OF WELFARE

There are several theories in the field, as I said, about what welfare is, and therefore several conceptions of equality of welfare. I shall divide what I consider the most prominent and plausible such theories into two main groups, without, however, supposing that all the theories in the literature can fit comfortably into one or the other. The first group I shall call success theories of welfare. These suppose that a person's welfare is a matter of his success in fulfilling his preferences, goals, and ambitions, and so equality of success, as a conception of equality of welfare, recommends distribution and transfer of resources until no further transfer can decrease the extent to which people differ in such success. But since people have different sorts of preferences, different versions of equality of success are in principle available.

People have, first, what I shall call political preferences, though

I use that term in a way that is both narrower and more extended than the way it is often used. I mean preferences about how the goods, resources and opportunities of the community should be distributed to others. These preferences may be either formal political theories of the familiar sort, such as the theory that goods should be distributed in accordance with merit or desert, or more informal preferences that are not theories at all, such as the preference many people have that those they like or feel special sympathy for should have more than others. Second, people have what I shall call impersonal preferences, which are preferences about things other than their own or other people's lives or situations. Some people care very much about the advance of scientific knowledge, for example, even though it will not be they (or any person they know) who will make the advance, while others care equally deeply about the conservation of certain kinds of beauty they will never see. Third, people have what I shall call personal preferences, by which I mean their preferences about their own experiences or situation. (I do not deny that these types of preferences might overlap, or that some preferences will resist classification into any of the three categories. Fortunately my arguments will not require the contrary assumption.)

The most unrestricted form of equality of success that I shall consider holds that redistribution should continue until, so far as this is possible, people are equal in the degree to which all their various preferences are fulfilled. I shall then consider the more restricted version that only nonpolitical preferences should be counted in this calculation, and then the still more restricted version that only personal preferences should count. More complex versions of equality of success, which combine the satisfaction of some but not all preferences from the different groups, are of course available, though I hope that the arguments I make will not require me to identify and consider such combinations.

The second class of theories of welfare I shall call conscious state theories. Equality of welfare linked to that sort of theory holds that distribution should attempt to leave people as equal as possible in some aspect or quality of their conscious life. Different conceptions of that ideal are constructed by choosing different accounts or descriptions of the state in question. Bentham and other early utilitar-

ians took welfare to consist in pleasure and the avoidance of pain; equality of welfare, so conceived, would require distribution that tended to make people equal in their balance of pleasure over pain. But most utilitarians and other partisans of the conscious state conception of welfare believe that “pleasure” and “pain” are much too narrow to represent the full range of conscious states that should be included. For example, “pleasure,” which suggests a specific kind of sensuous glow, poorly describes the experience produced by a harrowing piece of drama or poetry, an experience people nevertheless sometimes aim to have, and “pain” does not easily capture boredom or unease or depression.

I do not wish to discuss the issues this dispute raises. Instead I shall use the words “enjoyment” and “dissatisfaction” indiscriminately to name the full range of desirable and undesirable conscious states or emotions that any version of a conscious state conception of equality of welfare might suppose to matter. This usage gives those words, of course, a broader sense than they have in ordinary language, but I intend that broad sense, provided only that they must nevertheless name conscious states people might aim to have or avoid for their own sakes, and states that are introspectively identifiable.

People often gain enjoyment or suffer dissatisfaction directly, from sensuous stimulation through sex or food or sun or cold or steel. But they also gain enjoyment or suffer dissatisfaction through the fulfillment or defeat of their preferences of different sorts. So there are unrestricted and restricted versions of the conscious state conception of equality of welfare parallel to the versions I distinguished of conceptions of equality of success. One version aims to make people more equal in enjoyment without restriction as to source, another only in the enjoyment they take directly and from nonpolitical preferences, and another in the enjoyment they take directly and from personal preferences only. As in the case of equality of success, more discriminating versions that combine enjoyment from subdivisions of these different sorts of preferences are also available.

I shall also consider, though only very briefly, a third class of conceptions of equality of welfare, which I shall call objective conceptions. Many subdivisions and further classifications among these three classes of conceptions, beyond those I have just noticed, would

have to be considered in any full account of possible theories of welfare, and there are theories of welfare not represented, as I said, in this list at all. But these seem the most plausible candidates for constructing theories of distribution. I shall just mention, however, two sorts of complexities that we should at least bear in mind. First, many (though not all) of the conceptions and versions I have distinguished raise the question of whether equality in that conception is reached when people are in fact equal in welfare so conceived, or rather when they would be equal if they were fully informed of the relevant facts. Does someone attain a given level of success, for purposes of equality of success, when he believes that his preferences have been fulfilled to a given degree, or rather when he would believe that if he knew the facts? I shall try, when questions of that sort might affect the argument, either to discuss both possibilities, or to assume the version that seems to me in context more plausible. Second, many of the conceptions I shall discuss raise problems about time. People's preferences change, for example, so that the question of how far someone's preferences for his life have been fulfilled overall will depend on which set of his preferences is chosen as relevant, or which function of the different preferences he has at different times. I do not believe that any of these temporal problems affect the various points that I shall make, but readers who do should consider whether my arguments hold against alternate versions.

There is, however, a further preliminary question that must detain us longer. We can distinguish two different questions. (1) Is someone's overall welfare—his essential well-being—really just a matter of the amount of his success in fulfilling his preferences (or just a matter of his enjoyment)? (2) Does distributional equality really require aiming to leave people equal in that success (or enjoyment)? The first of these questions takes a certain view of the connection between theories of welfare, such as those I described, and the concept of welfare itself. It supposes that this connection is rather like the connection between theories or conceptions of justice and the concept of justice itself. We agree that justice is an important moral and political ideal, and we ask ourselves which of the different theories about what justice actually consists in is the best such theory.

So we might suppose that (for one or another purpose) the welfare of persons, conceived as their essential well-being, is an important moral and political concept, and then ask ourselves which of the traditional theories (or new theories we might deploy) is the best theory of what welfare, so conceived, actually is.

But the second question does not, in itself, require that we confront—or even acknowledge the sense of—that last question. We may believe that genuine equality requires that people be made equal in their success (or enjoyment) without believing that essential well-being, properly understood, is just a matter of success (or enjoyment). We may, indeed, believe that equality requires equality in success even if we are skeptical about the whole idea of essential well-being, considered to be a deep or further fact about people conceptually independent from their success or enjoyment. That is, we may accept equality of success as an attractive political ideal, even if we reject the very sense of the question whether two people who are equal in success are equal in essential well-being. And we may do so even if we deny that this question is analogous to the question whether producing the highest possible average utility makes an institution just.

I make these remarks because it is important to distinguish between two strategies that someone anxious to defend a particular conception of equality of welfare might use. He might begin, first, by accepting the idea of welfare as essential well-being, and then take, as at least the tentative premise of his argument, the proposition that genuine equality requires people to be equal in essential well-being. He might then argue for a particular theory of welfare (success, for example) as the best theory of what essential well-being consists in, and so conclude that equality requires that people be made equal in success. Or, second, he might argue for some conception of equality of welfare, such as equality of success, in a more direct way. He might take no position on the question whether essential well-being consists in success, or even on the prior question whether that question makes sense. He might argue that, in any case, equality of success is required for reasons of fairness, or for some other reasons having to do with the analysis of equality, that are independent of any theory about the sense or content of essential well-being.

Is it therefore necessary to consider both of these strategies in assessing the case for any particular conception of equality of welfare? I think not, because the defeat of the second strategy (at least in a certain way) must count as a defeat of the first as well. I do not mean myself to claim that the idea of essential well-being, as a concept admitting of different conceptions, is nonsense, so that the first strategy, shorn of nonsense, is just the second. On the contrary, I think that idea, at least as defined by certain contexts, is an important one, and the question of where a person's essential well-being lies, when properly conceived, is sometimes, in those contexts, a question of profound importance. Nor do I think it follows from the conclusion that people should not be made equal in some particular conception of welfare, that this is a poor conception of welfare (conceived as essential well-being). I mean rather to deny something like the opposite claim: that if some conception is a good conception of welfare it follows that people should be made equal in welfare so conceived. This does not follow. I might accept, for example, that people are equal in essential well-being when each is roughly equally successful in achieving a certain set of his preferences, without thereby conceding that an advance towards that situation is even pro tanto an advance towards genuine distributional equality. Even if I initially accept both propositions, I should abandon the latter if I am then persuaded that there are good reasons of political morality for not making people equal in that sort of success, and that these reasons hold whether or not the former proposition is sound. So any arguments capable of defeating the second strategy, by showing that there are strong reasons of political morality why distribution should not aim to make people equal in success, must also count as strong arguments against the first strategy, though not, of course, as arguments defeating the interim conclusion of that strategy: that essential well-being consists in success. In what follows I shall try to oppose the second strategy in this manner.

IV. SUCCESS THEORIES

I want now to examine equality of welfare conceived in the various ways I have described, beginning with the group of theories I called

success theories. I should perhaps say once again that I do not intend to make much of the practical difficulties (as such) of applying these or any other conceptions of equality of welfare. If any society dedicated itself to achieving any version of equality of success (or of enjoyment) it could do at best only a rough job, and could have only a rough idea of how well it was doing. Some differences in success would be beyond the reach of political action, and some could be eliminated only by procedures too expensive of other values. Equality of welfare so conceived could be taken only as the ideal of equality, to be used as a standard for deciding which of different practical political arrangements seemed most or least likely to advance that ideal on the whole as a matter of antecedent tendency. But precisely for that reason it is important to test the different conceptions of equality of welfare as ideals. Our question is: If (impossibly) we could achieve equality of welfare in some one of these conceptions, would it be desirable, in the name of equality, to do so?

Political Preferences

I shall begin by considering equality of success in the widest and most unrestricted sense I distinguished, that is, equality in the fulfillment of people's preferences when these include political as well as other forms of preference. We should notice a threshold difficulty in applying this conception of equality in a community in which some people themselves hold, as a matter of their own political preferences, exactly the same theory. Officials could not know whether such a person's political preferences were fulfilled until they knew whether their distribution fulfilled everyone's preferences equally, including his political preferences, and there is danger of a circle here. But I shall assume that equality of welfare, so conceived, might be reached in such a society by trial and error. Resources might be distributed and redistributed until everyone pronounced himself satisfied that equality of success on the widest conception had been achieved.

We should also notice, however, a further threshold difficulty: that it would probably prove impossible to reach a reasonable degree of equality in this conception even by trial-and-error methods in a community whose members held very different and very deeply felt political theories about justice in distribution. For any distribu-

tion of goods we might arrange, some group, passionately committed to a different distribution for reasons of political theory, might be profoundly dissatisfied no matter how well they fared personally, while others might be very pleased because they held political theories that approved the result. But because I propose to ignore practical or contingent difficulties, I shall assume a society in which it is possible to achieve rough equality in the amount by which people's unrestricted preferences were fulfilled, that is roughly equal success on this wide conception, either because people all hold roughly the same political theories, or because, though they disagree, anyone's dissatisfaction with a solution on political grounds could be made up by favoritism in his personal situation, without arousing so much antagonism in others as to defeat equality so conceived for that reason.

This latter possibility—that people who lose out because their political theories are rejected could be given more goods for themselves by way of compensation—makes this conception of equality of welfare immediately unattractive, however. Even people otherwise attracted to the idea of equality of welfare, on any conception, would presumably not wish to count gains or losses in welfare traceable to, for example, racial prejudice. So I assume that almost everyone would wish to qualify equality of success at least by stipulating that a bigot should not have more goods than others in virtue of the fact that he would disapprove a situation in which blacks have as much as whites unless his own position were sufficiently favored to make up the difference.

But it is unclear why this stipulation should not apply to all political theories that are in conflict with the general ideal of equality of success, at least, and not just to racial bigotry. It should apply equally to people who think that aristocrats should have more than plebs, or to meritocrats who think that, as a matter of political morality, those who are more talented should have more. Indeed, it should apply even to egalitarians who think that people should be equal in resources or enjoyment or in the success each has in his personal life rather than in the fulfillment of all his preferences including his political preferences. These “wrong” egalitarian theories will of course seem more respectable to officials who have accepted the latter conception of

equality than will bigoted or meritocratic theories. But it still seems odd that even wrong egalitarians should have extra resources credited to their personal account just to make up for the fact that their overall approval of the situation would otherwise be lower than those who hold the political theory assumed to be correct, and on which any claims the former might make to extra resources must in some sense rely. It seems odd (among other reasons) because a good society is one which treats the conception of equality that society endorses, not simply as a preference some people might have, and therefore as a source of fulfillment others might be denied who should then be compensated in other ways, but as a matter of justice that should be accepted by everyone because it is right. Such a society will not compensate people for having preferences that its fundamental political institutions declare it is wrong for them to have.

The reason why racial bigotry should not count, as a justification for giving the bigot more in personal goods, is that this political theory or attitude is condemned by the proper conception of equality, not that the bigot is necessarily insincere or unreflective or personally wicked. But then other forms of nonegalitarian political theory, and even misconceived forms of egalitarian theory, should be discounted in the same way. Suppose, moreover, that no one has a nonegalitarian or wrong-egalitarian political theory of any formal sort, but that some people are merely selfish and have no political convictions even in the extended sense, so that their overall approval of the state of affairs after any distribution is just a matter of their own private situation, while others are benevolent, so that their overall approval is increased by, say, the elimination of poverty in the society. Unless we refuse to take that benevolence into account, as a positive source of success in meeting the preferences overall of those who are benevolent, we shall end once again by giving those who are selfish more for themselves, to compensate for the success others have from that benevolence. But it is surely a mark against any conception of equality that it recommends a distribution in which people have more for themselves the more they disapprove or are unmoved by equality.

Consider, finally, a different situation. Suppose no one holds, in any case very deeply, any formal political theory, but each is generally benevolent. Many people, however, by way of what I called a political

theory in the extended sense, sympathize especially with the situation of one group of those less fortunate than themselves—say, orphans—and have special preferences that these be looked after well. If these preferences are allowed to count, this must have one or the other of two results. Either orphans will, just for this reason, receive somewhat better treatment than equality would itself have required in the absence of these special preferences, at the inevitable expense of other groups—including those disadvantaged in other ways, such as, say, cripples; or, if this is ruled out on egalitarian grounds, those who care more about orphans than about cripples will be given extra resources to make up for the failure to fulfill this discrete preference (which extra resources they then may or may not contribute to orphans). Neither of these results does credit to an egalitarian theory.

So we have good reason to reject the unrestricted conception of equality of success, by eliminating from the calculation of comparative success both formal and informal political preferences, at least for communities whose members differ in these political preferences, which is to say for almost all actual communities with which we might be concerned. We might just pause to consider, however, whether we must reject that conception for all other communities as well. Suppose a community in which people by and large hold the same political preferences. If these common preferences endorse equality of success, including success in political preferences, then that theory for all practical purposes collapses into the more restricted theory that people should succeed equally in their nonpolitical preferences. For if a distribution is reached that everyone regards with roughly equal overall approval, and the force of individual political convictions, in each person's judgment of how well he regards it, is simply to approve the result because everyone else does regard it equally, then the distribution must be one in which each person regards his own impersonal and personal preferences as equally fulfilled as well. For suppose Arthur is less satisfied with his impersonal and personal situation than Betsy. Arthur can have, by hypothesis, no political theory or attitude that could justify or require a distribution in which he is less satisfied in this way than Betsy is, so Arthur can have no reason to regard the distribution with as much general or overall approval, combining political, impersonal, and personal assessments, as Betsy does.

But suppose the shared political theory is not the ideal of equality of overall approval, but some other, nonegalitarian theory that could provide such a reason. Suppose everyone accepts a caste theory so that, though Amartya is somewhat poorer than others, the distribution leaves his preferences as a whole equally fulfilled because he believes that he, as a member of a lower caste, should have less, so that his preferences as a whole would be worse fulfilled if he had more. Bimal, from a higher caste, would also be less satisfied overall if Amartya had any more. In this situation, unrestricted equality of success does recommend a distribution that no other conception of equality of welfare would. But it is unacceptable for that very reason. An inequalitarian political system does not become just because everyone wrongly believes it to be.

Unrestricted equality of success is acceptable only when the political preferences that people happen to have are sound rather than simply popular, which means, of course, that it is in the end an empty ideal, useful only when it rubber-stamps a distribution already and independently shown to be just through some more restricted conception of equality of success or through some other political ideal altogether. Suppose someone denies this and argues that it is good, in and of itself, when everyone approves of a political system highly and equally no matter what that system is. This seems so arbitrary, and so far removed from ordinary political values, as to call into question whether he understands what a political theory is or is for. In any case he does not state an interpretation of equality, let alone an attractive one.

Impersonal Preferences

We must surely restrict equality of success still further by eliminating, from the calculation it proposes, at least some of what I called people's impersonal preferences. For it is plainly not required by equality that people should be equal, even insofar as distribution can achieve this, in the degree to which all their nonpolitical hopes are realized. Suppose Charles very much and very deeply hoped that life would be discovered on Mars. Or that the Great American novel would be written within his lifetime. Or that the Vineyard coast not be eroded by the ocean as it inevitably continues to be. Equality does not require that funds be taken from others, who

have more easily fulfilled hopes about how the world will go, and transferred to Charles so that he can, by satisfying other preferences he has, decrease the overall inequality in the degree to which his and their nonpolitical preferences are fulfilled.

Should any impersonal preferences be salvaged from the further restriction this suggests? It might be said that the various impersonal preferences I just took as examples are all impossible dreams, or, in any case, all dreams that the government can do nothing to fulfill. But I cannot see why that matters. If it is right to aim to decrease inequality in disappointment in all genuine nonpolitical aims or preferences, then the government should do what it can in that direction, and though it cannot bring it about that there is life on Mars, it can, as I said, at least partially compensate Charles for his failed hopes by allowing him to be more successful otherwise. In any case, I might have easily taken as examples hopes people have that are not impossible for government to realize, or even particularly difficult. Suppose Charles hopes that no distinctive species will ever become extinct, not because he enjoys looking at a variety of plants and animals, or even because he thinks others do, but just because he believes that the world goes worse when any such species is lost. He would overwhelmingly prefer that a very useful dam not be built at the cost of losing the snail darter. (He has not set out deliberately to cultivate his views about the importance of species. If he had, then this might be thought to raise the special issues about deliberate cultivation of expensive tastes that I shall consider later. He just finds he has these views.) But after the political process has considered the issue and reached its decision the dam is built. Charles' disappointment is now so great (and he cares so little about everything else) that only the payment of a vast sum of public money, which he could use to lobby against further crimes against species, could bring his welfare, conceived as the fulfillment of all nonpolitical preferences, back to the general level of the community as a whole. I do not think that equality requires that transfer, nor do I believe that many, even of those who find appeal in the general ideal of equality of welfare, will think so either.

Of course equality does require that Charles have a certain place in the political process I described. He must have an equal vote in select-

ing the officials who will make the decision, and an equal opportunity to express his opinions about the decision these officials should take. It is at least arguable, moreover, that the officials should take his disappointment into account, perhaps even weighted for its intensity, in the general cost-benefit balancing they undertake in deciding whether the dam should be built all things considered, that his dissatisfaction should count in a Benthamite calculation and be weighted against the gains to others that the dam would bring. We might wish to go beyond this, perhaps, and say that if the community faces a continuing series of decisions that pit economic efficiency against species preservation, it should not take these decisions discretely, through separate cost-benefit calculations each of which Charles would lose, but as a series in which the community should defer to his opinion at least once. But none of this comes near arguing that the community treats Charles as an equal only if it recognizes his eccentric position in a different way, by undertaking to insure, so far as it can, that his success in finding all his nonpolitical preferences fulfilled remains as high as everyone else's when the series of decisions is completed, no matter how singular his impersonal preferences are. Indeed this proposition contradicts rather than enforces what conventional ideals of political equality recommend, because if the community acknowledged that responsibility, Charles' opinions would very probably play a role far beyond what these traditional ideas provide for them.

But someone might still protest that my arguments depend on assigning to people impersonal preferences that are in the circumstances unreasonable, or, rather, unreasonable to expect the community to honor by compensating for their failure. My arguments do not, it might be said, suggest that reasonable impersonal preferences should not be honored in that way. But this introduces a very different idea into the discussion. For we now need an independent theory about when an impersonal preference is reasonable, or when it is reasonable to compensate for one. It seems likely (from the present discussion) that such a theory will assume that a certain fair share of social resources should be devoted to the concerns of each individual, so that a claim for compensation might be appropriate when this fair share is not in fact put at his disposal, but not if

deciding as he wishes, or compensating him for his disappointment would invade the fair share of others. We shall consider, later in this section, the consequences of using the idea of fair shares in this way within a theory of equality of success. It is enough to notice now that some such major refinement would be necessary before any impersonal preferences qualify for the calculation of equality of success.

Nor does it seem implausible to restrict a conception of equality of welfare to success in achieving personal, as distinct from both all political and all impersonal, ambitions. For that distinction is appealing in other ways. Of course people do care, and often care very deeply, about their political and impersonal preferences. But it does not seem callous to say that, insofar as government has either the right or the duty to make people equal, it has the right or duty to make them equal in their personal situation or circumstances, including their political power, rather than in the degree to which their differing political convictions are accepted by the community, or in the degree to which their differing visions of an ideal world are realized. On the contrary, that more limited aim of equality seems the proper aim for a liberal state, though it remains to see what making people equal in their personal circumstances could mean.

Equality of Personal Success

Relative Success. We should therefore consider the most restricted form of equality of success that I shall discuss, which requires that distribution be arranged so that people are as nearly equal as distribution can make them in the degree to which each person's preferences about his own life and circumstances are fulfilled. This conception of equality of welfare presupposes a particular but plausible theory of philosophical psychology. It supposes that people are active agents who distinguish between success or failure in making the choices and decisions open to them personally, on the one hand, and their overall approval or disapproval of the world in general, on the other, and seek to make their own lives as valuable as possible according to their own conception of what makes a life better or worse, while recognizing, perhaps, moral constraints on the pursuit of that goal and competing goals taken from their impersonal preferences. There

is no doubt a measure of idealization in this picture; it may never be a fully accurate description of any person's behavior, and it may require significant qualification in many cases. But it seems a better model against which to describe and interpret what people are than the leading and perhaps more familiar alternatives.

So I shall not quarrel with this psychological theory. But we must notice at once a difficulty in the suggestion that the resources of a community should be distributed, so far as possible, to make people equal in the success they have in making their lives valuable in their own eyes. People make their choices, about what sort of a life to lead, against a background of assumptions about the rough type and quantity of resources they will have available with which to lead different sorts of lives. They take that background into account in deciding how much of what kind of experience or personal relationship or achievement of one sort must be sacrificed for experiences or relationships or achievements of another. They therefore need some sense of what resources will be at their disposal under various alternatives before they can fashion anything like the plan for their lives of the sort that this restricted conception of equality of success assumes that they have, at least roughly, already created. Some of these resources are natural: people need to make assumptions about their expected life span, health, talents and capacities, and how these compare with those of others. But they also need to make assumptions about the resources they will have of just the sort society would allocate under any scheme of equality of welfare: wealth, opportunities, and so on. But if someone needs a sense of what wealth and opportunities will be available to him under a certain life before he chooses it, then a scheme for distribution of wealth cannot simply measure what a person should receive by figuring the expense of the life he has chosen.

There is therefore again danger of a fatal circle here. But I propose to set that problem aside, as another instance of the kind of technical problem that I promised not to labor. So I shall suppose, once again, that the problem can be solved in a trial-and-error way. Suppose a society in which people in fact have equal resources. It is discovered that some are much more satisfied with the way their lives are going than others. So resources are taken from some and given to others, on

a trial and error basis, until it is true that, if people were fully informed about all the facts of their situation, and each was asked how successful he believed himself to be at fulfilling the plans he has formed given the level of resources he now has, each person would indicate roughly the same level or degree of success.

But this "solution" of the practical difficulty I describe brings to the surface a theoretical problem to which the practical difficulty points. People put different values on personal success and failure, not only as contrasted with their political and moral convictions, and their impersonal goals, but just as part of their personal circumstances or situation. At least they do in one sense of success and failure. For we must now notice an important distinction I have so far neglected. People (at least as conceived in the way just described) choose plans or schemes for their lives, against a background of natural and physical resources they have available, in virtue of which they have discrete goals and make discrete choices. They choose one occupation or job over another, live in one community rather than another, seek out one sort of lover or friend, identify with one group or set of groups, develop one set of skills, take up one set of hobbies or interests, and so forth. Of course, even those people who come closest to the ideal of that model do not make all these choices deliberately, in the light of some overall scheme, and perhaps make none of them entirely deliberately. Luck and occasion and habit will play important roles. But once the choices they do make have been made, these choices define a set of preferences, and we can ask how far someone has succeeded or failed at fulfilling whatever preferences he has fixed in that way. That (I shall say) is the question of his relative success—his success at meeting the discrete goals he has set for himself.

But people make these choices, form these preferences, in the light of a different and more comprehensive ambition, the ambition to make something valuable of the only life they have to lead. It is, I think, misleading to describe this comprehensive ambition as itself only another preference people have. It is too fundamental to fit comfortably under that name; and it is also too lacking in content. Preferences are choices of something preferred to something else; they represent the result of a decision, of a process of making what one

wants more concrete. But the ambition to find value in life is not chosen as against alternatives, for there is no alternative in the ordinary sense. Ambition does not make plans more concrete, it is simply the condition of having any plans at all. Once someone has settled on even a tentative or partial scheme for his own life, once his discrete preferences have been fixed in that way, then he can measure his own relative success in a fairly mechanical way, by matching his situation to that scheme. But he cannot tell whether his life has succeeded or failed in finding value simply by matching his achievements to any set target in that way. He must evaluate his life as a whole to discover the value that it has, and this is a judgment that must bring to bear convictions that, however inarticulate these are, and however reluctant he might be to call them this, are best described as philosophical convictions about what can give meaning or value to any particular human life. I shall call the value that someone in this way attributes to his life his judgment of that life's overall success.

People disagree about how important relative success is in achieving overall success. One person might think that the fact that he is likely to be very successful at a particular career (or love affair or sport or other activity) counts strongly in favor of his choosing or pursuing it. If he is uncertain whether to be an artist or lawyer, but believes he would be a brilliant lawyer and only a good artist, he might regard that consideration as decisive for the law. Someone else might weigh relative success much less. He might, in the same circumstances, prefer to be a good artist to being a brilliant lawyer, because he thinks art so much more important than anything lawyers do.

This fact—that people value relative success differently in this way—is relevant here for the following reason. The basic, immediate appeal of equality of welfare, in the abstract form in which I first set it out, lies in the idea that welfare is what really matters to people, as distinct from money and goods, which matter to them only instrumentally, so far as these are useful in producing welfare. Equality of welfare proposes, that is, to make people equal in what is really and fundamentally important to them all. Our earlier conclusion, that in any event the fulfillment of political and impersonal

preferences should not figure in any calculation aimed at making people equal in welfare through distribution, might well be thought to damage that appeal. For it restricts the preferences that people are meant to fulfill in equal degree to what I have called personal preferences, and people do not care equally about the fulfillment of their personal preferences as opposed to their political convictions and impersonal goals. Some care more about their personal preferences, as opposed to their other preferences, than others do. But a substantial part of the immediate appeal I describe remains, though the point would now be put slightly differently. Equality of welfare (it might now be said) makes people equal in what they all value equally and fundamentally so far as their own personal situation or circumstances are concerned.

But even that remaining claim is forfeit if equality of welfare is construed as making people equal, so far as distribution can achieve this, in their relative success, that is, in the degree to which they achieve the goals they fix for themselves. On this conception, money is given to one rather than another, or taken from one for another, in order to achieve equality in a respect some value more than others and some value very little indeed, at the cost of inequality in what some value more. A person of very limited talents might choose a very limited life in which his prospects of success are high because it is so important to be successful at something. Another person will choose almost impossible goals because for him the meaning is the challenge. Equality of relative success proposes to distribute resources—presumably much fewer to the first of these two and much more to the second—so that each has an equal chance of success in meeting these very different kinds of goals.

Suppose someone now replies that the appeal of equality of welfare does not lie where I located it. Its purpose is not to make people equal in what they do value fundamentally, even for their own lives, but rather in what they should value fundamentally. But this change in the claims for equality of welfare achieves nothing. For it is absurd to suppose that people should find value only in relative success without regard to the intrinsic value or importance of the life at which they are relatively successful. Perhaps some people—those with grave handicaps—are so restricted in what they can do that they must choose

just so as to be able to be minimally successful at something. But most people should aim to do more than what they would be, relatively, most successful in doing.

Overall Success. This discussion might be thought to suggest a better interpretation of equality of welfare, namely equality of overall rather than relative success. But if we are to explore equality of welfare in that conception we must make a distinction not necessary (or in any case not so plainly necessary) in comparing relative success. We must distinguish a person's own judgment of his overall success (or, if we prefer, the judgment he would make if fully informed of the pertinent ordinary sorts of facts) from the objective judgment of how much overall success in fact he has. A person's own judgment (even if fully informed of the facts) will reflect, as I said, his own philosophical convictions about what gives value to life, and these might be, from the standpoint of the objective judgment, confused or inaccurate or just wrong. I shall suppose, here, that equality of overall success means equality in people's overall success as judged by themselves, from the standpoint of their own perhaps differing philosophical beliefs. I shall later consider, under the title of objective theories of welfare, the different conception that requires equality in the success of their lives judged in some more objective way.

So let us now alter the exercise we have imagined. Now we rearrange resources, as far as we are able, so that when we have finished, each person would, at least if fully informed, offer the same assessment, not of his relative success in achieving the goals he selected for himself, but of his overall success in leading a valuable life. But we must take care in describing just what we take that latter opinion to be. For there are many different beliefs each of which might possibly be thought to count as an assessment of one's own overall success, and it is of crucial importance to decide which of these, if any, should play a role in rearranging resources in the name of equality. Nor can we find much guidance in the literature either of welfare economics or of utilitarianism, which are the natural places to look. For most of those writers who argue or assume that welfare consists in the fulfillment of preferences seem to have had relative rather than overall success in mind, and in any case have not discussed the problems raised by the latter idea when the two ideas are separated. The language they use—

the language of preferences (or wants or desires)—seems too crude to express the special, comprehensive judgment of the value of a life as a whole.

We might begin by distinguishing the question of how valuable someone believes his life has been, taken as a whole, from the question of how much he wants his life to continue. These are certainly different matters. Some people, to be sure, wish their life to end, or are in any case almost indifferent whether it continues, because they regard it as a failure. But others wish to die just because they think their life has been too brilliant to tarnish with a slow decline. And others think that a successful life can be made more successful by the timely use of suicide as a creative act. People can want to end, that is, a life they are proud to have led. Can we say at least that if someone wishes to die he must regard the future life he would otherwise lead as having no or little value? This will certainly be so in most cases, but the connection is nevertheless, I think, contingent. He may only think that though his future life would be quite successful, his life as a whole would be a more successful life if it ended now. Nor does it follow from the fact that someone very much wishes to continue living, for as long as he can imagine, that he thinks that his life is a successful life, or even that his future life will be especially successful. He may, on the contrary, want to live longer because he thinks his life has been unsuccessful, because he needs more time to do anything worth doing, though it is more likely that he simply fears death. The distinction I want to make can be summarized, perhaps, this way. Someone's preferences about the length of his life are just that, preferences that are like his choices of jobs and lovers, fixed as part of the dominating exercise of deciding what life, given background assumptions about resources, would be the most valuable life all things considered. They are not in themselves judgments of overall success or failure.

Can we make a further distinction between the value someone finds in his own life and the value he believes it has for him? I am not sure what that latter phrase would mean as part of this contrast. We sometimes say that a person puts a low value on his own life when we mean, not that he is not proud of the life he has or will lead, but rather that he counts the value of that life low compared with the value he

puts on his duty or the lives of others. But we are now considering something different, not the value someone puts on his own life as compared with his moral or impersonal values, but as part of the assessment of his own situation.

Perhaps “the value of someone’s life for him” means only the intensity of his preference that his life continue. If so, the distinction between the value someone finds in his life and its value for him is the distinction we have already discussed. But someone who uses that phrase may have in mind something more complex and more elusive than that. He may mean to distinguish someone’s judgment about the value of any single human life (or indeed human life in general) to the universe as a whole from that person’s judgment from the inside, from the standpoint of someone charged with making something valuable of his own life. If so, then it is the latter judgment with which we are now concerned. Or he may mean to distinguish someone’s judgment of his own success in that assignment, given his talents and opportunities, from his judgment of whether it was good for him to have had the talents and opportunities and convictions that made him the person whose life would have most value lived that way. It is not hard to imagine lives that illustrate the distinction so understood. It is in fact a cliché that great artists often work, not out of enjoyment (even in the widest sense of enjoyment), but rather in constant misery simply because, in a familiar phrase, it is not possible for them not to write poetry or music or paint. A poet who says this may well think that a life he spent in any other way would be, in the most fundamental sense, a failure. But he might well think that the conspiracy of talents and beliefs that made this true was bad for him, meaning only that his life would be more enjoyable if he lacked these talents or did not have the belief, which he could not however shake, that a life of creating poetry in misery and despair was all things considered the most valuable life for him to lead. Suppose we then ask him the dark question only philosophers and sentimental novelists ask: Would it have been better for you if you had never been born? If he says yes, as he might in some moods, we would know what he meant, and it would not be that he has done nothing valuable with his life. If the distinction between someone’s judgment of the value of his life and his judgment of the value it

has for him is taken in this way, then it is the former judgment I mean by his judgment of his overall success. But if the distinction cannot be taken in this way, or in any of the other ways I have considered, then I do not understand it, and suspect that it is no distinction at all.

These scrappy remarks are intended to clarify the comparison we must intend when we propose that people should be equal in their overall success. We cannot carry out this comparison simply by discovering two people's own fixed preferences and then matching their situation to these preferences. That is only a comparison of their relative success. We must invite them to make (or ourselves make from their point of view) an overall rather than a relative judgment that takes fixed preferences as part of what is judged rather than the standard of assessment. If we ask them to make that assessment themselves, however, and then try to compare the assessments each makes, we may discover the following difficulty. Suppose we ask Jack and Jill each to evaluate the overall success of his or her own life, and we make plain, by a variety of distinctions, what we mean by overall success as distinct from relative success, enjoyment, how much they wish their lives to continue, and so forth. And we provide them with a set of labels, from "total failure" to "very great success" with several stops in between, from which to choose. We have no guarantee that each will use any one of these labels in the same way as the other, that is, to report what we might independently consider the same judgment. Jack may use one or more of the labels with a different meaning from the meaning Jill uses, and they may be using different scales in judging the intervals between these labels. Jack might suppose, for example, that there is a vast difference between "great success" and "very great success" while Jill understands these terms to enforce only a marginal difference; so that both might use the latter label to report judgments that we, on the basis of further conversation with them, would come to believe were in fact very different judgments. This difficulty, so described, is a difficulty in translation, and I shall suppose that we could in principle conquer it, at least for speakers of our own language, by the further conversations just mentioned.

But of course all this assumes that there is indeed a single kind of overall judgment that we are asking Jack and Jill each to make (or

that we propose to make from their standpoint, on their behalf) and that this judgment is in fact a judgment about the inherent value of their life and therefore different from a judgment of relative success or a judgment about how much a person wants his life to continue or how much enjoyment he finds in it. Many people are, of course, skeptical about such judgments so interpreted. If they are right, then the judgments we ask Jack and Jill to make are meaningless judgments. But then equality of overall success is itself meaningless for that reason. (Though someone might still propose, for reasons we need not explore, that people should nevertheless be equal in the character of each's illusion.) If we assume that the skeptics are wrong, however (or even that equality of illusion is the true aim) then equality of overall success must suddenly seem a peculiar goal indeed, at least in the following circumstances.

Suppose that Jack and Jill have equal resources and that they are otherwise roughly similar in every way except in respect of the beliefs I am about to mention. They are both healthy, neither handicapped, both reasonably successful in their chosen occupations, neither outstandingly accomplished or creative. They take roughly the same enjoyment from their day-to-day life. But Jack (who has been much influenced by genre painting) thinks that any ordinary life fully engaged in projects is a life of value, while Jill (perhaps because she has taken Nietzsche to heart) is much more demanding. Jack thinks, for example, that the life of a busy peasant who achieves very little and leaves nothing behind is full of value, while Jill thinks that such a life is only full of failure. If each is asked to assess the overall value of his or her own life, Jack would rate his high and Jill hers low. But there is surely no reason in that fact for transferring resources from Jack to Jill provided only that Jill would then rate her life, while still of little overall success, a bit higher.

It might seem that the difficulty this example exposes arises only from the fact that our procedures attempt to compare judgments of value reached on the basis of very different theories about what gives value to life, which is like comparing apples and oranges. Someone might object that we would do better if we asked Jack and Jill each to make comparative judgments using their own standards for each comparison, and then compared these comparative judgments

in some way that would neutralize the difference in their philosophical convictions. This is, I think, a mistake, but we should explore the suggestion nevertheless. We might ask Jack, for example, to compare the value, in his eyes, of his present life with the value of the life he would have under whatever conditions of physical and mental power and whatever collection of material resources and opportunities at his disposal he would take to be ideal. Or we might ask him to compare in this way his present life with the life he would have under what he would take to be the worst conditions. We might ask him how far his life is better than the life he would have if he had no or very few resources or opportunities. We would then put the same questions to Jill. Or we might ask each a rather different sort of question, not asking them to imagine different material circumstances, but rather to compare their present lives with lives in which they would each find no value at all.¹ We might ask each how far his or her life exceeded, in its value, that life. And so on. Once some one of these questions (or perhaps some weighted group of them) had been selected as for some reason especially appropriate for the purpose, equality of overall success, as a political ideal, would recommend redistribution until either the proportion or the flat amount hypothetically reported by way of answer was as close to the same in all cases as could be achieved in that way.

I should say at once that there is room for doubt, at least, whether all or possibly even any of these various questions could actually be answered, or be answered by any but the most philosophically inclined respondents. I shall set the doubts aside, however, and assume that people generally have a sufficient grasp of theories of value to be able intelligently to answer them. But of course the different comparisons the different questions prompted might, if each was harnessed to the ideal of equality of overall success, yield different recommendations for redistribution. Suppose, for example, that Jack thought his present life much better than the worst life he could imagine, but also much worse than the best life, while Jill thought her life not much better than the worst and not much worse than the best. Then the direction of redistribution would depend on which

¹. I owe this last suggestion to Derek Parfit, and through him, I understand, to J. P. Griffin and J. McMahon.

of these two comparisons was thought more important for comparing levels of overall success. Even if all the answers to all the questions we could invent pointed in the same direction for redistribution, we should still have to show that at least one of these questions was the right question to ask.

When we look more closely at the questions I listed, however, they turn out to be very much the wrong questions. Suppose Jack and Jill (who, as I imagined, are now roughly equal in resources and enjoyment and relative success in their chosen lives) do disagree radically in judgments about how much more valuable their lives would be if they had everything they could have, for example. Jack believes that with all these resources he could solve the riddle of the origin of the universe, which would be the greatest imaginable achievement for human beings, while Jill believes that riddle unsolvable, and has no comparable dream in hand. So Jack believes his present life is only a small fraction as good as what it could ideally be, but Jill believes her life is not that much worse than what it could possibly be. Surely we have no reason of equality here for transferring resources from Jill to Jack (destroying their assumed equality of resources and enjoyment and relative success) even if such a transfer would cause Jack to rank his new life at a somewhat higher fraction of his ideal solving-the-riddle life.

Suppose that Jack considers his present life much more valuable than any life he would consider to have no value at all, while Jill thinks her life just barely better, on any flat scale of value in life, than a life she would think had absolutely no value. But that this is for the reason already suggested. Jack considers any life fully engaged and active, with as much day-to-day enjoyment as his has, of enormous value, something to be treasured and protected and pursued. He can imagine a life about which he would be indifferent, but it is a life so impoverished that he has no trouble reporting that his life is better than that by a very long chalk. Jill has roughly as much day-to-day pleasure or enjoyment. She is not depressive, but rather, as I said, very demanding in her idea of what life could be deemed a really successful life. She cannot say, when asked seriously to consider this grave question in a philosophical mood, that she thinks her life, for all its apparent richness, is in fact a life of much real value; she

can easily imagine a life which she would believe had absolutely no value and cannot say that she honestly thinks her life is really, all things considered, much more valuable than that one. Once again it seems implausible that equality demands that resources be transferred from Jack to Jill.

Why are all these comparative questions so plainly the wrong questions to ask? Because we have not in fact escaped, in switching from flat questions to comparative ones, the difficulty we found in the former. Because the differences between Jack and Jill we have noticed are still differences in their beliefs but not differences in their lives. They are differences in their speculative fantasies about how good or bad their lives would be under very different and bizarre circumstances, or differences in their philosophical convictions about what could give great value to any life; but not, for that reason, a difference in what their lives now are. Each of the judgments Jack or Jill makes, in responding to the different questions we put to them, can be considered a judgment about the value or overall success of their lives. But they are not all the *same* judgment, and none of the judgments we have so far described seems appropriate for a theory of equality of overall success.

I want now to suggest a comparison of the overall success in people's lives, very different from the comparisons suggested in all these questions, that does seem to be connected, at least, to problems of distributional equality. Differences in people's judgments about how well their lives are going overall are differences in their lives, rather than simply differences in their beliefs, only when they are differences, not in fantasy or conviction, but in fulfillment, which is, I take it, a matter of measuring personal success or failure against some standard of what *should* have been, not merely of what conceivably *might* have been. The important, and presently pertinent, comparison seems to me this. People have lives of less overall success if they have more reasonably to regret that they do not have or have not done.

"Reasonably," of course, carries much weight here. But it is all necessary. No one can reasonably regret that he has not had the life that someone with supernatural physical or mental powers, or the life span of Methuselah, would have had. So no one has a less successful life, all things considered, just because he thinks that such a life

would be infinitely more valuable, in the philosophical way, than the life he has. But people can reasonably regret that they have not had the normal powers or the normal span of life that most people have. No one can reasonably regret that he has not had the life that someone with an unfairly large share of the world's resources would have led, so no one person's life is less successful than another's because the first thinks his life would be much more valuable in those circumstances while the other does not. But people can reasonably regret not having whatever share of material resources they are entitled to have.

Perhaps the point is now clear. Any proposed account of equality of overall success that does not make the idea of reasonable regret (or some similar idea) pivotal in this way is irrelevant to a sensible theory of equality in distribution. It may develop a concept of overall success useful for some purpose, but not for this purpose. But any proposed account that does make this idea pivotal must include, within its description of equality of overall success, assumptions about what a fair distribution would be, and that means that equality of overall success cannot be used to justify or constitute a theory of fair distribution. I do not mean simply that equality of success could not be applied in some cases without having an independent theory of fair distribution as a supplement for such cases. If the point were only that, then it would show only that equality of overall success could not be the whole story in a theory of distribution. The point is more striking. Equality of overall success cannot be stated as an attractive ideal at all without making the idea of reasonable regret central. But that idea requires an independent theory of fair shares of social resources (this might, for example, be the theory that everyone is entitled to an equal share of resources) which would contradict equality of overall success not in some cases only, but altogether.

Suppose someone contests this important conclusion in the following way. He concedes that the aim of equality of success, properly conceived, is to make people equal in what they have reasonably to regret. But he believes that the idea of reasonable regret can be elucidated in some way that does not require any theory of fair share of resources *other than* some version or refinement of the

equal success theory itself. He might propose the following. People cannot reasonably regret that they are not leading the life of someone with supernatural powers. Or the life of a successful sadist. Or a life in which they have resources such that, with those resources, they can achieve a life with less reasonably to regret than others can have with the resources then left for them. This will not do, however. We aim to make people equal in what they have reasonably to regret. Suppose (as before) that Jack and Jill have equal resources. Jack has (as we saw) grand ambitions and, though he does not believe himself entitled to anything in particular, will always regret not having more than he does. We want to know whether Jack and Jill are nevertheless equal in what they have *reasonably* to regret. On the proposed test, we must ask Jack (or ask ourselves from his point of view) how far the life he can now lead falls short of the life he would lead if he had (among other things) the amount of resources such that if he had those resources he would have the same amount reasonably to regret as others would then have. Jack cannot answer that question (nor can we). He can pick some different distribution at random—say a distribution in which he has a million dollars more and others in the aggregate a million less. But he cannot tell whether his new-distribution life is the proper baseline against which to measure his present life without knowing whether the reasonable regret he would feel with one more million is no more than others would reasonably regret with what they could then have, and he cannot tell this without picking some *further* new distribution at random (in which, perhaps, he has two million more) against which to compute his regret at the one-million-more life. And so on into infinite regress. We cannot, of course, repair this failure (as we tried to repair other failures) by some trial-and-error device. For the problem is not that we can offer no noncircular algorithm for reaching an initial distribution to test, but rather that we can offer no method for testing any distribution however reached.²

2. In the case of some people, but not Jack, we might be able to find an amount of resources such that their actual regret at not having more is so weak that we do not need to compute their reasonable regret at that amount to say that the latter must be less than the actual regret that others would have if the former had that amount. But many questions arise even then. Is it not necessary still to compute the reasonable regret, as distinguished from the

I conclude that reasonable regret cannot itself figure in the distributional assumptions against which the decision whether some regret is reasonable is to be made. Nor can I think of any other conception or refinement of equality of overall success that can fill that role. If so, then the goal of making people equal in what they have reasonably to regret is self-contradictory in the way I described. I do not mean that comparisons of fulfillment—of how far different people have been able to make a success of their lives in their own eyes—have no place in discussions of equality. Many differences in overall regret—many occasions that people have properly to regret what they have not done—flow from handicaps or bad luck or weakness of will or sudden changes, too late for anything but regret, in people's perceptions of what they really take to be valuable. But it is perhaps the final evil of a genuinely unequal distribution of resources that some people have reason for regret just in the fact that they have been cheated of the chance others have had to make something valuable of their lives. The ideas of fulfillment and of reason for regret are competent to express this final argument against inequality only because they are ideas that reflect, in their assumptions, what inequality independently is.

I cannot, of course, prove that no one will invent a test or metric for overall success that will be both pertinent to equality and independent of prior assumptions about equality in distribution. For that reason I considered a fairly wide variety of suggested tests of this sort, hoping to show why I think it unlikely that one can be found. Certainly nothing that I am aware of in the present literature will do. But now suppose someone defending equality of overall success concedes that no such distribution-independent test can be found. I have been assuming that he must then concede that equality of overall success is useless as a distinct political goal because, insofar as it recommends changes from the independent distribution it assumes to be fair, it must recommend distributions it condemns as unfair. But is this too quick a conclusion?

actual regret, of the latter group, before deciding that the former group may not have more than that amount? Can this be done without regress? In any case, the total of amounts fixed as maxima for particular people, in this way, would undoubtedly exceed the total available for distribution. I shall not pursue these complexities further.

Suppose he argues that we must distinguish between the measure of and the means of achieving equality of overall success. He might suggest, for example, that a fair distribution for purposes of computing some person's present overall success is an equal distribution of resources. We compute Jack's and Jill's overall success by asking how far each regards his or her life as less successful than the best life he or she could have if resources were shared equally in society. If Jack's overall success, so measured, is greater than Jill's, we transfer resources from Jack to Jill so far as we can thus reduce the difference. It is true that Jack and Jill will not then have equal resources. Jill will have more resources than Jack. But they will be (more) equal in overall success as measured in the proper, reasonable-regret-oriented, way. There is no contradiction in using the idea of equal resources internally, within the metric for determining overall success, and then actually distributing so as to achieve equality of overall success rather than equality of resources.

But this reply misses the point. The reasonable regret metric for determining overall success makes assumptions about what distribution is fair, about the distribution to which people are *entitled*. If that metric assumes that a fair distribution is an equal distribution of resources, and Jill is then given more than an equal share, she is given more than the theoretical argument supposedly justifying the transfer says is her fair share. Of course Jill might not complain about having more than the share of resources to which she is, by hypothesis, entitled. But Jack will complain about having less than the justification assumes he is entitled to have, and the only way to give Jill more than that share is to give Jack (or someone else) less.

V. EQUALITY OF ENJOYMENT

I now propose to discuss the second group of conceptions of equality of welfare that I distinguished at the outset, which take equality of welfare to consist in equal amounts or degrees of a conscious state. I shall simplify this discussion, as I said there, by taking the concept of enjoyment to stand for a particularly broad version of the conscious state or states in question, and I mean to use that con-

cept in the wide sense I described. Fortunately, this discussion can be simplified in another way as well, for much of the argument I used in considering unrestricted versions of equality of success apply to unrestricted versions of equality of enjoyment as well.

People gain enjoyment, as I said, from the satisfaction of their political and impersonal preferences as well as directly and from their personal preferences, and they suffer dissatisfaction when these political and impersonal preferences are defeated. But the same considerations that argue for a restricted form of equality of success, which does not count success or failure in achieving these preferences in the calculations that theory recommends, argue for similar restrictions in equality of enjoyment. So I shall assume that equality of enjoyment, as a theory of equality in distribution, holds that resources should be distributed, so far as possible, so that people are equal in the enjoyment they take directly and from their beliefs that their personal preferences are achieved.

My first argument against this restricted version of equality of enjoyment is also modeled on the argument I used against equality of relative success. The main appeal of a restricted form of equality of enjoyment lies in the claim that it makes people equal in what they all value equally and fundamentally so far as their personal position is concerned. But that appeal cannot be sustained, because in fact people differ in the importance each attaches to enjoyment even in the widest sense that leaves that term a description of conscious states. When they are made equal in that one respect, they become unequal in other respects many value much more.

For almost everyone, pain or dissatisfaction is an evil and makes life less desirable and valuable. For almost everyone pleasure or enjoyment of some other form is of value, and contributes to the desirability of life. Conscious states of some such form, positive and negative, figure as components of everyone's conception of the good life. But only as components, because almost no one pursues only enjoyment or will make any large sacrifice of something else he values to avoid a small amount of pain. And different people give even these conscious states very different weight. Two scholars, for example, may both value creative work, but one may be willing to give up more, by way of social pleasure or the enjoyments of reputation or the satisfaction that

comes from completing a piece of research well done, to do work that is in fact more original.

Someone might now object that the first scholar does not value enjoyment less but rather finds it in a different source—not in the delights of society or the glow of fame but in the deeper satisfactions of the pursuit of genuine discovery. But this is plainly not necessarily or even usually so. Some of the most ambitious scholars (and artists and statesmen and athletes) set off in a direction that they predict will bring them only failure, and they know that they will find no delight or satisfaction just in the fact that they are aiming high, but only misery in how far they have fallen short. They may truly say (in the spirit of the poet whose views I described earlier) that they wish that some goal or project had not occurred to them or fallen in their path, or that they did not have the talents that made it necessary for them to pursue it, because then their lives would have been more satisfactory, more enjoyable all things considered. It perverts their report, misunderstands their complex situation, to say that they have actually found more enjoyment in the life they have led. For it is exactly their point that they have led that life in spite of, rather than for, the quality of the conscious life it has brought them.

Now of course not many people are dedicated to some ambition in that particularly strenuous way. But most of us, I think, are dedicated to something whose value to us is not exhausted or captured in the enjoyment its realization will bring, and some are dedicated to more things in that way, or more strongly dedicated, than others. Even when we do enjoy what we have or have done, we often enjoy it because we think it valuable, not vice versa. And we sometimes choose, in the same manner, though not to the same dramatic degree as the most ambitious scholar, a life that we believe will bring less enjoyment because it is in other ways a better life to lead. This is evident, I think, in a psychological fact that in some ways illustrates a different point, but is nevertheless relevant. Suppose you had a genuine choice (which, once made, you would forget) between a life in which you in fact achieved some goal important to you, though you did not realize that you had, and a different life in which you falsely believed that you had achieved that goal and therefore had the enjoyment or satisfaction

flowing from that belief.³ If you make the former choice, as many would, then you rank enjoyment, however described, as less important than something else.

Suppose someone now says, however, that equality of enjoyment is an attractive political goal, not because people all do value that state equally and fundamentally, when they decide what is important for themselves, but rather because they ought to do so. He says, not that the ambitious scholar I described really values enjoyment, but rather that he is mistaken, perhaps even irrational, because he does not. Someone making this objection, that is, abandons what I said is the immediate appeal of any conception of equality of welfare, which is that it claims to make people equal in what they value equally and fundamentally. He argues that the appeal of that political ideal is rather that it makes people equal in what they ought to value equally and fundamentally.

We have, I think, two answers. First, he is wrong in his view about what people ought to value. He is wrong in supposing either that the most valuable life is a life of maximum enjoyment, no matter how generously that conscious state is described, or that everyone ought to hold that view of what is the best life. Second, even if that theory about what people ought to value is more plausible than I think, even if it is in fact true, a political theory of equality based on that conception of the good life is an unattractive theory for a society in which many if not most people reject that conception, and some reject it as alien to their most profound beliefs about the goodness of their own lives.

We may, moreover, find a second argument against the restricted form of equality of enjoyment in the arguments we considered against equality of overall success. Though I have emphasized the error in supposing that ambitious people all take enjoyment in their strenuous lives, or pursue those lives for the sake of the enjoyment they will bring, it is nevertheless true that people of ambition often find dissatisfaction in the failure of their grand aims, and in their regret that they do not have the additional resources of talent and means that

3. See Bernard Williams, "Egoism and Altruism," in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 262.

would make success more likely, whether or not they hold political theories that suppose that they are entitled to more than they have. Though this was not part of my story of Jack and Jill, we might vary that story to suppose, for example, that Jack found keen disappointment and day-to-day dissatisfaction in the fact that he did not have solving-the-riddle talents and means. But it would seem equally wrong to transfer resources to him on account of that greater dissatisfaction as on account of his lower success ratio measured in that way. No one, I think, would want to aim at counting more than the dissatisfaction he found in reasonable regret. But if the arguments I offered earlier are sound, introducing the idea of reasonable regret for the sake of that limitation would introduce a different and inconsistent theory of distribution into the very statement of and justification for equality of enjoyment.

VI. OBJECTIVE THEORIES OF WELFARE

The conceptions of equality of welfare thus far considered are all subjective in the following sense. They may each be enforced without asking whether a person's own consistent and informed evaluation of how far he meets the deployed standard of welfare is correct. Of course the arguments in favor of choosing one or another conception of equality of welfare may assume that people are wrong in what they take to be important, or even in what they would take to be important if fully informed of the pertinent facts. We considered, for example, the argument in favor of equality of enjoyment that people ought to value enjoyment as fundamentally important to their lives, in spite of the fact that many do not. But even if the conscious state conception is defended in that way, it may be applied without any evaluation of the enjoyment in question. It directs officials to produce the distribution such that each person takes equal enjoyment in the life he leads, without asking whether people are right to take enjoyment in what they then would.

Equality of overall success in the form we considered it is also subjective in that way. It aims to make people equal in (as we should now say) the amount or degree by which each person could reasonably

regret that he was not leading a life he would deem to be a life of greater value. That judgment is in certain ways, it is true, nonsubjective. It imposes constraints on reasonable regret that the person in question might himself reject, for example. If that person's assessment of what gives value to life changes over the course of his life, the judgment requires some amalgamation or selection among his different judgments. But the judgment does not allow the computation of someone's reasonable regret to be based on assessments of value in life that are wholly foreign to him, that he would reject even if fully informed of the ordinary facts.

I should now mention a version of equality of overall success that is more objective in just that way, however. Someone might propose that people be made equal in the amount of regret they should have about their present lives. On this revised test officials would have to ask whether someone who in fact does not value friendship, for example, and believes his life good though it is solitary and without love, and believes this in spite of the fact that he is aware of the comforts and joy that others find in friendship, is wrong. If so, then resources might be transferred to him, either directly or through special education for him about the values of friendship, on the ground that his overall success is low even though he would count it high, at least before the special education takes hold.

Now we may well object that officials have no business relying on their own judgments about what gives value to life in redistributing wealth. We might believe that such a scheme for redistribution invades autonomy, or is in some other way foreign to the correct liberal principles. But we need not consider these objections, because this more objective version of equality of overall success meets the same argument we used against the more subjective version. Any pertinent test of what someone should regret about the life he is in fact leading, even on the best rather than his own theory about what gives value to life, must rely on assumptions about what resources an individual is entitled to have at his disposal in leading any life at all. So the objective version, like the subjective version, must assume an independent theory of fair distribution, and has no more power to justify giving some people more and others less than what they are entitled to have

under that theory. Both versions are self-defeating insofar as they recommend any changes in a distribution independently, under some other theory of distribution, shown to be fair.

I should just mention, though very briefly, another putative conception of equality of welfare that might also be considered an objective conception. This supposes that a person's welfare consists in the resources available to him, broadly conceived, so as to include physical and mental competence, education and opportunities as well as material resources. Or, on some versions, more narrowly conceived so as to include only those that are in fact, whatever people think, most important. It holds that two people occupy the same welfare level if they are both healthy, mentally sound, well-educated, and equally wealthy even though one is for some reason malcontent and even though one makes much less of these resources than the other. This is an objective theory in the sense that it refuses to accept a person's own judgment about his welfare, but rather insists that his welfare is established by at least certain kinds of basic resources at his command.

Equality of welfare, so interpreted, requires only that people be equal in the designated resources. This version of equality of welfare is therefore not different from equality of resources or at least equality in some resources. It is rather a statement of equality of resources in the (misleading) language of welfare. The abstract statement of equality of resources, of course, as I said, leaves open the question of what counts as a resource and how equality of resources is to be measured. These are the complex questions left for Part 2 of this essay. But there is no reason to think that these questions will be easier to answer if we tack on to the ideal of equality of resources the rider that if people are equal in resources, on the correct conception of that ideal they will also be equal in some objective concept of welfare as well.

VII. AN ECUMENICAL SUGGESTION

I must now consider what might seem a wise and ecumenical suggestion. Perhaps an attractive conception of equality of welfare can be found, not exclusively in one or another of the different conceptions we have now inspected and dismissed, but in some judicious and com-

plex mix of these. In that case the strategy I followed in the last three sections might be the misleading and fallacious strategy of divide and conquer, rejecting each conception of equality of welfare by supposing that unless that conception tells the whole story it may be wholly ignored. Perhaps the ideal of equality of welfare may be considered fairly only by treating the different unrestricted and restricted versions of equality of success and equality of enjoyment each as strands to be considered in a complex package rather than as isolated theories.

It would be foolish to say, in advance, that no new conception of equality of welfare could be described that would make that ideal attractive. We must wait to see what new conceptions are presented. But it is perhaps not foolish to suppose that no successful conception could be formed using the conceptions we considered as components in some larger package. In any case my arguments were intended to reduce confidence in that project. I did not argue simply that no one of the versions I discussed is satisfactory on its own, or that each leads to unappealing consequences if unchecked by some other. If my arguments had been of that character, they would indeed invite the suggestion that these conceptions might be combined so as to supplement or check the shortcomings of each alone. But I meant to support a more radical criticism: that we have no reason to accept any of these versions of equality of welfare as a theory of distributional equality, even *pro tanto*.

It is of course desirable, in some sense at least, that people's overall success be improved, though philosophers and politicians might disagree whether the subjective or objective versions of that goal should be controlling when the two conflict. But, for reasons explained, neither version can provide other than an idle or self-defeating principle of equality in distribution. Nor, for the same reasons, can either figure as useful components in some complex package of conceptions of equality of welfare. Insofar as equality of overall success figured, even as one component among many, it would figure because some independent test of fair distribution was assumed, and it could not recommend, nor could the package overall, any deviation from that independent test.

The other conceptions of equality of welfare we considered we rejected for different reasons. We found no reason to support the idea

that a community should accept the goal of making people more equal in any one of these different ways even when it could do so without damage to any of the others. If that is so then it is unlikely that it should accept the goal of making people more equal in some way that is a composite or compromise among these different ways. Combinations and trade-offs are appropriate when a set of competing goals or principles, each of which has independent appeal, cannot all be satisfied at once. They are not appropriate when no goal or principle has been shown to have independent appeal, at least as a theory of equality, at all.

VIII. EXPENSIVE TASTES

I said at the outset that equality of welfare, even as stated simply in the abstract, without specifying any of the conceptions we later distinguished, seems to produce initially troubling counter-examples. The most prominent of these is the problem of expensive tastes (a phrase I shall use, most often, to include expensive ambitions as well). Equality of welfare seems to recommend that those with champagne tastes, who need more income simply to achieve the same level of welfare as those with less expensive tastes, should have more income on that account. But this seems counter-intuitive, and I said that someone generally attracted to the ideal would nevertheless wish to limit or qualify it so that his theory did not have that consequence. I want to return to that suggestion now, not because the problem of expensive tastes is of practical importance in politics, but for two different reasons. First, many readers initially attracted to some conception of equality of welfare may suspect that the arguments I directed against their favorite conception, in the last several sections, would have less force if a limitation or qualification suitable to exclude the expensive tastes consequence had been built into my description of that conception. I think that this suspicion, if indeed it exists, is mistaken, but it is nevertheless worthwhile to consider, for this reason alone, whether such a limitation is in fact possible. Second, there will be readers who are left unpersuaded by my earlier arguments, but would nevertheless abandon their favorite conception of equality of welfare

if they believed that it could not in fact be qualified so as to avoid that consequence.

We must be careful to distinguish, when we consider possible qualifications of any such conception, the compromise of a principle from its contradiction. A compromise reflects the weight of some independent and competing principle; a contradiction is a qualification that reflects instead the denial of the original principle itself. The question I want to press is this: Can the principle of equality of welfare be compromised (under any interpretation of what equality of welfare is) in such a way as to block the initially counter-intuitive results of that principle, like the proposition that people with champagne tastes should have more resources? Or is any qualification capable of barring those results rather a contradiction that concedes the final irrelevance of the principle?

Imagine that a particular society has managed to achieve equality of welfare in some chosen conception of that ideal. Suppose also that it has achieved this through a distribution that in fact (perhaps just by coincidence) gives everyone equal wealth. Now suppose that someone (Louis) sets out deliberately to cultivate some taste or ambition he does not now have, but which will be expensive in the sense that once it has been cultivated he will not have as much welfare on the chosen conception as he had before unless he acquires more wealth. These new tastes may be tastes in food and drink: Arrow's well-known example of tastes for plovers' eggs and pre-phylloxera claret.⁴ Or they may (more plausibly) be tastes for sports, such as skiing, from which one derives pleasure only after acquiring some skill. Or, in the same vein, for opera. Or for a life dedicated to creative art or exploring or politics. Can Louis be denied extra wealth, taken from those who acquire less expensive tastes (or simply keep those they already have), without contradicting the ideal of equality of welfare that his community has embraced?

Let us first consider how we might explain what Louis has done. No doubt people often put themselves in the way of new tastes carelessly, or on whim, without considering whether they will really be

4. Kenneth J. Arrow, "Some Ordinalist-Utilitarian Notes on Rawls's Theory of Justice," *The Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 9 (10 May 1973):254.

better off if they acquire these tastes, or even perversely, knowing that they will be worse off. Even when they think they would be better off, they might be mistaken. But I want to suppose that Louis is not only acting deliberately rather than inadvertently, but is also acting on the basis of the kind of judgment I said people often make when they form and change their preferences. He is trying to make his life a better life in some way. This does not make his claim for extra resources any more appealing or less counter-intuitive, I think. On the contrary, the fact that he is acting so deliberately in his own interests seems to make his claim, if anything, less appealing than the claim of someone who tries an expensive experience on a whim, for the pleasure of the moment, and then finds that he is hooked.

Louis will, of course, have his own ideas of what makes a life better, of where his own essential well-being lies. If his society has chosen one of the discrete conceptions of welfare, such as enjoyment or relative success, however, as the welfare in which people should be equal, then Louis cannot think that his own well-being consists in the maximum amount of welfare in that conception. If he did, his behavior would make no sense. This means that one possibly appealing description of what he has done must be wrong. Many people, first hearing this story, might assume that Louis cultivates expensive tastes in order to steal a march on others, so that it would "reward" improper efforts if he were to receive more income. But if stealing a march means acquiring more welfare than others in the chosen conception, then this is impossible. Of course someone might pretend to like plovers' eggs, though he hates them in fact, in order to gain more income, and then spend that income secretly buying more hens' eggs and thus more enjoyment than others can afford. But the problem of expensive tastes is not the problem of fraud—that problem must be handled separately in any society based on equality of welfare because someone could, after all, pretend to be crippled. If Louis sets out to acquire a taste for plovers' eggs so that, if successful, he will in fact have less welfare on the chosen conception if he does not have them, then he cannot purpose to gain some advantage in that form of welfare over others by this decision. He may of course think that he will in the end get more welfare in that conception from a dollar's worth of plovers' eggs than hens' eggs, costly though the former are. In that

case he knows that his income will be reduced if he is successful. Or he may think that he will not gain more welfare per dollar by cultivating a taste for plovers' eggs, but rather less. In that case he knows that his welfare (as always, on the chosen conception) will decline overall (though not by much in a very large community) because the total welfare that can then be produced (of which in the end he can expect only $1/nth$) will decrease. It would be absurd to think that he sets out to reduce his own welfare in order to have a larger income, either absolutely or relative to others. After all, though he may have a larger income than others, they are, by hypothesis, no worse off in the chosen conception of welfare than he is, and he is at least by some degree worse off than he would otherwise have been.

Louis does, as I said, suppose that if he cultivates his new taste his life will be better. But this is because he does not accept that the value of his life is measured just by the welfare in which his society has, for some reason, undertaken to make people equal. It is hard to see how this can justify either the suggestion that he has acted improperly or the decision not to give him more resources but rather to leave him unequal to others in the chosen conception. The choice of that conception was society's choice, not his, and society chose that people be equal in it not the other conception that Louis values more. After all there is no reason to think that people were equal in welfare on Louis's conception even before he developed his new taste, and he may still have less than others have of that even if he is brought back to equality in the chosen conception.

Louis thinks, as I said, that his life would be a more successful life overall—would provide less reason for regret—if he had the expensive taste or ambition even at the small cost in welfare in the chosen conception he would lose if society reestablished equality in that conception for him. Indeed he might think that his life would be more successful overall even if society did not reestablish equality for him. (People develop expensive tastes even in our own society, when they must bear the increased costs themselves.) Suppose the chosen conception is enjoyment. If Louis develops a taste for plovers' eggs, he must believe that a life of satisfying expensive tastes is a better life overall in spite of the fact that it will provide less enjoyment, and might believe it better even if it would provide much less enjoyment.

These may, in fact, be plausible beliefs. Or at least they may be plausible if we substitute, for the contrived examples of plovers' eggs, the sorts of expensive tastes that people do seem to cultivate deliberately and in their own interests, such as a taste for sports that follows from developing skill or a desire for practical power that follows taking an interest in the public weal. It is plausible to suppose that beliefs of that sort figure even in the best accounts of why people in our own economy develop the less admirable expensive tastes—champagne tastes—that figure in the usual examples. For if someone like Louis wishes to lead the life of people in *New York* magazine ads, this must be because he supposes that a life in which rare and costly goods are savored is a life better because it knows a greater variety of pleasures, or more sophisticated pleasures, or, indeed, simply pleasures that others do not know, in spite of containing less pleasure overall.

This explanation of Louis' behavior challenges the importance of the distinction we have thus far been assuming between expensive tastes that are deliberately cultivated and other aspects of personality or person, such as native desires or socially imposed tastes, that affect people's welfare. For the explanation suggests that such tastes are often cultivated in response to beliefs—beliefs about what sort of life is overall more successful—and such beliefs are not themselves cultivated or chosen. Not, that is, in any sense that provides a reason for ignoring differences in welfare caused by these beliefs in a community otherwise committed to evening out differences in welfare. I do not mean that beliefs are afflictions, like blindness, that people find that they have and are stuck with. People reason about their theories of what gives value to life in something of the same way in which they reason about other sorts of beliefs. But they do not choose that a life of service to others, for example, or a life of creative art or scholarship, or a life of exquisite flavors, be the most valuable sort of life for them to lead, and therefore do not choose that they shall believe that it is. We may still distinguish between the voluntary decision someone makes to become a person with certain tastes, or to lead the sort of life likely to have that consequence, and his discovery of tastes and ambitions that he just has. But the distinction is less important than

is sometimes thought, because that decision is rarely if ever voluntary all the way down.

If Louis' society aimed to make people equal, not in one of the discrete conceptions of welfare we have thus far been assuming in his story, such as enjoyment or relative success, but in subjective overall success, then we would need a somewhat different account of why he would develop expensive tastes, and of whether it would be fair to deny him extra resources. I argued earlier that any attractive version of equality of overall success must provide a place for the idea of reasonable regret, and that this idea in turn presupposes some independent non-welfare theory defining a fair distribution of resources. If this is right, then no one could claim extra resources for expensive tastes in a community ostensibly governed by equality of overall success. If his share of resources is fair before he cultivates his new taste, his share remains fair after he has done so. But since I want to offer independent arguments in this section, I shall assume that my earlier arguments are unsound, and that an attractive subjective version of equality of overall success can be developed that is not self-defeating in that way.

But then, since the chosen conception is now overall success, we can no longer say that Louis acts as he does because he believes his life would be more successful overall though less successful on the chosen conception. Suppose that before Louis conceived his expensive taste he was satisfied that his life was roughly as successful overall as everyone else's. He then came to believe that his life would be more valuable if he cultivated some expensive hobby, for example. We must ask what he now thinks about the value of the life he had before he formed that belief. He may think that, though his earlier life was just as good as he thought it was, and would remain so if he could not pursue his new hobby, it would be much better if he could. In that case the problem of expensive tastes does not arise. For Louis is claiming additional resources in order to have more welfare than others on the chosen conception, and he does not have even a *prima facie* claim to that. But he may instead have changed his beliefs about how valuable his life was. He may have read more widely, or reflected more deeply, and come to the conclusion that his former life, for all its former appeal

to him, was in fact a worthless and insipid life. He wants to cultivate new and more challenging tastes to repair the defects in his life, as he now understands them. He asks only the resources necessary to make his life as valuable, in his eyes after they have been opened, as other people find their lives. How can a society committed to equality in this respect deny him these resources? It cannot say that he was wrong to continue to reflect on how best to live. An unexamined life is for that very reason a poor life. If Louis had reached his present opinions about value in life before the initial distribution, he would have received then the resources he now seeks. Why should he be refused them now, and be condemned to a life he finds less valuable than everyone else finds theirs?⁵

We might summarize the position we have reached in this way. If the chosen conception is one of the discrete conceptions we considered, other than overall success, then Louis is attempting to improve his welfare on some other conception he values more, while retaining equality in the chosen conception. But if the chosen conception is what really matters for equality, and if in any case others may already have more welfare in the conception Louis prefers, what ground does society have for now refusing him equality in the chosen conception? If the chosen conception is overall success (which is assumed, arguendo, not to be self-defeating) then if a claim for extra resources arises at all, it arises because Louis now believes that the earlier distribution was based on a mistake. He asks no special advantage, but only that society reach the distribution it would have reached if he had been able to see more clearly then. What ground could society have for refusing him that?

One ground perhaps suggests itself, which is the ordinary utilitarian principle that average welfare in society (which we should under-

5. If the chosen conception is some objective version of equality of success, rather than the subjective version discussed in this paragraph, the situation is different still. If the change in Louis' tastes has the consequences that his life is now objectively more successful, then he should have fewer rather than more resources in consequence. If (because Louis' convictions are mistaken) the change makes his life objectively worse, then the claim that someone might make on his behalf, for still further resources for reeducation, seems especially strong. But I am assuming that the objective version of equality of overall success has little appeal for a liberal society, so I shall not pursue this line.

stand to mean welfare in the chosen conception) should be as high as possible. If society “rewards” people who develop expensive tastes by giving them extra resources with which to satisfy these tastes, then people will not be discouraged from doing so. But expensive tastes (by definition) decrease the total welfare that can be produced from a given stock of resources. So the independent principle of utility justifies a compromise with the principle of equality of welfare by recommending that people not be brought to parity of welfare if they develop expensive tastes, in order to discourage them from doing so. If the chosen conception is a discrete conception, this means that people are to be discouraged, for the sake of average utility, from bringing it about that they will need more resources to achieve the same welfare, even though they may think that their lives would be more successful if they did bring that about. If the chosen conception is overall success, judged subjectively, then people are to be discouraged from reexamining their lives in a way that might leave them dissatisfied with the value of the lives they have.

But in fact the principle of utility does not explain what needs explaining here. It can at best explain why compensating those who develop expensive tastes is inefficient. It cannot explain why the ideal of equality does not recommend doing so. It is, after all, a familiar idea in political theory that a just society will make some compromise between efficiency and distribution. It will sometimes tolerate less than perfect equality in order to improve average utility. But the compromise intuitively demanded by the problem of expensive tastes is not such a compromise between efficiency and equality. It is rather a compromise within the idea of equality. Our difficulty is not that, though we believe that equality requires us to pay Louis more because he has forced himself to like champagne, we must deny him equality in order to protect the overall stock of utility. Expensive tastes are embarrassing for the theory that equality means equality of welfare precisely because we believe that equality, considered in itself and apart from questions of efficiency, condemns rather than recommends compensating for deliberately cultivated expensive tastes.

I should also point out, parenthetically, that it is far from plain that the utilitarian principle, by itself, can even provide an explanation of what it does purport to explain, which is why a society that does

wish to compromise equality for efficiency would select expensive tastes as the point of sacrifice for equality. Refusing to compensate people who develop expensive tastes will protest average utility only if it succeeds in discouraging at least some people from developing such tastes who would otherwise do so. It is impossible to predict how much of such experimentation would take place in a society dedicated to equality of welfare even without this kind of deterrence, or how effective the deterrence would be. (After all, people develop expensive tastes even in our own society when they do not receive extra resources when they do.) It is also impossible to predict the long-term consequences for utility under any particular assumptions about the success of the deterrence. Any society bent on using noncompensation as a deterrent must set a fairly articulate policy that stipulates reasonably clearly when people whose tastes and ambitions change will be compensated and when they will not be. How would the policy distinguish, for example, between tastes that are deliberately cultivated and those that simply steal up on people? What level of expense—what level of efficiency in producing enjoyment, for example, per dollar cost—would be stipulated as making a taste expensive rather than inexpensive? Beer may very well be less expensive, in this sense, than champagne, but it is also more expensive than water. Suppose the community responds to these difficulties by refusing to compensate for new tastes if people take any positive steps to acquire them or even act in a way that they should know makes their acquisition more likely, whenever these tastes are any more expensive than the tastes, if any, that they replace. If this policy succeeds in discouraging experimentation in tastes to any marked degree, then it might well end, for all we know, in a dull, conformist, unimaginative, and otherwise unattractive community, and a community with less long-term utility as well. There are many reasons for predicting that latter consequence, but I shall mention only the two most obvious. First, some tastes that are expensive when taken up only by a few people become inexpensive—produce more utility per dollar than present tastes—when they become very popular through the example of those few. Second, a society that does become dull and conformist is a society in which no one takes much pleasure in anything, or cares very deeply about achieving the goals that have been taken mechanically from others rather than developed

for himself. It is of course not plain that this policy of non-compensation tacked to a general principle of compensation for tastes acquired in a less voluntary way would have these consequences. But that is because no hypothesis about what levels of utility would be achieved by such a society, so different from our own, is worth much, which hardly recommends this explanation of why an equality of welfare society that is also utilitarian would refuse compensation.

So the supposed utilitarian justification of our intuitive conviction, that equality does not require that those who deliberately cultivate expensive tastes have equal welfare after they have done so, fails on two grounds. We still lack a justification for that conviction. But suppose someone now argues in the following way. It is true that people do not choose their beliefs about what would make their lives overall more successful. But they do choose whether and how far to act on these beliefs. Louis knows, or at least ought to know, that if he cultivates some expensive taste in a society dedicated to equality of enjoyment, for example, and is compensated, then that will decrease the enjoyment available for others. If, knowing this, he chooses the more expensive life then he does not *deserve* compensation. He is no longer a member of the company of those who deserve equal enjoyment in their lives.

Louis has a choice. He may choose to keep the presently equal resources I said he had, and settle for a life with the enjoyment he now has but without the tastes or ambitions he proposes to cultivate. Or he may keep his present resources and settle for a life that *he* deems more successful overall than his present life, but one that contains less enjoyment. It is quite unfair that he should have a third choice, that he should be able, at the expense of others, to lead a life that is more expensive than theirs at no sacrifice of enjoyment to himself just because he would, quite naturally, consider *that* life a more successful life overall than either of the other two. The reason why Louis does not deserve compensation is not that the more expensive life he might choose is necessarily a worse life. He might be right in thinking that enjoyment is not all that matters, and that a life poorer in enjoyment may be, just from the personal standpoint, a more successful life overall. We say only that the first two choices are rightly his, but that the third is not.

I myself find this argument both powerful and appealing. It is also an important argument for the following reason. The objection to allowing Louis the third choice described is most naturally put this way. Louis should be free (at least within the limits allowed by a defensible form of paternalism) to make the best sort of life he can with his fair share of social resources. But he should not be free to trespass on the fair shares of others, because that would be unfair to them. But of course once the point is put that way it cannot stand simply as an argument for a compromise to equality of welfare tailored to the problem of expensive tastes. For the idea of fair shares cannot then mean simply shares that give people equal welfare on the chosen conception, because that is exactly the conception to which Louis appeals in asking for extra resources. If fair shares are shares fixed independently of that conception, however, then any compromise using the idea of fair shares becomes a contradiction.

Can the idea of fair shares be defined for this purpose in some way that does not make the shares that produce equal welfare in the chosen conception automatically fair shares, but nevertheless uses that conception in some way that avoids contradicting it? Suppose someone's fair share is taken to be the share that produces equal welfare in that conception, or would produce it if the person in question had not deliberately cultivated an expensive taste. This will not help, as we saw, if the chosen conception is overall success, and Louis believes that the life he would lead if he did not cultivate new tastes would be a life of less overall success than others believe their lives to be. Even if the chosen conception is one of the discrete conceptions, such as enjoyment, defining fair shares in this way will not help. The argument I said I found powerful uses the idea of fair shares not simply to describe the limitation on equality of welfare it recommends, but also to justify that limitation. It proposes to explain why, in spite of the various objections I made earlier in this section, independent and non-contradictory considerations of fairness justify a compromise of equality of welfare. But if the definition of fair shares just assumes that the compromise in question is for some unspecified reason fair, then the appeal to fair shares can itself provide no justification that is not immediately circular. If the idea of fair shares is to do any work, then it must appeal to some independent account of fairness in

distribution, and any independent account contradicts the conception to which it is attached, as I said, because it occupies all the space that conception claims for itself. I might add that I think that the most plausible independent account, which I myself had in mind when I said that the argument against Louis' third choice was powerful, is some conception of equality of resources (though of course there are others available such as, for example, some principle that argues that resources are fairly distributed when those with more merit have more).

Perhaps ingenuity could produce some explanation or interpretation of the argument in question—that Louis does not deserve more resources just because he has chosen a more expensive life—which does not use this idea of fair shares or any similar ideas. But any such account would, I suspect, fall before the following further example. Imagine now a society newly dedicated to equality of enjoyment in which, when resources are redistributed in order to achieve equality of enjoyment, Jude has far less money than anyone else because his wants are so simple and so inexpensively satisfied. But one day (perhaps after reading Hemingway) he decides that his life, for all its richness in enjoyment, is a life of less overall success than it might be, and proposes to cultivate a new taste for some challenging sport, such as bullfighting. Suppose that after he does so he finds himself seriously frustrated by his lack of funds with which, for example, to travel to Spain, and asks for more funds through a further redistribution after which he would still, as things fall out, have less than anyone else. Do we now have any grounds for saying that he is undeserving of the increase, when we know that if it is denied he will have both less funds and less enjoyment than anyone else? I doubt anyone will want to say this. But if so then we cannot say that the reason Louis is undeserving of an increase is simply that the taste he has cultivated is expensive. Jude's new taste may be just as expensive. The difference is that Louis asks that more than an equal share of social resources be put at the disposal of his life while Jude asks only that something closer to an equal share be put at the disposal of his. We need the idea of fair shares (in this particular case the idea of an equal share of resources) in order to express the force of this difference.

Suppose that if Jude is given more funds and can travel to Spain he will have not merely as much but *more* welfare than anyone else, in whatever conception has been chosen, including overall success, though he will still have much less money than anyone else as well. Does equality now require that he be denied the additional money? If not, then Jude's case makes an even stronger point. Not only may Jude reestablish equality of welfare in spite of the expensive taste he has deliberately cultivated. He may even succeed, by developing such a taste, in having more welfare than others. In both cases it is the idea of equality of resources that is doing the work.

I hope the moral of this long section is clear. If someone begins anxious to defend some version or conception of equality of welfare, but also wishes to resist the consequence that those who develop expensive tastes should have more, he will come, in the end, to a very different theory of equality. He will find that he must presuppose some other theory that makes his conception of equality of welfare either idle or self-defeating. That is, of course, exactly the conclusion that we reached in studying certain of these conceptions separately. It remains to consider, as I propose to do in the next section, whether there are strong reasons for nevertheless trying to find some small room for equality of welfare within a general and different theory of equality.

IX. HANDICAPS

I conceded, at the beginning, the immediate appeal of the idea that genuine equality is equality of welfare. One aspect of that immediate appeal may easily have survived the various doubts I have raised, which is the apparent power of equality of welfare to explain why people with physical or mental handicaps (or who otherwise have special needs) should have extra resources. Surely (it might still be said) this is because they are able to achieve less of something that falls within the general ambit of "welfare" than others are on the same share of resources. Perhaps we care about the handicapped because they are able to achieve less enjoyment or relative or overall success, or perhaps it is some discrete combination of these, or all of them. But some tug towards equality of welfare under some inter-

pretation must be part of our intuitions about the handicapped. If so, then this fact might be thought to show that any final theory of equality must provide at least some space for equality of welfare, though perhaps only as a supplement to or qualification of another theory of equality, if only to capture the provisions we insist on making for those who are unfortunate in this particular way.

But it is far from clear that some welfare concept is needed to explain why the handicapped should sometimes have more material resources than the healthy. In the second part of this essay I shall describe a different approach to the problem of handicaps which does not rely on welfare comparisons but which might explain this equally as well. There is no reason to assume, in advance of considering this and other suggestions, that only a welfare-based theory of equality can provide the account that is necessary. In fact (and moreover) a welfare-based theory can provide only a less satisfactory account than might at first appear. The argument we are now considering is that equality of welfare deserves a place, at least, in any general theory of equality, because it so accurately captures our intuitions about how the handicapped should be treated in the name of equality. But is this true? It does seem plausible to say, on any conception of welfare, that people with severe handicaps are likely, as a class, to have less welfare than others. But this is of course true only statistically. In many cases those with handicaps have in consequence less income, and therefore do not have even equal material resources with others. And some people with appalling handicaps need extra income just to survive. But many people with serious handicaps have high levels of welfare on any conception—higher than many others who are not handicapped. That is true, for example, of Tiny Tim and Scrooge. Tim is happier than Scrooge, approves the way the world is going more, is more successful in his own eyes, and so forth.

The intuition I spoke of, however, that those with handicaps should have extra resources, is not limited to those among the handicapped who do in fact have less than average welfare on some conception. If Tim had as much money as Scrooge (when perhaps Tim's welfare would be greater than Scrooge's by an even larger margin) but Tim nevertheless did not have enough money to afford physiotherapy, many of us would think him entitled to extra resources for that pur-

pose. Now of course we might believe this only because our intuitions have been schooled by the statistical fact. On this hypothesis, we feel that the handicapped as a group should have more because their welfare is as a group lower, and we then apply the general intuition to individual cases without checking to see whether the general rule holds. But I do not find that a persuasive account of why we feel as we do. If, when we know that someone handicapped is not particularly low in welfare, we still believe that he is entitled to extra resources in virtue of that handicap, then this is poorly explained by supposing that we have lost the power to discriminate.

So our beliefs about the handicapped are not in fact justified so accurately or powerfully by the idea of equality of welfare as to suggest that any general theory must on that account include some measure of that ideal. The lower-welfare explanation of these beliefs has further shortcomings as well. Suppose that the welfare (on any interpretation) of an entirely paralyzed but conscious person is vastly less than the welfare of anyone else in the community, that putting more and more money at his disposal would steadily increase his welfare but only by very small amounts, and that if he had at his disposal all the resources beyond those needed simply to keep the others alive he would still have vastly less welfare than they. Equality of welfare would recommend this radical transfer, that is, until the latter situation was reached. But it is not plain to me (or I think to others) that equality, considered just on its own, and without regard to the kinds of considerations that sometimes might be thought to override it, really does require or even recommend that radical transfer under these circumstances.

I do not claim (as this last observation recognizes) that any community that embraced equality of welfare in principle would then be committed to the radical transfer. Some other principle the community also accepted (for example the principle of utility) might recommend some compromise with equality here. But where should the line be drawn? It might, perhaps, be left to the practical politics of intuition to draw such a line. But then the victim of total paralysis might well receive nothing at all. The equality principle would in itself offer no reason for the community's accepting an initial utility loss to do him some good that would not also apply to doing him more

good, at least in the circumstances I describe in which the marginal utility to him of further transfers does not much decline. The principle would offer almost no guidance to the community here, beyond a call for help equally strident over the whole range of possible transfers to this victim, a call too impractical to honor in full and too unstructured for principled compromise.

Now suppose different facts. There is an expensive piece of equipment that would enable a paraplegic to lead a much more normal life, and the community can afford that equipment at great but not crippling sacrifice to its other needs and projects. The community votes to levy a special tax to provide this machine for him. But he is an excellent and dedicated violinist, and he replies that he would rather have a superb Stradivarius which he could purchase with the same funds. Can the community properly refuse to honor that choice?⁶ On any of the conceptions of welfare we might choose, the paraplegic's welfare might in fact be increased more by owning the violin than by having the machine. Even if he knew all the facts he would prefer to have it, it would bring him more enjoyment, make his life both relatively and overall more successful in his own eyes and objectively. The independent principle of utility would recommend the same choice, of course.

But these facts would be embarrassing to a scheme that was not committed generally to equality of welfare, and allowed that ideal only a limited place in order to handle the special problem of handicaps. For consider someone else, not handicapped, who has a low level of welfare on all the same conceptions. He takes little enjoyment from his life, counts it a failure, and so forth, just because, though he has the same amount of wealth as everyone else not handicapped, that is not enough to buy the Stradivarius he covets above all else. If the paraplegic is allowed to use his extra funds to buy the violin, that other person might properly complain. The paraplegic treats the transfer, not as the occasion to remove or mitigate his handicap, but simply as an opportunity to increase his welfare in other ways, and the other violin-lover would seem to have, in his low state of welfare, as much claim to do that as the paraplegic has. But if the community

6. See Scanlon's discussion of this problem in "Preference and Urgency," *The Journal of Philosophy* 72, no. 19 (6 November 1975): 659-661.

denies the handicapped person that use of his extra funds, and requires him to buy the machine instead, its position seems perverse. It grants extra funds to him just on the ground that this will increase his lower than average welfare, and yet denies him the right to increase his welfare, with those funds, as much as he can.

X. WELFARISM

If I am right, in the various arguments I have made in this essay, then equality of welfare is not so coherent or attractive an ideal as it is often taken to be. We therefore have reason to consider with some care the alternative ideal of equality of resources. But it is worth stopping now to consider very briefly whether the arguments I have made against equality of welfare might be effective against other forms of welfarism and, in particular, how far they might be effective against utilitarianism. (I am using Amartya Sen's account of welfarism as the general theory that the justice of distributions must be defined exclusively by stipulating some function of individual welfare.)⁷

The different versions of equality of welfare that we have been studying are varieties of welfarism. Utilitarianism, which calls for some maximizing function over some conception of welfare, is another, or rather, another group. Two kinds of justification are in principle available for any form of welfarism. A welfarist theory can be defended on the teleological ground that the stipulated function of the stipulated conception of welfare is something good in itself that ought to be produced for its own sake. Or it can be defended as a particular conception of equality, as a particular theory about when people are being treated as equals. The distinction between these two types of grounds is reasonably clear, I think, in the case of utilitarianism. That theory can be supported in a direct teleological way: not only is pain bad in itself but pleasure (or some other conception of positive welfare) is good in itself, and the more there is of it the better. Or it can be supported as a conception of equality. It is then understood as the theory that people are treated as equals when and only when their pleasures and pains (or components of some other

7. A. K. Sen, "Utilitarianism and Welfarism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 76, no. 9 (September 1979): 463-489.

conception of welfare) are taken into account quantitatively only, each in that sense to count as one and only one. Of course this egalitarian version of utilitarianism cannot, as the teleological version can, purport to supply all of a plausible general political or moral theory. The egalitarian utilitarian would have to explain why it is not as good to aim at maximum average misery as maximum average happiness, for example, or why there is anything to regret in a natural disaster that kills thousands though it improves the situation of a few. But he might find this explanation either in a further political principle, which holds that those who aim at others' misery or failure do not show these others the concern to which human beings, at least, are entitled, or in a distinct morality of outcomes which holds that death or pain or some other kind of suffering is bad in itself, but which uses neither the same conception nor the same metric of welfare as his egalitarian utilitarianism deploys.

The arguments we considered against equality of welfare would seem, at least on a first look, equally effective against utilitarianism when it is understood in that second way, that is, as a conception of equality. Once again we should proceed by stating different interpretations of utilitarianism composed by taking different conceptions of welfare as the maximands for a given community. And once again it will seem implausible only to take gains and losses in enjoyment, for example, or in relative success, as the measure of when people are being treated as equals, because people value welfare in these particular conceptions differently. Nor will it be helpful to take gains and losses in overall success, interpreted either subjectively or objectively, as the measure, because, as we saw, these conceptions of welfare depend on already having accepted a different, independent test of when people are being treated as equals.

These various arguments are plainly beside the point, however, when utilitarianism is supported in the first way, that is, as the teleological theory that welfare on some conception is inherently good in itself. Against that argument my claim, that people cannot be treated as equals by making them equal in some dimension they value unequally, is irrelevant, because what is then in question is only whether welfare on that conception is good in itself. I might add that I think that the teleological ground of utilitarianism, which my arguments

do not touch, is much less appealing than the egalitarian ground, which they do. It is the egalitarian ground, I think, rather than the teleological ground, that accounts for whatever appeal utilitarian arguments still have for modern politicians and lawyers.

The distinction between these two types of grounds for welfarist theories might seem less plausible when applied to forms of welfarism other than utilitarianism. But it is available at least in principle, I think, and we can construct a teleological defense of at least some conceptions of equality of welfare. Someone might say that it is simply a good thing when people have the same amount of enjoyment, for example, whether or not everyone agrees that enjoyment is fundamentally important in their own lives, or even, perhaps, whether they ought to agree that it is important in that way. The arguments I have offered do not reach equality of welfare conceived and defended in that way. They are aimed at equality of welfare taken to be a theory about treating people as equals. Equality of welfare, so conceived, is weaker than we might initially have thought. Is equality of resources stronger?

Derek Parfit has been outstandingly generous and helpful in commenting on drafts of this essay, and I have followed his advice at many points. I am also indebted to the Editors of *Philosophy & Public Affairs* for their acute comments.

Part 2 of this article will appear in the next issue.