

TOWARD A DEMYSTIFICATION OF EGALITARIANISM*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the recent literature of distributive justice, philosophers have debated whether distributional equality could be intrinsically valuable.¹ Following their terminology, we will use the term “egalitarianism” to label the view that equal distribution of (at least) certain goods has intrinsic value.² Accordingly, we will call those who acknowledge the intrinsic value of distributional equality “egalitarians,”³ and their opponents “non-egalitarians.”⁴ There are different theoretical approaches, such as

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¹ N. Holtug, and K. Lippert-Rasmussen (eds.) *Egalitarianism: New Essays on the Nature and Value of Equality* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007).

² The egalitarian does not have to claim that equal distribution of any good is intrinsically valuable; she only needs to maintain that equal distribution of some goods has intrinsic value. A list of distributional goods may include freedom and rights, opportunities, happiness, capabilities, respect, income and wealth, etc. Here, “distributional goods” should be understood broadly, including not only direct metrics of distribution, but also distributive states that are achieved by appeal to the metrics of distribution.

³ A. Marmor, “The Intrinsic Value of Economic Equality,” *Meyer, Paulson and Pogge* (2003) 127–43; L. H. Meyer, S. L. Paulson, and T. W. Pogge (eds.) *Rights, Culture, and the Law: Themes from the Legal and Political Philosophy of Joseph Raz* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003); D. McKerlie, “Equality,” *Ethics* 106 (1996): 274–96; Steiner, H. “Equality, Incommensurability, and Rights,” *Meyer, Paulson and Pogge* (2003) 119–27; L. S. Temkin, *Inequality* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996); L. S. Temkin, “Egalitarianism Defended,” *Ethics* 113 (2003a): 764–82; L. S. Temkin, “Personal versus Impersonal Principles: Reconsidering the Slogan,” *Theoria* 69 (2003b): 21–31.

⁴ E. S. Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?” *Ethics* 109 (1999): 287–37; H. Frankfurt, “Equality as a Moral Ideal,” *Ethics* 98 (1987): 21–43; H. Frankfurt, “Equality and Respect,” *Social Research*

utilitarianism, sufficientarianism, and prioritarianism, which might justify an equal (or more equal rather than less⁵) pattern of distribution, but those approaches would make the value of equal distribution non-intrinsic. What distinguishes egalitarianism from those competing theories is its insistence on the intrinsic value of distributional equality.

It is important to define what is meant by “intrinsic value.” In this paper, we follow a standard usage, according to which x is intrinsically valuable if x is valuable for its own sake, or in other words, valuable as an end.^{6,7} Two remarks are worth mentioning. First, something can be intrinsically valuable even if its value derives from deeper values or reasons.⁸ For example, suppose that beauty is an intrinsic value. But there could be deeper reasons and values (aesthetic or otherwise) that explain why beauty is valuable. We should distinguish intrinsic values from fundamental values, values that are not grounded by any other values. The mere fact that the value of something is based on other values is no reason to deny that it could still be intrinsically valuable.

Second, something can be intrinsically valuable even if its value is contingent on certain conditions. The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic values is not parallel with the distinction between unconditional and conditional values. For something to be an intrinsic value, it does not have to be valuable (much less intrinsically valuable) in every context—it only needs to be so in some circumstances. For instance, pleasure is a typical example of intrinsic value. But as Jonathan Dancy argues, pleasure might be not valuable in certain circumstances, such as the circumstances in which one feels happy about killing a baby.⁹ For our

64 (1997): 3–15; D. Parfit, “Equality and Priority,” *Ratio* 10 (1997): 202–21; P. Railton, “The Problem of Well-Being: Respect, Equality, and the Self,” *ISUS-X, Tenth Conference of the International Society for Utilitarian Studies*, 1–30; J. Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988); J. Raz, “On the Value of Distributional Equality,” *Legal Research Papers Series* 41 (2008): 1–19.

⁵ The egalitarian can agree that there could be *pro tanto* reasons in favor of an *unequal* distribution of some goods (such as income and wealth), although there are *pro tanto* reasons in favor of an *equal* distribution. So, the egalitarian does not have to propose a strictly equal distribution of goods, but only a more equal rather than less pattern of distribution.

⁶ Some philosophers may adopt a different terminology. For example, Korsgaard uses the term “intrinsic value” in the sense that x is an intrinsic value if the value does not depend upon anything external to x (Korsgaard 1983). She seems to equate the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic values with the distinction between non-relational and relational values. For our purpose, we stick with the standard usage of “intrinsic value” adopted by most egalitarians/non-egalitarians (Parfit 1997; Raz 2008).

⁷ C. M. Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” *The Philosophical Review* 92 (1983): 169–95.

⁸ See Footnote 4.

⁹ J. Dancy, *Ethics without Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

purpose, we only need to argue that distributional equality is intrinsically valuable under certain conditions or in certain circumstances, but not that it is always intrinsically valuable.

Of course, although non-egalitarians cast doubts upon the intrinsic value of distributional equality, they do not deny that distributional equality could be valuable in other ways. Distributional equality can be instrumentally valuable if equal distribution of goods causally brings about other valuable states of affairs (e.g., peace, social harmony, and non-domination). Moreover, distributional equality can be valuable as a by-product of promoting other values. For example, suppose that it is valuable for a person to enjoy freedom. Then it seems to follow that it is also valuable for everyone to enjoy freedom. The equal distribution of freedom is valuable indeed, but, according to the non-egalitarian, valuable only as a side effect of promoting freedom *maximally* or *universally*.

In this article, we will attempt to demystify the doctrine of egalitarianism by pointing out where the intrinsic value of distributional equality could lie. Our paper is structured as follows. In the next section, Section 2, we will introduce the famous “leveling-down” objection, which seems to raise a serious challenge to egalitarianism. The reason why the leveling-down objection is quite troublesome to the egalitarian is that it is hard to find how distributional equality could benefit people intrinsically. In Section 3, we will attempt to argue that distributional equality can be connected to people’s well-being in an intrinsic way. First, by drawing upon dispositional theories of value in contemporary metaethics, we will propose that it is (epistemically) reasonable to regard x as an intrinsic value for a person S if S rationally desires x for its own sake. Second, we will argue by thought experiment that people can rationally desire the equal distribution of certain goods for its own sake in certain circumstances. In Section 4, we will consider two possible objections and attempt to show that neither of them seriously threatens our main thesis. Then we conclude that the intrinsic value of equality should play an ineliminable justificatory role in distributive justice.

II. THE LEVELING-DOWN OBJECTION

In the current section, we will discuss the famous “leveling-down objection” to egalitarianism. Consider two persons, Jane and John, who are unequal in the possession of some kind of good, G . Suppose that Jane has a greater amount of G than John does—say, Jane has 200 units, whereas John has 100 units. There are three ways of achieving the equality of G between Jane and John: (1) we bring external 100 units of G to John so that each has 200 units of G (a leveling-up case); (2) we take 50 units away from Jane and give them to John so that each has 150 units (we call it a “leveling-between case”); and (3) we take 100 units away from

Jane without giving them to John so that each has 100 units (a leveling-down case).

Needless to say, everyone would agree that the leveling-up situation is better than the original unequal position. Furthermore, we may probably have the intuition that the leveling-between situation is also better than the original unequal situation, even if the overall utility is the same in the two situations.¹⁰ But the non-egalitarian would insist that the value of equal distribution is just a by-product of promoting other values in the two cases. For example, the non-egalitarian may appeal to utilitarianism to explain why the leveling-up situation is better than the original unequal situation by pointing out the fact that leveling up increases John's quantity of *G* and hence promotes the overall utility. And the non-egalitarian may attempt to explain why the leveling-between situation is also better than the original position by appeal to the prioritarian reason that the *moral* value of benefiting the worse off is greater than that of benefiting the better off.^{11,12}

Since it is controversial whether equality makes any contribution to the increase of values in either the leveling-up or the leveling-between case, the non-egalitarian invites us to consider the leveling-down case, which seems a clearer test on the possible value of distributional equality. The leveling-down objection goes as follows:

1. If egalitarianism is true, then the leveling-down situation *D* would contain some intrinsic value, which it not had by the original unequal situation *O*.
2. If *D* contains some distinctive intrinsic value, then *D* would be better than *O* in some respect.
3. Thus, if egalitarianism is true, then *D* would be better than *O* in some respect.
4. But *D* is no better than *O* in any respect.
5. Therefore, egalitarianism is false.

Peter Railton gives a vivid example to illustrate this leveling-down challenge to egalitarianism:

Suppose there is a genetic difference among actual humans that is normally expressed in differences in the resilience or intensity of the respect they have for others. People with the *R* allele, say, are harder to push into disrespect for others out of stress, disappointment, fear, etc. than those with the

¹⁰ Here let us assume that the 50 units of *G* bring to John an amount of utility that is the same as the amount of utility taken from Jane.

¹¹ See Footnote 4.

¹² R. Arneson, "Luck Egalitarianism and Prioritarianism," *Ethics* 110 (2000): 339–49.

NR allele. Now this is also an inequality in respect. *R* individuals will, for example, feel and show respect for others in conditions where the *NR* individuals around them fail to do so. Suppose that otherwise *R* individuals are no happier or more prosperous than *NR* individuals—perhaps those more easily pushed into disrespect also have more gratifying experiences of restoring their respect for others, say. The inequality, then, is limited to respect. Suppose there is no treatment to replace the *NR* allele with *R*, but there is a button you can push to eliminate the *R* in future generations. Would there be anything to be said for that? A systematic inequality in respect would be eliminated. Of course, there might be something to be said for looking for a way to make the *R* allele universal. But then the rationale could be increasing respect for others. (Railton¹³)

If we equalize the amount of respect by making the *R* allele universal, this leveling-up situation would contain new intrinsic values. But it seems that this is not due to the intrinsic value of distributional equality, but an increase in a kind of intrinsic value (i.e., respect). Then, Railton asks, what intrinsic value can the leveling-down action possibly bring about? The egalitarian cannot just desperately reply that leveling down brings about the value of equality. The egalitarian is obligated to explain how distributional equality is intrinsically connected to the promotion of some values. The leveling-down objection seems to raise a serious challenge to egalitarianism.

We admit that it is a hard task to show where the intrinsic value of distributional equality lies. This is hard because a successful argument for egalitarianism probably needs to show that distributional equality is intrinsically valuable in ways that can promote people's well-being. Let me introduce what we call the "person-benefiting principle" below:

If realizing or instantiating a putative value can never benefit persons, then that putative value is not a genuine value.¹⁴

As Raz argues, if distributional equality cannot promote people's well-being, it would be dubious to regard it as a value. There are two strategies the egalitarian may adopt for meeting Raz's challenge. She can either argue that distributional equality somehow benefits people (intrinsically), or simply reject the person-benefiting principle. But there are serious costs with the second approach. Raz puts it this way:

Given its historical and political background, egalitarianism may well wish to pursue the first avenue . . . Even if there are values which cannot benefit people the view that equality is among them would surprise and disappoint most egalitarians, as the ethos of egalitarianism is deeply humanist, that is concerned with the fortunes of people. (Raz¹⁵)

¹³ Railton, *Tenth Conference of the International Society for Utilitarian Studies*, 4.

¹⁴ See Footnote 4.

¹⁵ Raz, *Legal Research Papers Series* 10.

We agree with Raz that the person-benefiting requirement applies to egalitarianism, even if it may not work for other values. It would be odd if a pattern of distribution of goods did not matter to people's well-being. In this paper, we will assume the truth of the person-benefiting principle without further discussion. For the sake of brevity, we will use the phrase "valuable for a person" interchangeably with "benefiting a person" or "promoting a person's well-being."

On the person-benefiting principle, distributional equality is intrinsically valuable only if it is intrinsically valuable for (at least some) people. But there seems to be a strong intuition that a person's well-being only depends upon the absolute, or non-comparative features of her life, but not (intrinsically) upon how she compares to others (call it the "absoluteness thesis"). Thus, whether a person enjoys an equal amount of good with others seems irrelevant to her well-being (at least not relevant in an intrinsic way). If the absoluteness thesis were true, then it would follow that the value of distributional equality cannot be intrinsically related to people's well-being. And given the person-benefiting principle, it would conclude that distributional equality cannot have intrinsic value. Here is the argument:

1. Distributional equality has intrinsic value only if it is intrinsically valuable for people.
2. But a person's well-being only depends upon the absolute, or non-comparative features of her life, but not (intrinsically) upon how she compares to others.
3. That is, distributional equality cannot be intrinsically valuable for people.
4. Therefore, distributional equality has no intrinsic value.

III. DISTRIBUTIONAL EQUALITY, INTRINSIC VALUE, AND RATIONAL DESIRE

By relying on some quick intuition, many philosophers conclude that distributional equality is not intrinsically valuable for people. We rather suggest that we should first determine how to find out whether something has intrinsic value or not. To answer this question, we'd better consider paradigms of intrinsic personal values, such as pleasure. Why do philosophers almost universally agree that pleasure is intrinsically valuable for people? What is the *evidence* for this claim? A natural answer is that this is because people rationally desire pleasure for its own sake.¹⁶

¹⁶ Here we use the term "desire" in a broad sense to refer to any motivational state that has a "world-to-mind" direction of fit. The object of a desire could be either a particular thing or a state of affairs.

The thought of connecting values with desires has a long history in ethics.^{17,18} In contemporary metaethics, this tradition has been highly developed and sophisticatedly elaborated by various sorts of theories that aim to reduce evaluative properties to desire-based dispositional properties.¹⁹ For example, Peter Railton proposes a famous account of non-moral goodness that appeals to rational desires or wants, according to which x is non-morally good for A if and only if an idealized self of A , A^+ , would want A to want x were A^+ to find himself in the actual condition and circumstances of A .²⁰

However, in this paper we are not proposing any dispositional account of value; for the time being we remain completely silent to the metaethical question of whether values are desire-based dispositional properties. All we wish to stress here is just that our *knowledge* about what things are valuable is typically based on evidence regarding rational desirability—this phenomenon on value epistemology is exactly the starting point from which a dispositional theory of value is developed. We do think that it would be fruitful for our current ethical and political inquiries if we draw upon the resources of dispositional theories of value, which pay much attention to the close relationship between values and rational desires.

Now we want to tentatively propose an epistemic principle concerning intrinsic personal value as follows:

(Principle *D*) It is (epistemically) reasonable to regard x as an intrinsic value for a person S if S rationally desires x (as part of her life) for its own sake.

It is worth noticing two points. First, although it is very hard to give an accurate definition of “rational,” it would be helpful to list several typical conditions on the rationality of desires: (1) *Freedom from errors*. A desire is rational only if it is a result of correct (descriptive) beliefs and competent reasoning. (2) *Freedom from ignorance*. A rational desire must be based on full descriptive information about the relevant situation. (3) *Consistency*. For a desire to be rational, it must be coherent with other desires obtained by the agent. For example, there shouldn’t be inconsistency between first-order and second-order desires, between basic and derivative desires, etc. (4) *Generalizability*. Suppose that someone has a particular desire, but doesn’t think that others in similar circumstances should also have this

¹⁷ D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978).

¹⁸ J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).

¹⁹ D. Lewis, “Dispositional Theories of Value,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. 63 (1989): 113–37; P. Railton, “Moral Realism,” *The Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 163–07; M. Smith, “Exploring the Implications of the Dispositional Theory of Value,” *Noûs* 36 (2002): 329–47.

²⁰ See Footnote 19.

desire. Her desire is perhaps not rational because it is not generalizable. (5) *Counterfactual stability*. A desire is counterfactually stable if the agent not only desires x but also judges that she should desire x in counterfactual situations. Suppose that someone actually desires x , but judges that she doesn't have to stick with this desire if she didn't desire x in a counterfactual situation. The person's desire is probably irrational because it is not counterfactually stable.²¹

Second, in order for something to be a value *for* someone, the person must rationally *desire* it (as part of her life), not just merely *endorse* or *believe in* its value. Imagine we somehow know that there is a beautiful forest in a remote planet but we can never observe the forest by any means. Suppose that while we *believe* that the forest is beautiful, we don't really *desire* it (although we may desire that there be such a forest in our city). Then probably the beautiful forest is not valuable for *us*, even if it may be valuable as such.

In what follows, we will argue that people can rationally desire equal distribution of certain goods for its own sake in certain circumstances. We can easily decide whether we rationally desire certain things (e.g., pleasure) for its own sake. But it is much more difficult to appeal to a quick intuition to judge whether we have the same attitude toward distributional equality. So, we attempt to appeal to thought experiments to reveal our intuitions on distributional equality. Let's introduce two cases regarding distribution of respect and distribution of freedom.²²

III.1. Respect

Consider two planets, α and β . α -dwellers show a minimal level of respect to each other. They do respect others' dignity and rights, and regard some actions (e.g., killing, beating, manipulation, rape, and stealing) as morally impermissible.

²¹ We are not sure if the last two conditions are necessary for rationality—it depends upon different theories of rationality. But since we attempt to connect rational desires with values, we intentionally make the conditions of rationality stronger than, say, the conditions of procedural rationality. We will argue that the desires for distributional equality can satisfy those requirements.

²² Before we proceed, there is something we want to note in passing. Raz seems to believe that if the equal distribution of some good G is intrinsically valuable, then G itself must be also intrinsically valuable (Raz 2008). We are not sure if the intrinsic value of equal distribution of G necessarily requires that G is intrinsically valuable. At least, this does not seem to be a conceptual truth. Even though G is not intrinsically valuable, it is still possible that the equal distribution of G somehow has intrinsic value. Take *moral* value as an analogy. Although health care per se is just a personal good rather than a moral value, the equal distribution of health care may be morally worthy or even morally required. Similarly, although income and wealth, for example, have no intrinsic value, it is possible that the equal distribution of income and wealth is intrinsically valuable (Marmor 2003). This may or may not be true, but Raz has not provided any arguments to bolster his claim. But in order to make our position more solid, we will focus on equal distribution of intrinsic goods, such as respect and freedom.

But besides that, they are cold hearted and disrespectful. They seldom have warm feelings to each other, and don't care whether their behaviors would hurt others' feelings—they always criticize, mock, and despise their fellows. In contrast, β -dwellers are very warm hearted. They always try to be as nice as possible to each other, even under depressing and stressful circumstances. In a word, we can say that β -dwellers enjoy a substantially higher level of reciprocal respect than α -dwellers. But there is one thing in common between α -dwellers and β -dwellers. Both α -dwellers and β -dwellers would treat any aliens coldly and disrespectfully (at the same level as α -dwellers treat their kind). That is, whereas on planet α there is an equal distribution of respect no matter whether aliens immigrate there, on planet β an alien would be treated with less amount of respect than the original dwellers are treated. Let's suppose that the differences between α and β would not lead to any further good or bad consequences.

Now imagine that the earth is no longer livable (perhaps due to global warming) and we need to immigrate to another planet. We can choose to immigrate to either α or β . Suppose that we know many things about the two planets, including the above-mentioned facts. Suppose also that we will show the same amount of respect to people in the two planets as they show to us no matter which planet we will live on. The question is: Which planet would we choose to live on? We have a strong intuition that we would desire to live on planet α .

III.II. *Freedom*

Consider again two planets—for the sake of convenience, we also call them α and β . On planet α , everyone is entitled to the same scope of freedom, including political liberties, property rights, freedom of speech, etc. But for some reason, they lack the freedom of religion; they are forced to embrace one particular religion, R . On planet β , everyone possesses at least the scope of freedom α -dwellers possess. But there is one difference: Original β -dwellers enjoy one additional sort of freedom, that is, freedom of religion, whereas immigrants do not—like α -dwellers, they must also embrace religion R . In a word, while on planet α there is an equal distribution of freedom no matter whether aliens immigrate there, on planet β an alien would possess a narrower scope of freedom than original dwellers have. Suppose further that the differences between α and β would not lead to any further good or bad consequences.

Now we need to immigrate to another planet. We can choose to immigrate to either α or β . Suppose that we know many things about the two planets, including the above-mentioned facts. Suppose also that we don't want to embrace that particular religion. The question is: Which planet would we choose to live on? Again, we have a strong intuition that we would desire to live on planet α .

There is no reason to deny that our desires in the two cases are rational. The desires are not based on any errors, incompetence, or ignorance. Nor there is any inconsistency between the desires and other desires in our psychological system. Moreover, the desires seem to pass the generalizability test. In our example, we ask ourselves which planet we want to live. The answer is α -planet. But suppose that there is a stranger, Smith, who is deciding which planet he should immigrate to. Do we think that Smith should also choose planet α ? The answer seems yes. Finally, the desires also pass the counterfactual test. Imagine that in a counterfactual world we don't care whether we are treated differently. We only care about the absolute level of respect or freedom we can enjoy. No more desires of ours would be satisfied if we live on α -planet. Now, which planet do we think we *should* live on in the counterfactual situation? The answer, we're afraid, is the same.

We prefer to live on α -planet (an egalitarian society) than β -planet, even though, as we have assumed, all other things are equal. Since we know that this choice won't lead to other good consequences, it is reasonable to say that we *intrinsically* desire living on α , not for other purposes. Then according to principle *D*, it is reasonable to say that living on α -planet is intrinsically valuable for us (given that our desires are rational). The general lesson is that what matters to our well-being are not only the absolute, non-comparative features of our life, but also how our life compares with the life of others. The absoluteness thesis is thus problematic.

Now we are in a position to answer the question raised by the leveling-down objector. Consider two possible situations. In one situation, an earthling lives on α (call it situation *A*), whereas in the other she lives on β (call it situation *B*). Situation *A* can be regarded as a leveling-down result of situation *B*. In situation *B*, there is inequality regarding respect or freedom: An earthling enjoys a smaller amount of respect or freedom than other original β -dwellers. But in situation *A*, everyone enjoys as much respect or freedom as an earthling possesses in situation *B*. As we have argued, whereas living on α -planet could be intrinsically valuable for the earthling, living on β -planet wouldn't have this kind of value—that is to say, leveling down would bring the earthling a distinctive, equality-based intrinsic value. To generalize, leveling down can intrinsically benefit people that are worse off in the original unequal position.²³ Since anyone's well-being counts, it is reasonable to conclude that equal distribution is intrinsically valuable at least in a *pro tanto* sense—it is another issue whether or not this value outweighs the loss caused by leveling down.

²³ Needless to say, equal distribution of respect is not intrinsically valuable for people who are better off in the original unequal position.

It is worth noticing that our thought experiments allow the chooser to know her immigration status. But according to many contractualists,²⁴ if we want to figure out what kind of distribution people should choose for the whole society, the choosers should not know where they will end up in the society for which they choose. However, as we mentioned, the aim of our thought experiments is not to find what kind of distribution, overall speaking, we should choose, but just to discuss whether equal distribution can have intrinsic value. For our purposes, it is fine to assume that the person knows where she will end up. It is possible that β is overall better than α , supposing that the greater goods override the value of equality (accordingly, a rational person without knowing her immigration status would choose β rather than α). The egalitarian can agree with this, as she is only committed to the view that equal distribution has *pro tanto* value, but not the view that equality is the *overriding* value in every context.²⁵

In this paper, we use respect and freedom as tenable examples for vindicating the intrinsic value of distributional equality. We believe that our discussion of respect can be generalized to argue for the intrinsic value of equal distribution of some other goods, such as care and opportunities. But here we only need to argue that equal distribution of *some* goods is intrinsically valuable—the equal distribution of what particular goods can have intrinsic value could be a thesis for discussion on another occasion.

IV. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

In this section, we will consider three possible objections and attempt to show that neither of them really threatens our main thesis.

1. Someone might say that it is not always the case that we (intrinsically) desire distributional equality. In some circumstances, we may be indifferent to whether other people live better than us. Quite a few philosophers appeal to thought experiments regarding remote galaxies for rejecting egalitarianism. For instance, Raz invites us to imagine the scenario below:

Imagine that a state of ideal equality prevails on our planet. However, there is another planet, in a galaxy too remote for us to be able to interact with, where there are human beings living in conditions of ideal equality with each other, but whose conditions are not equal to those of people on planet earth, not equal in the respect in which equality is a good thing. The people in either planet do not know of the existence of the other, nor can they find out (given the laws of nature). Bertie is one of those people. He lives on earth. The question is: Would Bertie benefit if the conditions of

²⁴ J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

²⁵ We thank the anonymous referee for bringing up this point.

the people on the other planet changed and became equal to the conditions of his life (and that of other people on earth)? (Raz²⁶)

Let's borrow Raz's example back to our current cases. Suppose that in some possible world w_1 , people on that remote planet receive a greater amount of respect or freedom than earthlings do. Now consider another possible world, w_2 , in which earthlings possess the same amount of respect or freedom as they do in possible world w_1 , but the amount of goods people on the remote planet receive is leveled down to the amount of goods earthlings possess. Again, suppose that the difference between the two possible worlds won't lead to any further good or bad consequences. Should we earthlings desire to live in w_2 rather than w_1 ? No. It seems we are indifferent to the two options. Thus, since the worse off don't always rationally desire equal distribution of goods, it seems to follow that equal distribution of goods is not an intrinsic value for the worse off.

Our reply would be very simple. The value of distributional equality depends upon the context in which distributional equality is imposed. To be more specific, the value of distributional equality depends upon whether equal distribution is established within the same *society* or not. Here we use the term "society" in the sense that people are in the same society if they can have social, political, economic, and symbolic interactions with each other. In the contemporary era of globalization, the boundary of a society is beyond the boundary of a village, a city, or even a country; the scope of the society for a human being probably includes the most part (if not the whole) of the earth. As some philosophers argued, it may be just a normative fact that we should care about comparisons with other fellows in the same society, but not with people that are too remote to engage us.²⁷

People who use examples regarding remote galaxies to refute egalitarianism seem to have a (false) assumption that if equal distribution is intrinsically valuable, then it must be intrinsically valuable in every circumstance. As we have mentioned at the beginning, intrinsic values could be conditional values. In order to argue against non-egalitarians, we don't have to argue that equal distribution is always intrinsically valuable; rather, we only need to argue that equal distribution is intrinsically valuable in certain circumstances.

2. Someone might contend that the desire for distributional equality is nothing but a particular instance of *envy-based* desires. As psychologists and anthropologists may point out, humans generally don't want to live less well than their *fellows*—the emotion of envy seems to be deeply rooted in human psychology. The envy-rooted psychology can explain why we have the desire to live on α -planet rather than β -planet even though the absolute level of goods is the same;

²⁶ Raz, *Legal Research Papers Series* 11.

²⁷ See Footnote 3.

it can also explain why we don't care whether people on a remote planet live better than we do. But it is hard to say that an envy-driven desire is indicative of any value. Even if the desire for distributional equality satisfies all the requirements of rationality we listed, it does not necessarily follow that distributional equality is (intrinsically) valuable—perhaps because rational desirability is not a sufficient condition for genuine values.

We have two responses. First, we don't claim that there is a *necessary* connection between rational desirability and value. Instead, we just want to say that a desire's being rational is *reliable* evidence that the object of the desire is valuable. The non-egalitarian needs to provide independent arguments to show why the objects of so-called "envy-based" desires must be valueless—we will have to place the burden of proof on the shoulders of the non-egalitarian. But if the non-egalitarian merely *labels* any desire involving interpersonal comparison as an envy-based desire, we are happy to admit that the desire for distributional equality is "envy-based" in her terminology. So what? The fact that an alien would feel envy in planet β may indicate that there is something wrong with the distribution of goods in β .²⁸

Second, even if humans generally have envy-based desires the objects of which are valueless, it does not follow that our desire for equal distribution of respect or freedom, a desire after *rational* deliberation, must be the product of our *actual* envy-rooted psychology. If we find some cases in which we don't care, after rational deliberation, whether our fellows possess the same amount of goods with us, then we can show that it is dubious to appeal to envy in explaining why we have the desire for equal distribution of respect.

Let us consider an example concerning distribution of pleasure. Imagine two planets. In one planet (call it planet x), people equally enjoy a reasonable amount of pleasure, say, 100 units, whereas in the other planet (call it planet y), people equally enjoy a substantially higher amount of pleasure, 200 units. Now an earthling, Smith, is deciding which planet he should live on. Suppose that for unknown biological and physical reasons, Smith will have 100 units of pleasure no matter which planet he will live on. If he lives on planet x , there will be an equal distribution of pleasure. But if he lives on planet y , he will enjoy a smaller amount of pleasure than others. Let us assume that all other things are equal. Which planet should Smith choose? It seems that we don't have a strong intuition that Smith should choose planet x over planet y —unlike the respect case and the freedom case, the equal distribution of pleasure does not seem to be intrinsically desirable.²⁹ Since after rational reflection we don't always desire equal distribution of

²⁸ We thank the referee for this suggestion.

²⁹ The discussion of why equal distribution of some goods (e.g., respect) rather than others (e.g., pleasure) is intrinsically valuable is beyond the scope of this paper. Our tentative hypothesis is that

goods, it is unreasonable to explain away our (rational) desire for equal distribution of respect or freedom in terms of envy.

3. Someone may worry that our argument for the intrinsic value of distributional equality (in certain contexts) is paired with an argument for the intrinsic value of inequality in analogous contexts.³⁰ Take the freedom of religion as an example. Consider two planets: *C*-planet in which everyone including aliens must practice a particular religion, and *D*-planet, which is like *C* except that although every original dweller must practice this religion, aliens are free to choose whatever religion to practice. Which planet would you prefer to live in as a resident alien? It seems we would prefer to live in planet *D*.

We agree that a resident alien would probably choose planet *D*. But we tend to believe that this is not because inequality is intrinsically valuable, but because the person would possess more goods (here, the freedom of religion) in *D* than she would have in *C*. To see whether people (rationally) desire inequality for its own sake, let us consider another scenario. Here are two planets, again: *E*-planet in which everyone enjoys the freedom of religion, and *F*-planet, which is like *E* except that only aliens have freedom of religion. Which planet would you prefer to live in as a resident alien? It seems that we do not prefer planet *F* over planet *E*—we would even feel bad about ourselves if we have more desire to live in planet *F* than to live in planet *E*. Therefore, whereas equality can be rationally desired in an intrinsic way, it is not rational to desire inequality for its own sake.

V. CONCLUSION

Parfit makes the distinction between a teleological and a deontological argument for egalitarianism. While a teleological argument normally links the value of distributional equality with the goodness of promoting individuals' well-being, a deontological argument standardly bases the value of distributional equality on some non-personal demand or value (such as the requirement of fairness).^{31,32}

However, we don't think that the two kinds of arguments must be exclusive. It is possible that a distribution is fair because it promotes people's well-being in an appropriate way. Or the vice versa—a distribution makes people's life good because the distribution is fair. We will leave it open the question of which relationship is correct. As we mentioned, intrinsic values do not have to be

equal distribution of goods that involve *interpersonal* relationship such as respect, care, freedom, and opportunities may have intrinsic value, whereas equal distribution of goods that do not involve such relationship like pleasure, health, and capacities is less likely to have intrinsic value.

³⁰ We thank the referee for this point.

³¹ See Footnote 1.

³² See Footnote 4.

fundamental values. Regardless of whether distributional equality derives its value from other values, it could still be intrinsically valuable.

We do not pretend that we have provided a conclusive argument for egalitarianism. We have just proposed a line of thought for demystify the intrinsic value of distributional equality. Of course, we agree that there are non-egalitarian reasons for distribution, such as promoting the overall utility, satisfying urgent needs, and providing people with a sufficient level of capabilities. But what we wish to suggest is that there is an additional egalitarian reason for distribution: That is, we should distribute the goods equally for its own sake, other things being equal. The final pattern of distribution is the result of taking all the considerations into account. But the intrinsic value of equality should play an ineliminable justificatory role in distributive justice.

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