

Draft chapter from *Equality: From Theory to Action*, by John Baker, Kathleen Lynch, Sara Cantillon, Alpha Connelly and Judy Walsh. Do not quote without written permission.

Chapter 5: Dimensions of Equality: A Framework for Theory and Action

In this chapter, we provide a framework for thinking about equality, concentrating on the normative question: what ideals of equality should we believe in? We identify five dimensions of equality, and use them to distinguish between what we call basic equality, liberal egalitarianism and equality of condition. What emerges is a spectrum of views with increasingly ambitious goals for developed societies, and by implication for the relation between these societies and the rest of the world. But we argue that there is a natural path from basic equality to the beliefs of liberal egalitarians, and from those beliefs to equality of condition. We start by saying something about the idea of equality, and why it generates so many different meanings. We then discuss each of the three views in turn. Towards the end of the chapter we outline how this normative framework can be applied to different social groups in different social contexts.¹

The idea of equality

Looked at in a very general way, equality is a relationship, of some kind or other, between two or more people or groups of people, regarding some aspect of those people's lives. If equality were a simple idea, it would be obvious what this relationship is, who it is about, and what aspect of their lives it concerns. Unfortunately, none of these are obvious, and that is why there are many different conceptions of equality.

For a start, the idea of equality is sometimes applied to individuals and sometimes to groups. When the Universal Declaration of Human rights states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, it is referring to each and every individual person. But for good reasons, equality is often discussed in terms of groups, such as women or

ethnic minorities. And of course there are many different and overlapping groups, even in relatively homogeneous societies. Equality between men and women, for instance, would not necessarily involve equality between middle class and working class people, or equality between disabled and non-disabled people. So the first question about equality is 'equality between whom?' (Young, 2001).

Having decided whether we are interested in equality between individuals or between such-and-such groups, the next question is what aspect of their lives are we concerned with. Should we be interested in whether the people have equally good lives overall - in their overall well-being or 'welfare'? Or should we have more tangible aims, like equality of income and wealth? Should our focus be on outcomes such as educational attainment, or on the opportunities people have for achieving these? The question here is 'equality of what?'

Even the task of defining the relationship of equality can be approached in different ways. The clearest case is where two groups or individuals have the same amount of something, like the same incomes. But this is a limited model of equality. It does not seem to be stretching the idea of equality too much, for instance, to say that the aim of ensuring that everyone's basic needs are satisfied is an egalitarian one, even though this may not involve an equal distribution of anything in particular. Again, it is widely considered egalitarian to give priority to the worst off, even if this does not go so far as to ensure that everyone is *equally* well off. And it is surely an egalitarian position to say that there should be a much *more* equal distribution of income, even if no one thinks that incomes should be absolutely equality. To take a different kind of example, a relationship in which a husband dominates his wife is clearly an unequal relationship. But is an equal marriage one in which each spouse has the same *amounts* of something? So the third question is 'what type of relationship?'

Thus, equality can be defined in terms of both individuals and a wide variety of groups, it can relate to many different dimensions of people's lives, and it can refer to many different types of relationship, all of these differences having some kind of basis in the idea of treating people as equals. It follows that far from being a single idea, equality refers to countless ideas, which may have very different implications and may even be incompatible (Rae et al 1981). Another consequence of the variety of ideas of equality is that what we think of as an egalitarian political outlook may be better expressed in terms of a set of related principles of equality rather than in terms of a single principle. It may even be that significantly different types of egalitarian consider their views to be based on the same fundamental principles of equality, and differ most in terms of what they think these principles entail.

Over the last century, there have been many attempts to define equality and to classify types of egalitarianism. The framework developed here is only one alternative, which we think is particularly relevant to contemporary developed societies and to the interdisciplinary and practical project of equality studies. We try to relate it to some of the major theorists of equality, but they do not all fit in very neatly. That is because the categories are meant to distinguish broad approaches to equality rather than to analyse particular theories, and broad classifications always involve a certain amount of simplification and generalisation. Theorising about equality is constantly challenged both by new academic work and even more importantly by social movements of the marginalised and oppressed. The framework below is meant for now, not forever. It is meant to be open enough to allow for different interpretations and perspectives. And it is designed to be relatively *à la carte*: to allow for someone to have liberal egalitarian views in one respect, while believing in equality of condition in another.

Basic equality

Basic equality is the cornerstone for all egalitarian thinking: the idea that at some very basic level all human beings have equal worth and importance, and therefore are equally worthy of concern and respect. It is not easy to explain quite what these ideas amount to, since many of the people who claim to hold them defend a wide range of other inequalities, including the view that some people deserve more concern and respect than others. Perhaps what is really involved in basic equality is the idea that every human being deserves some basic minimum of concern and respect, placing at least some limits on what it is to treat someone as a human being. At any rate, that is how we will define basic equality here.²

The minimum standards involved in the idea of basic equality are far from trivial. They include prohibitions against inhuman and degrading treatment and at least some commitment to satisfying people's most basic needs. In a world in which rape, torture and other crimes against humanity are a daily occurrence, and in which millions of people die every year from want of the most basic necessities, the idea of basic equality remains a powerful force for action and for change. Yet taken on its own, it remains a rather minimalist idea. On its own, it does not challenge widespread inequalities in people's living conditions or even in their civil rights or educational and economic opportunities. It calls on us to prevent inhumanity, but it does not necessarily couch its message in terms of justice as distinct from charity. These stronger ideas only arise in more robust forms of egalitarianism, of the sort to which the rest of this chapter is devoted.

It is surprisingly hard to provide any *arguments* for basic equality. Most people take it for granted that inhuman treatment and destitution are wrong; these ideas seem to be built into the very idea of morality. They are in any case the common assumptions of all modern

political outlooks. We will not survey all these outlooks here. Instead, we will concentrate on a variety of ideas which are particularly important for our times and which can all claim to be genuinely egalitarian.

Liberal egalitarianism

Liberalism has itself been interpreted in many different ways, all of them embracing basic equality but varying quite a lot in terms of the other types of equality they believe in. We mean to include among liberal egalitarians only those liberals who move well beyond basic equality: positions which might be called 'left liberalism' and which are often found in social democratic political movements. Liberal egalitarians typically define equality in terms of individuals rather than groups. But beyond this common assumption, liberal egalitarians hold a wide range of views.³

Equality of what?

Liberal egalitarians vary considerably in their replies to the question, 'Equality of what?'⁴ What ultimately matters, surely, is people's well-being: how well their lives are actually going. So in thinking about equality, one's first impulse is to call for equality of well-being. Unfortunately, that principle faces some serious problems. First of all, people have very different conceptions of what their well-being consists in - very different values concerning the good life. It would be wrong to define equality in a way that reflected only one view about what matters in life. A second major problem is to build into egalitarian principles an appropriate recognition of people's responsibility for their own lives. Even a basic respect for individuals implies a respect for their ability to make important choices in their lives, which may work out for better or worse. By contrast, strict equality of well-being would seem to commit us to taking collective responsibility for every aspect of people's

lives. For these reasons, all contemporary egalitarian theorists have moved at least one step away from the idea of equality of well-being, emphasising in one way or another the conditions that enable people to pursue their own aims rather than well-being itself. But they disagree on how these conditions should be specified.

Below, we identify some of the key factors that affect nearly everyone's well-being or quality of life. We treat these as five *dimensions of equality*: respect and recognition, resources, work, power, and love, care and solidarity. In choosing these five dimensions, we hope to provide a framework which not only helps to map the differences between liberal egalitarians and equality of condition, but also makes it easier to analyse inequality and to develop institutions and policies for the future. We recognise that the five dimensions do not necessarily pick out every aspect of equality and inequality that may be of sociological or political interest. But we think it is sufficiently broad to cover most of the issues that contemporary egalitarians are concerned with.⁵

What kind of relationship?

A key assumption of liberal egalitarians is that there will always be major inequalities between people in their status, resources, work and power. The role of the idea of equality is to provide a fair basis for managing these inequalities, by strengthening the minimum to which everyone is entitled and by using equality of opportunity to regulate the competition for advantage. Liberals vary in both these respects. For some, the minimum to which all should be entitled barely differs from basic equality. Others have a more generous idea of the minimum, for example by using an expanded idea of what count as basic needs, or by defining poverty in relation to the normal activities of a particular society. The most ambitious liberal principle is Rawls's difference principle, which states that 'social and economic

inequalities' should work 'to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged' members of society (Rawls, 1971, p. 83; 1993, p. 6; 2001, pp. 42-43).

Liberal equality of opportunity means that people should in some sense have an equal chance to compete for social advantages. This principle has two major interpretations. The first, non-discrimination or 'formal' equal opportunity, is classically expressed in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) as the principle that all citizens 'are equally eligible for all positions, posts and public employments in accordance with their abilities' (Art. 6). A stronger form of equal opportunity insists that people should not be advantaged or hampered by their social background, and that their prospects in life should depend entirely on their own effort and abilities. Rawls calls this principle 'fair equal opportunity' (1971, p. 73; 2001, pp. 43-44).⁶

To make these ideas more concrete, we now look at the five dimensions of equality, and at some of the ways in which liberal egalitarians have applied the ideas of a minimum standards and equal opportunity in each case.

1. Respect and recognition: universal citizenship, toleration and the private sphere

A fundamental element in the thinking of liberal egalitarians is their commitment to 'social' equality in the sense of recognising the equal public status of all citizens and of tolerating individual and group differences, so long as they respect basic rights. The principle that in the public realm we all share an equal status as citizens is a long-standing democratic belief. The idea is that regardless of our relations in other, non-public spheres - the economy, religion, family life, private associations - we should relate to each other as equals when we are acting as citizens concerned with the collective life of our societies. In this public sphere, we should abstract from all those differences of class, gender, ethnicity and so

on which differentiate us from each other, and meet on the basis of our common identity as citizens. This principle of equal status is reflected in such practices as universal suffrage and the decline in the use of differentiating titles (Walzer 1983: ch. 11; Miller 1997).

The idea of toleration is another deeply entrenched part of the liberal tradition, arising from the religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The citizens of modern, pluralist societies disagree about many fundamental issues of what matters in life and how we should live, and these disagreements are embodied in their different religious commitments, cultural traditions, sexual preferences, family values and so on. We have different 'conceptions of the good', as it is sometimes put. Each of us may deeply disapprove of the values of others. But rather than act to suppress these values and to impose our own, we should tolerate them and 'live and let live'. This toleration is embedded in freedom of conscience and opinion and in the protection of personal relationships from outside interference. It supports the idea that the basic constitutional arrangements of our societies should as far as possible be impartial among these different beliefs.

These elements of the thinking of liberal egalitarians are related to the distinction they make in the name of personal freedom between those aspects of human life that are subject to social and legal regulation and those which are protected against any such interference, a distinction sometimes phrased in terms of the 'public' versus the 'private'.⁷ The idea of religious toleration was facilitated by thinking of religious belief and practice as a private concern that was not an appropriate object of public regulation. Another less explicit exemption was the realm of the family, allowing for male dominance of family affairs regardless of the degree to which women were able to achieve equality in other areas. Neither of these exemptions has been absolute - religions aren't allowed to perform blood

sacrifices, husbands aren't allowed to murder their wives. But the public/private distinction, coupled with the principle of toleration, has protected important spheres of life from egalitarian challenges.⁸

Although these ideas of universal citizenship, toleration and the private sphere are meant to define a sense in which every member of society has an equal status, they are generally considered by liberal egalitarians to be compatible with huge differences in social esteem. Everyone has a right to the status of citizen, but social esteem has to be earned by achievement and is therefore inevitably unequal. In this regard, as in others, it is more accurate to think of liberal egalitarianism as combining the idea of a minimum entitlement with the idea of equal opportunity than to see it as committed to strictly equal respect (cf. Walzer, 1985, ch. 11).

2. Resources: poverty relief and the difference principle

The second dimension of liberal egalitarianism concerns the distribution of what can be called resources in a wide sense of the term. The most obvious resources are income and wealth, and these are the resources that liberal egalitarians typically concentrate on. Assuming that significant inequality in the distribution of resources inevitable, liberal egalitarians aim to regulate this inequality by combining a minimum floor or safety net with a principle of equal opportunity.⁹ The minimum floor is a logical extension of the basic egalitarian commitment to satisfying basic human needs and a central idea of the modern welfare state. Quite where the floor should be and how it should be defined is a continuing issue for liberal egalitarians, illustrated in debates about whether poverty is 'absolute' or 'relative' and whether it can be defined entirely in terms of income or has to include other

resources. The key point is that these liberal egalitarians are more concerned with eliminating poverty than promoting equality of resources.

A more demanding liberal egalitarian principle, at least in theory, is Rawls's difference principle. Like other liberal egalitarians, Rawls assumes that there will be major economic inequalities, explaining that 'the function of unequal distributive shares is to cover the costs of training and education, to attract individuals to places and associations where they are most needed from a social point of view, and so on' (1971, p. 315). But rather than aiming simply at bringing everyone above the poverty line, the worst off should be brought as high up the economic scale as possible. How far this approach takes us towards full equality of resources depends on the degree of inequality necessary to perform the function Rawls sees for it. So it is hard to judge in practical terms quite how much the difference principle departs from an anti-poverty position.¹⁰

Because liberal egalitarians take inequality of resources to be inevitable, they are concerned to ensure that the competition for advantage is as fair as possible and that it is governed by equal opportunity. One of the most difficult problems for liberal egalitarians is that this is a forlorn hope. Major social and economic inequalities inevitably undermine all but the thinnest forms of equal opportunity, because privileged parents will always find ways of advantaging their children in an unequal society.

3. The benefits and burdens of work: occupational equal opportunity

Work is a central fact of human life, but it is double-edged. In some respects it is a burden, something people have to be induced to do by threat or reward. In other ways it is a benefit, not just because it is a major factor determining status, resources and power but because it provides opportunities for social contact, personal satisfaction and self-realization.

Work is immensely varied, consisting of all forms of productive activity, whether paid or unpaid and whether in the formal economy or not. It includes the work people do in households and voluntary bodies, in politics and classrooms. If liberal egalitarians were interested in equality with respect to work, they would need to consider these factors with care. But as with other dimensions of equality, they assume that there will be major inequalities of work.

Perhaps surprisingly, liberal egalitarians have paid little attention to minimum standards. The idea that everyone has a right to work, under minimally decent conditions, is common enough in the modern world. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment' (Article 23, sec. 1). But that idea does not feature much in the writings of liberal egalitarian theorists. Nor, taking work as a burden, do liberal egalitarians have much to say about either the minimum or maximum burden any member of society should bear.¹¹

The central liberal-egalitarian principle for dealing with work, then, is equal opportunity. The 'formal' interpretation of equal opportunity inspires anti-discrimination legislation which makes it illegal to deny education or work to people because of their religion, sex or other specified characteristics. Some countries also prohibit 'indirect' discrimination, which is the use of irrelevant criteria which favour one group over another. An example would be the requirement for employees to be a certain height, if it has no job-related basis, because this indirectly discriminates against women. Rawls's principle of 'fair equal opportunity' has stronger implications, implying that the educational system should try to compensate for the obstacles people from working class and other disadvantaged backgrounds face in

developing their talents compared to people from privileged backgrounds. Since most educational systems do too little in this regard, another implication of fair equal opportunity is the development of 'affirmative action': policies for helping members of disadvantaged groups to compete for and obtain education and jobs. The reasoning is that if members of these groups are under-represented in, say, universities or the professions, this must be because they have not had equal opportunities to develop their abilities. Affirmative action is a way of improving the balance at a later stage, ensuring greater equality of opportunity overall.

Under either interpretation of equal opportunity, it is left to the operation of social institutions - in particular the market and the family - to decide who ends up in which occupations and how tasks are distributed among these occupations. The benefits and burdens attached to different kinds of work are taken as given, even though this has the effect of consigning some people to lives of unmitigated toil.

4. Power relations: civil and personal rights and liberal democracy

The fourth dimension of liberal egalitarianism concerns relations of power. The protection of basic civil and personal rights against the powerful, particularly the state, is a central and long-standing idea within liberalism. These rights include the prohibition of slavery, of torture and of cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment. They encompass equality before the law, protection against arbitrary arrest and a right to the due process of law. Also included are such rights as freedom of movement, the right to own property, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of association. These civil and personal rights are familiar features of modern liberal regimes and can be found in such documents as the American Bill of Rights (1789, although it took

another 75 years and a civil war before slavery was prohibited), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976). Quite what is included in these rights and how they are specified and interpreted has varied. But taken overall, they are one way of setting limits on the degree of inequality of power any society should tolerate.

Liberalism also has a long-standing association with democracy and a certain conception of political equality. The principle that every citizen has an equal say through the ballot box, and the extension of this principle over the past two centuries to all social classes, to women and to ethnic minorities, is clearly an egalitarian idea, and it plays an important role both in reducing economic inequality and in expressing the equal status of all citizens. But we need to contrast these equal political rights with the fact that economically and culturally dominant groups have much more influence on public policy in all liberal democracies than disadvantaged groups. Liberal democracy also assumes that there will necessarily be a power gap between ordinary voters and the people they elect. Elections are seen, primarily, as a method for choosing and limiting the power of decision-makers rather than as a means by which the people engage in self-rule in any meaningful sense. A further feature of liberal democracy is its concentration on what is generally considered 'politics', neglecting power inequalities in the economy, the family, religion and other areas.¹² Liberal democracy and the conception of political equality that goes with it are thus themselves in line with the general idea that liberal equality is about regulating inequality rather than eliminating it. They provide, as before, both a basic minimum and a kind of equal opportunity - largely formal in character - for achieving and exercising power.

5. Love, care and solidarity: a private affair

The fifth dimension of equality we want to identify is conspicuous by its absence from the work of most liberal egalitarians. It is the dimension of love, care and solidarity. When we think of the conditions human beings typically need for even a minimally decent life, it is clear enough that relations of love, care and solidarity with others belong on the list, a point too obvious to labour. But when we turn to the work of liberal egalitarians, there is little discussion of this important good. One line of feminist criticism of liberal egalitarianism has taken this absence to be a symptom of a misplaced emphasis on justice, and has contrasted this approach with the idea of an ethic of care (see for example Behabib, 1992, ch. 6; Held, 1995; cf. Kymlicka, 2002, ch. 9). But in our view, it is an important issue of equality, and therefore of justice, to ask who has access to, and who is denied, relations of love, care and solidarity, whether these relations are reciprocal or asymmetrical, and whether societies operate in ways which help to satisfy or frustrate this human need. Quite how to characterise equality in this dimension, and how to promote it, are difficult questions. But that is different from ignoring it altogether.

The most plausible explanation of the liberal egalitarian neglect of love, care and solidarity is that liberals see these as private matters which individuals should work out for themselves. That stance sits uncomfortably with the fact that many of the institutions of liberal societies are both dependent upon and have a direct impact on these relationships. One of the central concerns of contemporary feminism has been to emphasise the degree to which all societies rely on the love and care typically provided by women to children and other dependents. More generally, the emotional support people get from family and friends plays a vital role in sustaining their capacity to function as workers and citizens. At the same time,

the organisation of work and transportation has an obvious impact on the amount of time workers can spend with their families. And the way the state organises residential facilities for disabled people, or denies accommodation to Travellers or homeless people, has a huge impact on their personal relationships. So it is not surprising that this is an area of tremendous importance in the everyday lives of people in liberal societies. As with the issue of work, the concerns of ordinary people are ahead of those of liberal egalitarian theory.

Were we to construct a more adequate liberal-egalitarian approach to love, care and solidarity, the natural place to start would be with the ideas of a minimum standard and equal opportunity. We would have to consider how to ensure that every member of society had access to an adequate range of loving, caring and solidary relationships, and to address those aspects of our societies which frustrate this important human need. We would also have to consider whether social arrangements systematically work in ways that make it harder for some groups of people to meet these needs than for other groups, since this would be contrary to equal opportunity. But in keeping with the general shape of liberal-egalitarian ideas, we would consider it inevitable that some people would have much greater access to relations of love, care and solidarity than others.¹³

Reform of existing social structures

The discussion so far has concentrated on the key principles endorsed by liberal egalitarians, but the picture would be incomplete without discussing how they think of these principles as being implemented: what social structures or institutions are necessary to put these principles into practice? The vision liberal egalitarians have of the how the world operates and of the possibility of change seems to be based on the assumption that the fundamental structures of modern welfare states are at least in broad outline the best we are

capable of. In saying this we do not mean to imply that liberal egalitarians think that we live in the best of all possible worlds or that there is little we can do to improve the way we manage our societies. But we think they are convinced that certain key features of modern welfare states - including representative government, a mixed economy, a developed system of social welfare, a meritocratic educational system, a specialised and hierarchical division of labour - define the institutional framework within which any progress towards equality can be made, and that the task for egalitarians is to make various adjustments to these structures rather than to alter them in fundamental ways.¹⁴ It is partly because these structures inevitably produce inequality that liberal egalitarians think that inequality is unavoidable, and that the egalitarian agenda must be defined in terms of regulating inequality rather than eliminating it.

Justifying liberal equality

The views of liberal egalitarians represent a tremendous challenge not just to the inequalities of pre-capitalist societies but also to the entrenched inequalities of the contemporary world. Can this challenge be morally justified? Many of the arguments put forward by liberal egalitarians are rooted in the idea of basic equality, the claim of every human being to basic concern and respect. If we are to take these ideas seriously in the context of modern societies in which people have complex and diverse needs and differ profoundly in their moral and political beliefs, we must surely take steps to tolerate their differences, to protect their personal freedoms, and to enable them to participate in decision-making. The ideas of concern and respect also support the principle that everyone should have a decent standard of living, including the resources necessary to exercise their rights and freedoms. The most distinctive idea of liberal egalitarians, equal opportunity, can

be seen as a way of showing basic respect and concern for human beings as rational agents with differing talents and ambitions. Of course, these remarks are not a fully developed argument for liberal egalitarian ideas: they merely indicate the ways in which many authors have attempted to construct one. In any case, the principles of liberal egalitarians are in fact widely accepted in contemporary welfare states (Miller, 1992). But are these principles strong enough? We argue below that they are not.

Basic equality, liberal egalitarianism and human rights

One of the most powerful political advances of our times has been the development of an international movement in support of human rights. Defined over several decades of activism and international negotiation, the human rights agenda is widely seen as setting universal minimum standards for the ways people can be treated, particularly by governments. The idea of human rights is a fundamentally egalitarian idea, resting as it does on the Universal Declaration's claim that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (Art. 1).

In relation to our spectrum of egalitarian views, the human rights agenda clearly encompasses basic equality. It is also closely connected to liberal egalitarianism because it is primarily concerned with the setting of minimum standards and promoting key principles of non-discrimination. Some of the principles proclaimed by liberal egalitarians are more demanding than those included in the major human rights documents. For example, Rawls's principle of fair equal opportunity and his difference principle are both stronger than anything found in the Universal Declaration or the European Convention on Human Rights. But liberal egalitarians and human rights activists have broadly similar aims. This fact alone should

remind us of the strength of the case for liberal egalitarianism and the degree to which its principles have achieved widespread support.

Equality of condition

Liberal egalitarianism is based on the assumption that major inequalities are inevitable and that our task is to make them fair. The idea of equality of condition defines a much more ambitious aim: to eliminate major inequalities altogether, or at least massively to reduce the current scale of inequality.¹⁵ The key to this much more ambitious agenda is to recognise that inequality is rooted in changing and changeable social structures, and particularly in structures of domination and oppression. These structures create, and continually reproduce, the inequalities which liberal egalitarians see as inevitable. But since social structures have changed in the past, it is at least conceivable that they could be deliberately changed in the future. Exactly how to name and analyse these structures and their interaction is a matter of continuing debate, but one way or another they clearly include capitalism (a predominantly market-based economy in which the means of production are privately owned and controlled), patriarchy (systems of gender relationships which privilege men over women), racism (social systems which divide people into 'races' and privilege some 'races' over others) and other systems of oppression.¹⁶

This emphasis on social structures in explaining inequality affects the way equality of condition should be understood. In contrast to the tendency of liberal egalitarians to focus on the rights and advantages of individuals, equality of condition also pays attention to the rights and advantages of groups. In contrast to liberal egalitarians' tendency to concentrate on how things are distributed, equality of condition pays more attention to how people are related, particularly through power relations. In contrast to the tendency of liberal egalitarians to treat

individuals as responsible for their successes and failures, equality of condition emphasises the influence of social factors on people's choices and actions. These contrasts should not be overstated, but they do affect how equality of condition is defined, as will become clearer by looking at its central ideas.

Discussions of equality sometimes contrast the liberal idea of equality of opportunity with the idea of equality of outcome. Although the distinction has a point, it can be misleading, since equality of condition is also concerned with people having a wide range of choices, not with their all ending up the same. The difference is in how equal opportunity is understood. Liberal equal opportunity is about fairness in the competition for advantage. It implies that there will be winners and losers, people who do well and people who do badly. An 'opportunity' in this context is the right to compete, not the right to choose among alternatives of similar worth. So two people can have equal opportunities in this sense even if one of them has no real prospect of achieving anything of value. For example, a society in which only 15 per cent of the population attend third level education could in this liberal sense give everyone an equal opportunity to do so, even though in a stronger sense it would clearly be denying the opportunity for third level education to 85 per cent of the population.

Equality of condition is about opportunities in this stronger sense, what might be called *real* options or *real* choices. In the dimension of respect and recognition, it is about the freedom to live one's life without the burden of contempt and enmity from the dominant culture. In the dimension of resources, it is about having roughly the same range of resource-dependent options as others. In the dimension of work, it means ensuring that everyone is enabled to develop their talents and abilities, and that everyone has a real choice among occupations that they find satisfying or fulfilling. In the dimension of power, it means the

roughly equal ability of each person to influence the decisions that affect their lives. In the dimension of love, care and solidarity, it means promoting circumstances in which everyone can form a roughly equal range of valuable human attachments. Inevitably these fields of choice will lead to different outcomes, but these outcomes, precisely because they are the result of choices among alternatives of similar worth, and thereby leave people with roughly similar prospects for further choices, represent the best interpretation of the idea of equality of condition. To make these ideas more precise, we return to the five dimensions of equality.

1. Respect and recognition: critical inter-culturalism

Like liberal egalitarianism, equality of condition includes the principle of universal citizenship as an expression of the basic equality of status of all citizens. Where it differs from liberalism is in relation to the ideas of toleration and the public/private distinction. The liberal tradition's commitment to respecting and tolerating differences is one of its great strengths. However, critics of liberalism have pointed out that toleration is not always quite what it seems, since it is perfectly possible to tolerate someone while retaining a sense of one's own superiority. Thus, dominant cultures can 'tolerate' subordinate ones, but not vice versa. The dominant view is still seen as the normal one, while the tolerated view is seen as deviant. There is no suggestion that the dominant view may itself be questionable, or that an appreciation of and interaction with subordinate views could be valuable for both sides.¹⁷

For these reasons, supporters of equality of condition tend to talk about the appreciation or celebration of diversity, and to say that differences from the norm are to be welcomed and learned from rather than simply permitted. We should be glad to have in a multi-cultural society, to live among people with different sexual orientations, and so on. While this shift from 'tolerate' to 'celebrate' is of real value, it can mislead us into thinking

that it is wrong to criticise beliefs we disagree with, that the politically correct view is to cherish all difference. That could not possibly be a coherent position, if for no other reason than that not every group is prepared to celebrate - or even to tolerate - others. In fact, one of the common themes of writers who want to celebrate difference is that the dominant culture itself needs to be critically assessed, particularly if its sense of identity depends on belittling others. And since it seems to be the case that all cultures are shaped by oppressive traditions, none can be considered to be above criticism.

This conclusion is strengthened by a significant difference between liberal egalitarianism and equality of condition concerning the definition of the 'private' sphere, the area of life that ought to be protected from regulation by either law or social convention. Equality of condition accepts the idea of a private sphere, but it rejects the way that sphere has been defined in the past for protecting certain forms of oppression: in particular, the oppression of women and children inside both families and religions (Okin, 1989; Cohen, 2000; Kymlicka 2002, ch. 9). If we are truly committed to equality of recognition, we cannot cordon off these important spheres of life from critical scrutiny. By redrawing the line between public and private, equality of condition widens the scope for criticising and transforming both dominant and subordinate cultures.

In the end, we show more respect for others by engaging critically with their beliefs than by adopting a *laissez-faire* attitude. The real task is to engage in such criticism in an open and dialogical spirit, instead of speaking from the presumed superiority of one's own way of thinking. Such a dialogue often reveals that there is more common ground between apparently divergent views than meets the eye, and that there are centres of resistance within even the most oppressive cultures.¹⁸ We have adopted the label 'critical inter-culturalism'

for this relation of mutually supportive and critical dialogue between members of different social groups.

The principle of critical inter-culturalism applies to a wide range of social institutions, as the chapters in Part II demonstrate. How law, politics and the economy operate are all significant in reinforcing or denying respect and recognition. But these issues are particularly taken up in chapters 10 and 11, in our discussions of education and language.

We noted above that liberal egalitarians are generally quite comfortable with inequality of social esteem. Perhaps this is because most liberal egalitarian theorists are members of high-status professions. The world looks very different from the point of view of those with low social status, who are in a position to recognise more clearly the contribution of accident, indoctrination and fashion in deciding who is due high esteem and who is not. For as long as human beings exist, there will always be attitudes of admiration and disdain, but the idea of equality of condition calls on us to limit their range. Without such limits, inequality of esteem is all too easily translated into inequality in all of the other dimensions of equality.

2. Equality of resources

In contrast to liberal egalitarianism, equality of condition aims at what can best be described as equality of resources. Like liberal egalitarianism, it recognises income and wealth as key resources. But the idea of resources naturally includes a number of other goods which people find useful in achieving their aims in life. For example, Bourdieu (1986) has emphasized the importance to people's prospects of what he calls social and cultural capital. Social capital consists of the network of social relationships to which people have access, while cultural capital is the cultural knowledge, abilities and credentials they can make use of. A person's resources also include those aspects of their access to goods and

services that are not determined solely by income and wealth, such as their rights to public services like health care and education and their right not to be excluded from privately provided goods and services by discriminatory treatment. Finally, resources also include environmental factors such as a safe and healthy environment, the geographical arrangement of cities, the accessibility of buildings, and so on.¹⁹

Equality of condition accepts the urgency of satisfying basic needs and providing a safety net against poverty. But its wider understanding of resources helps us to recognise a wider range of needs than some liberal egalitarians are inclined to attend to and to take a less market-oriented view of how these needs should be satisfied. For example, people with physical impairments not only need higher incomes than those without these impairments, but also changes in the physical environment which promote their inclusion into the activities that others take for granted.

Beyond the level of need, equality of condition aims for a world in which people's overall resources are much more equal than they are now, so that people's prospects for a good life are roughly similar. Because of the multi-faceted and disputable nature of well-being, and the complicated relationship between resources and prospects for well-being, we cannot hope for any precise account of equality of resources. It certainly cannot be equated with the idea that everyone should have the same income and wealth, because people have different needs and because there are so many other important resources to take account of. As we discuss below, there is also a case for permitting modest inequalities in income to offset inequalities in the burden of work. But if these are the only kinds of reason that would justify *inequality* of income and wealth, it follows that people who have similar needs and who work in similarly demanding occupations for similar amounts of time should have the

same income and wealth. This principle implies, for example, that manual workers should be paid as much as office workers, that there should be no significant differences in income and wealth between women and men, people of colour and whites, or disabled and non-disabled people, and that public services should serve these different groups equally well. So equality of condition would certainly involve a dramatic change in the distribution of income and wealth and in access to public services. In adopting this view, we reject the liberal belief that substantial inequalities of resources are inevitable.²⁰

3. Working as equals

As mentioned earlier, work is in some respects a burden, in others a benefit. In our societies, both the burdens and benefits of work are unequally distributed, and those who shoulder the greatest burdens often receive the least benefit. The burden of menial work is generally accompanied by the lowest possible wages and working conditions. The burdens of caring in individual households are typically unpaid, unrecognised, and carried out with little support (Kittay, 1999). Equality of condition involves a reversal of these inequalities, so that both the burdens and the benefits of work are much more equally shared, and that the conditions under which people work are much more equal in character. Where some people continue to take on greater burdens, it is consistent with the idea of equality of condition for them to receive greater benefits. The aim should be to ensure that people are roughly equally well off taking both burdens and benefits into account.

The most fundamental change involved in equality of condition would be in the division of labour, so that everyone has the prospect of satisfying work. This would affect both the benefits and burdens of work, since tedious, unsatisfying work can be a crushing burden and satisfying work has intrinsic benefits. The current division of labour is not sacrosanct. It is the

result of economic structures which function primarily for the purpose of maximizing profits in a deeply unequal world. To be sure, human life depends on the completion of many tedious and disagreeable tasks and will continue to do so. But it is a matter of social organisation whether these tasks are concentrated in particular occupations or fairly shared among the population as a whole. The division of society into those who define tasks and those who merely execute them is unjust and needs to be radically reconceived (Young, 1990, ch. 7).

A restructured division of labour would have important implications for education and training, in at least two ways. First, it would require a system of education that enabled everyone to develop the skills and talents necessary for pursuing worthwhile occupational choices. But secondly, since going to school is itself a kind of work, it would require us to think of how to make all forms of education more satisfying in their own right.

One of the forms of work that has been most neglected by liberal egalitarians is the work of loving and caring: work that is done primarily by women and is primarily unpaid.²¹ Developing the human capacities to form and maintain solidary relations takes time, energy and commitment. It is work of an emotional kind, especially in the developmental stages of life, but also in adulthood (Delphy and Leonard, 1992). It takes an intense and prolonged engagement with others to establish and maintain relations of solidarity and bonds of affection, to provide moral support, to maintain friendships, to give people a sense of belonging and to make them feel good. Caring labour and love labour are demanding on our energies and resources (Lynch, 1989; Lynch and McLoughlin, 1995). Equality of condition requires that this work should be recognised, supported and shared (cf. Kittay, 1999).

Equality of condition does not entail the right of every person to the job of their choice. That would clearly be unrealistic. So who does what remains an important issue and equality of condition has to incorporate fair principles of occupational equal opportunity. There are other issues about work that are harder to think through, for example the role and distribution of voluntary and unpaid work in an egalitarian society, and the question of whether everyone has an obligation to do some kind of useful work. But the guiding principle is that the overall benefits and burdens of work should be as equal as possible.²²

4. Equality of power

A fourth area of concern for equality of condition is the pervasive nature of power relations in all societies. Equality of condition recognises the dangers of state power, and retains the liberal commitment to basic civil and personal rights, including the right to personal private property. But since the general right to private property enshrined in some declarations of rights, including the Irish Constitution (Arts. 40.3.2 and 43), can be used to protect the economic power of the privileged, equality of condition has to involve a more limited definition of what this right involves. And because social structures often involve the systematic oppression of social groups, equality of condition may entail creating certain group-based rights, for example the right of members of a linguistic minority to educate their children in their first language or the right of an ethnic minority to political representation. This is not a blanket endorsement of the right of social groups to behave in any way they choose towards their members, which would go beyond even liberal forms of the public/private distinction. It is a recognition that specific group-based rights may sometimes promote equality of power. We return to these issues in Chapters 7, 9 and 11.

As discussed earlier, liberal democracy has a strictly limited impact on power inequalities, leaving dominant groups largely unchallenged in the political sphere and neglecting many other types of power altogether. Yet it is precisely these power relations which sustain inequality between privileged and oppressed groups. Equality of condition responds to these limitations on two fronts. First of all, it supports a stronger, more participatory form of politics in which ordinary citizens, and particularly groups who have been excluded from power altogether, can have more control over decision-making. Strengthened local government, closer accountability for elected representatives, procedures to ensure the participation of marginalised groups and wider access to information and technical expertise are some of the elements of this radical democratic programme, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

The second aspect of equality of power is to challenge power in other areas, such as the economy, the family, education and religion. The agenda here includes democratic management of individual firms and democratic control over key planning issues for the local, national and global economy. It involves rejecting the power of husbands over wives and questioning the power relations between parents and children. It means a democratic, co-operative model of education. It implies that the power structures of religious organisations are just as open to question as those of the secular world. Some of these power relations are discussed in chapters 8 to 11.

In both cases, the aim is to promote equality of power rather than to contain inequalities of power, recognising that power takes many forms, is often diffuse and has to be challenged in many different ways.

5. *Affective equality*

All human beings have the capacity for intimacy, attachment and expressive relations with others. We all recognize and feel some sense of affiliation and concern for others. We value the various forms of social engagement that emanate from such relations and we define ourselves in terms of them. Solidary bonds of friendship or kinship are frequently what bring meaning, warmth and joy to life. Being deprived of the capacity to develop such supportive affective relations, or of the experience of engaging in them when one has the capacity, is therefore a serious human deprivation. Emotional nurturance is also a fundamental prerequisite for human development. Relations of solidarity, care and love help to establish a basic sense of importance, value and belonging, a sense of being appreciated, wanted and cared for. Being deprived of intimate bonds of love and care inhibits the development of those emotional capabilities required for maintaining relations of companionship and solidarity with others.

These facts show that, at the very least, an adequate conception of equality must involve a commitment to satisfying the basic need for love, care and solidarity. But as with other dimensions of equality, the question arises of whether securing a basic minimum is enough to aim for. Equality of condition surely involves a more ambitious goal, a society in which people's prospects for loving, caring and solidary relationships are roughly equal. To achieve this goal, we will need to change structures and institutions which systematically impede people's opportunities to develop such relationships, including the organisation of paid work, processes of gender-stereotyping and the gendered division of labour, attitudes and institutional arrangements concerning disability, and of course the burdens of poverty and deprivation. Societies cannot *make* anyone love anyone else, and in this sense the right

to have loving, caring and solidary relations is unenforceable. But societies can work to establish the conditions in which these relationships can thrive, and in which no one faces systematically worse prospects for enjoying them. As noted above, a key element in this task is to make sure that the work involved in providing love and care is properly recognised, supported and shared.

Challenge to existing structures

It seems clear enough that equality of condition challenges the basic structures of contemporary societies. A predominantly capitalist economy continually creates and reproduces inequalities in people's resources and work; it relies on and perpetuates inequalities of power and status; it places tremendous strains on relations of love, care and solidarity. Many of the key structures of the welfare state, from the welfare office to the 'caring' professions to the prison system, marginalise, disempower and brutalise the very people they are supposed to help. The ways in which developed societies are structured around gender differences - in the organisation of the economy, in the family, in religion, in education and in other areas - systematically limit women's status, their access to resources, their opportunities for satisfying work and their power; and although women are expected to care for others, they often receive precious little care in return. Societies pervasively and systematically disable and disempower people with impairments and members of ethnic and 'racial' minorities. Existing political systems protect and sustain inequality in all of these dimensions.

Equality of condition would require quite different economic, political and social institutions, developing participatory, inclusive, enabling and empowering ways of co-

operating in all areas of life. The central aim of Parts II and III of this book is to contribute to the task of imagining and bringing about these changes.

Justifying equality of condition

Equality of condition presents a radical challenge to existing attitudes and structures, but many of the arguments in its favour come from basic and liberal egalitarianism. The most general way of putting the case is that the aims of both basic and liberal egalitarians are thwarted by inequalities of wealth, status and power which they refuse to challenge. On the face of it, it seems a simple enough task to ensure that everyone in the world has access to clean water and decent food, but layers of entrenched inequality make even these minimal goals unattainable. On the face of it, it seems easy enough to ensure that everyone's basic rights are protected, but in practice the rights of powerless and marginalised people are easily violated. Liberal egalitarians are eloquent proponents of equal opportunity, but equal opportunity is impossible so long as privileged people can deploy their economic and cultural advantages on behalf of themselves and their families - as they will surely continue to do, so long as the consequences of success and failure are so spectacularly different.²³

Other arguments for equality of condition arise out of the internal tensions and contradictions of liberal egalitarianism. We have seen how the idea of toleration can involve the very inequality of respect it purports to reject. There is a similar contradiction in the 'incentive' argument for inequality, namely that when privileged people demand an incentive for helping the worst off, they are taking resources away from the very people they pretend to be concerned about (Cohen, 1991). Another tension arises in arguments for the liberal ideal of occupational equality of opportunity. This principle is often justified by appealing to the interest each person has in 'experiencing the realization of self which comes from a skilful

and devoted exercise of social duties' (Rawls, 1971, p. 84). Yet it is clear enough that an unequal society provides precious few people with this experience.

Additional arguments for equality of condition come from reflections on the limited assumptions of liberal egalitarianism. In a curious way, liberal egalitarians seem to ignore the structured nature of inequality, the ways in which inequality is generated and sustained by dominant social institutions, and the influence of these institutions on people's attitudes, preferences and prospects. Thus when Rawls, for example, explains fair equal opportunity by saying that people's prospects 'should not be affected by their social class' (1971, p. 73; cf. 2001, p. 44), he seems to be accepting the idea of a class-divided society at the very same time as he is endorsing a principle which implies the elimination of class altogether. His work is also notorious for its neglect of gender.²⁴ A related problem is the liberal egalitarian emphasis on choice and personal responsibility, which plays an important role in supporting the idea of equal opportunity but tends to ignore the extent to which people's choices are influenced by their social position.

These, then, are some of the key arguments for equality of condition.²⁵ If they are sound, then western societies in particular, and the world more generally, are deeply unjust and need to be radically rebuilt.

Dimensions of equality	Basic equality	Liberal egalitarians	Equality of condition
Respect and Recognition	Basic respect	Universal citizenship Toleration of differences Public/private distinction	‘Critical inter-culturalism’: universal citizenship <i>plus</i> celebration of diversity; redefined private sphere; critical dialogue over cultural differences; limits to unequal esteem.
Resources	Subsistence needs	Anti-poverty focus Rawls’s ‘difference principle’ (maximise the prospects of the worst off)	‘Equality of resources’: substantial equality of resources broadly defined, aimed at satisfying needs and enabling roughly equal prospects of well-being.
Work		Non-discrimination Rawls’s ‘fair equal opportunity’	‘Working as equals’: educational and occupational options which give everyone the prospect of self- development and satisfying work.
Power relations	Protection against inhuman and degrading treatment	Classic civil and personal rights Liberal democracy	‘Equality of power’: liberal rights <i>but</i> limited property rights; group-related rights; stronger, more participatory politics; extension of democracy to other areas of life.
Love, care and solidarity		A private matter	‘Affective equality’: roughly equal prospects for relations of love, care and solidarity.
Social structures		Reform of current structures	Major restructuring: see Part II.

Table 4.1: Basic Equality, Liberal Egalitarianism and Equality of Condition

Applying the framework: dimensions, groups and contexts

We have identified five key dimensions of equality, and have contrasted the ways in which these dimensions are treated by liberal egalitarians with their role in equality of condition (see Table 4.1). In applying these ideas, it is often useful to focus on particular social groups, and to concentrate on the particular social contexts in which inequalities are generated and can be challenged. The social groups are diverse, and necessarily include both disadvantaged and privileged groups. Some key social contexts are the economy, the formal political system, the educational system and the family. In some group relations one dimension of equality may be more important than another, but because of the interrelations of the dimensions, groups that are unequal in one dimension are likely to be unequal in others. In each context, some of the dimensions of equality will be more prominent than others, but most social contexts involve all five dimensions of equality.

The importance of social groups

When we look at the world around us, what is most striking about its inequalities is that some social groups are systematically worse off than others, often in every dimension of equality. As Young (1990, 2001) has explained, these group-based inequalities result from structural features of our societies. For example, the capitalist economic structures of our societies privilege certain social classes and reproduce those privileges across generations. Patriarchal structures in households, cultural institutions and the economy privilege men over women. And so on. The principle of equality of condition demands that the life prospects of every individual should be roughly equal to those of any other, but what stands in the way of that principle are social structures that systematically make the life prospects of the members

of some groups worse than those of others. We can see this particularly clearly if we look at the way the dimensions of equality interact with each other in the lives of particular groups.²⁶

Disabled people are a diverse group whose experiences are shaped in many ways by different impairments. What they have in common is their experience of exclusion from activities other people take for granted. This exclusion results to a large extent from a social environment that is designed to suit people without impairments. So a key inequality here is inequality of appropriate environmental resources. This inequality has the further effect of excluding disabled people from the labour force, affecting both their work opportunities and their incomes. But disabled people are also strongly affected by a culturally constructed image of disability that marks disabled people as strange, as 'other': an image that is easily sustained on account of their exclusion from everyday social activities. All of these factors interact with the way that disabled people are subjected to the power of non-disabled people, seen most clearly in institutions such as special schools and hospitals. Because these institutions have traditionally treated disabled people as helpless, they have reinforced their isolation and exclusion. Residential institutions for disabled people have also often contributed to depriving them of relations of love and care, either through overt abuse or through discouraging disabled people from forming loving relations with each other. The social exclusion of disabled people has limited their opportunities for developing relations of love, care and solidarity with others, as well as excluding them from political decision-making.²⁷

Gender relations are in some ways similar to those of disability and in other ways different. A central feature of sexual inequality is the gendered division of labour, which assigns some roles primarily to men and others primarily to women. These roles are

associated with differences in income: women earn on average significantly less than men, and of course receive no income at all for the unpaid work they are traditionally expected to do in the household. Men are also more likely to have opportunities for satisfying work and to be in powerful social roles. A further dimension of gender inequality is a set of norms and prejudices that systematically belittles women and reinforces the gendered division of labour. The resources and economic power held by men, together with their higher social status, contribute to their near-monopoly of political power, power that is put to use in maintaining their economic advantages. Although the gendered division of labour provides women with the opportunity and indeed the duty to love and care for others, it can also work to deprive them of the love and care they need themselves.²⁸

A third example of the interaction of the dimensions of inequality is social class. Here again the division of labour plays a key role, subjecting working class people to the power of employers, depriving them of opportunities for satisfying and fulfilling work and consigning them to a lower standard of living. Cultural norms that treat working class customs, accents and activities as inferior interact with these economic factors to reinforce the unequal status of working class people and to exclude them from political power. How these facts affect opportunities for relations of love, care and solidarity is not well researched. Some evidence from Scandinavian countries indicates that companionship and solidarity are independent of material well being, but of course the level of material well being enjoyed in these societies is very high by international standards (Allardt, 1993). We do know that severe material deprivation can lead to emotional deprivation. For example, poor people are more likely to become homeless or to go to prison, and thus to suffer the deprivation of love, care and solidarity these experiences involve (Focus Point, 1993; O'Mahony, 1997).²⁹

At the other end of the economic spectrum, the wealthy are in positions of high status and economic power. They have extensive opportunities for engaging and rewarding work and can provide similar opportunities to their children. They are also advantaged politically, through their access to privileged social networks and their ability to buy political influence. In addition, their educational credentials and occupations help them to establish the profiles deemed necessary for political office.

These examples could be multiplied by looking at relationships of 'race', ethnicity, sexuality, age, and so on. The general point is that the ways societies are structured around differences of impairment, sex and class generate inequalities across all five of the dimensions we have identified for the groups they systematically privilege and disadvantage. Of course, some groups may be more disadvantaged in one dimension than in others. For example, older people in some societies may suffer more seriously from a lack of love, care and solidarity than from poverty or powerlessness. But the general tendency is for social structures to work in a way that generates inequality in every dimension of well-being for specific social groups.

Key contexts of oppression and change

The idea of a social structure is useful for analysing inequality, but is hard to put to practical use. For that purpose, it is more helpful to concentrate on the particular social institutions or practices that work together to produce and reproduce social structures. We call these institutions and practices 'contexts' of equality and inequality.

An absolutely central context for generating inequality is of course the economy, since it is in the economy that the primary distribution of resources takes place, a distribution which generates, reflects and reinforces other inequalities. The economy is also the main context in

which inequalities of work are established and perpetuated. As the defining system of capitalist social relations, the economy is at the centre of the processes through which capitalism generates inequality. It also plays an important role in sustaining and reproducing patriarchy, racism and other structures of oppression.

Another key context is the political system, which is particularly important for the distribution of power in society. It also has a major impact on relations of respect and recognition, because the equal public status it gives to citizens is an egalitarian baseline from which other struggles for equality of respect and recognition can be waged. The political system influences the distribution of resources as well, both by directly counteracting the tendencies of the economy and by defining the legal framework within which the economy operates. And like the economy, it produces, mirrors and strengthens other inequalities. The political system is where state power is usually employed to back up, and less frequently to challenge, dominant social structures, in particular the economic structures of welfare state capitalism. Within the political system, dominant groups use this power to pursue their own interests, while subordinate groups exercise whatever power they can muster to resist this domination.

A third important context of equality and inequality is a society's cultural sphere, which includes both its educational system and its mass media. These cultural systems have a particularly direct connection with inequalities of respect and recognition, although they also include and influence inequality in other dimensions. The cultural sphere is especially important in generating and reinforcing social structures that are built around differences of appearance, values and preferences, such as racism, disablism, religious oppression and homophobia. The educational system passes the dominant ideas of society from one

generation to the next, in ways that help to legitimise and reinforce inequalities, while at the same time it is a place where those ideas can be criticised and resisted. The mass media constitute another cultural system that serves mainly to express and reinforce dominant ideas while again offering some opportunities for challenging them.

One context of equality and inequality that has been largely neglected by academic researchers can be called the 'affective context'. We include in this context systems of both kinship and friendship, reflected in the composition of households and in wider social networks. Kinship and friendship are of course particularly important in meeting or frustrating people's needs for love and care, but they are also sites of inequality in other dimensions. They play a central role in generating and reproducing patriarchy and ageism, for example by socialising children into a gendered division of labour that the adult members of kinship and friendship networks adhere to on a day-to-day basis. They also help to reinforce links within dominant groups and separate them from subordinate groups, although they are also sources of solidarity for members of these groups.

The interaction of dimensions and contexts creates a certain amount of terminological ambiguity. For example, the idea of 'economic inequality' is usually used to refer to a particular context - the economy - and to focus on a component of inequality within that context, inequality of wealth and income. Similarly, 'political inequality' is usually used to refer to inequalities of power, and perhaps of recognition, within the political system. There is nothing wrong with this, so long as we remember that both the economy and the political system contain inequalities in all five dimensions and that there are inequalities of resources, power and respect in other contexts, too.

Reviewing this list of key contexts of inequality, which is not intended to be exhaustive, we can see that each of the contexts is linked in a particularly striking way with at least one dimension of equality and with at least one major structure of oppression, and it is worth bearing this in mind when we turn to the practical problems of creating a more egalitarian society. At the same time, it is also clear that each context contains inequalities in all five dimensions and that each helps to strengthen a wide range of oppressive social structures. For example, it is clear enough that the political system has a primary effect on inequality of power. But it also includes inequalities of respect and recognition, an unequal distribution of politically relevant resources, an unequal division of political labour, and unequal relations of care and solidarity. The political system plays a primary role in sustaining and reproducing welfare state capitalism, but it also reinforces structures of racism, patriarchy, disabilism, ageism and so on. A similar range of issues can be found in other social contexts.

Once we recognise that what goes on in particular social contexts is systematically connected not only to the dimensions of equality but also to oppressive social structures, we can go on to ask about the differential impact of these contexts on different group inequalities. For example, it is obvious that the economy, through its impact on work and income and its role in sustaining capitalism, is a central context for producing and sustaining class inequalities and therefore of major importance for working class people and economically disadvantaged groups. By contrast, it seems likely that cultural systems such as education and the media, with their impact on inequalities of respect and recognition, are particularly important in sustaining the structures that oppress gays and lesbians and lead to the further inequalities of resources, work opportunities, power and emotional support they experience. We do not want to overdraw these relationships. In fact, what is striking is that

practically every subordinate group is affected by a wide range of social contexts. But it is important not just for sociological explanation but also for political strategy to note the relative importance of different contexts for different groups. Our view of the relation between the contexts, dimensions, structures and groups is summarised in Table 4.2.

These Contexts	are particularly important for these		
	Dimensions	Structures	Subordinate groups
Economy, Political system	Resources, Work, Power	Welfare State Capitalism	Working class, Unemployed, Homeless
Cultural Educational system Mass media	Respect and Recognition	Racism, Disablism, Homophobia	Ethnic/racial minorities Disabled people, Gays and Lesbians
Affective Kinship system Friendship networks	Love, care, and solidarity	Patriarchy, Ageism	Women, Children, Older people

Table 4.2. Importance of contexts for dimensions, structures and groups

A template for change

Since social contexts are so important for both reproducing and challenging inequalities, it is useful to have a way of assessing their impact on specific groups and for setting policy objectives. Within each social context, we can ask the following questions about the prospects of different social groups (Equality Studies Centre, 1995):

1. Are members of the group denied *access* to institutions and practices in this context?
2. Can they *participate on equal terms* with members of other groups?
3. Do they achieve *equally good outcomes* across the five dimensions of equality?
4. To what extent does the operation of this context promote *equal of condition*?

The clearest way to disadvantage members of a particular group is to deny them access to education, jobs, political influence and so on, by erecting formal legal and bureaucratic barriers or other obstacles to their participation. A system can also work to a group's disadvantage if it is hard for them to participate on an equal footing with more privileged groups, for example by offering them inferior facilities, worse training, or inappropriate environments. Ultimately, the strongest test for whether or not a group is disadvantaged within a given context is in the outcomes of participation: if a group's participation in a given context continues to lead to worse recognition, resources, work, power, or relations of love, care and solidarity, there is a presumption of systematic disadvantage. Of course, even if two groups achieve equal outcomes, there may be significant inequalities within the groups. Equality of condition goes beyond equality of outcome by seeking equality within groups as well as between them.

All of these ideas are closely connected with different conceptions of equal opportunity. Equality of access relates to non-discrimination or formal equal opportunity. The principle of fair equal opportunity requires not just equal access, but also ensuring that all groups should be able to participate on an equal basis, while the general tendency would be for the members of different groups to achieve the same levels of success in terms of respect and recognition, resources, work, power, and love, care and solidarity (O'Neill, 1977; cf. Roemer 1998).³⁰ As we have seen, even equality of condition is about opportunities in a stronger sense, which we called equality of real options or real choices. So the progression from equality of access through equality of participation to equality of outcome and of condition is also a progression from non-discrimination through fair equal opportunity to equality of real options.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have set out a framework for thinking about equality, distinguishing the basic egalitarianism that is the common assumption of all modern political thinking from what we have called liberal egalitarianism and equality of condition. We have outlined and contrasted the main ideas of liberal egalitarianism and equality of condition by identifying five key dimensions of equality - respect and recognition, resources, work, power, and love, care and solidarity - and by commenting on their relation to social structures. These are, of course, broadly drawn positions, and we do not pretend to have presented a comprehensive survey of egalitarian views. We have also tried to sketch the reasons why a person who takes basic equality seriously is obliged to move on to the beliefs of liberal egalitarians, and how the difficulties involved in holding those beliefs provide grounds for equality of condition. But these arguments are far from complete. In particular, we recognise that someone could support equality of condition in some dimensions but not others. We went on to indicate how the framework can be applied to different social groups and in different social contexts, illustrating along the way how the dimensions of equality are interconnected, and how different contexts are particularly important for different dimensions, structures and groups. Finally, we set out a template for social change based on the ideas of equality of access, participation and outcome as steps towards equality of condition.

In contemporary western societies, basic egalitarianism is taken for granted at the level of moral and political rhetoric. The dominant parties of the left are primarily concerned with what we have called liberal egalitarian objectives, and therefore with equality of access, participation and outcome. It is not our aim to disparage these goals: they represent a major challenge to existing inequalities. But we have tried to show that equality of condition is a

natural extension of the concerns and difficulties involved in the liberal egalitarian outlook. If we are right in recommending equality of condition, this only emphasises the scale of the tasks ahead of us. We face the challenge not only of constructing plausible models of an egalitarian society, but of developing a political movement for radical change. The central aim of Parts II and III of this book is to contribute to these tasks.

Notes to chapter 5

¹ [An earlier version of this chapter was published as Baker 1998. We are grateful to G. A. Cohen for their comments on that chapter. A revised version was presented at the 10th Anniversary Conference of the Equality Studies Centre in December 2000, and we would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Niall Crowley and the other participants. We have also benefited from the comments of Vittorio Bufacchi.

² It is sometimes objected that such a minimalist view is not a principle of *equality* at all. Our view is that its egalitarianism lies in its commitment to extending the basic minimum to all human beings, as opposed to considering some people to be beneath consideration.

³ The paradigm case of a liberal egalitarian is Rawls (1971; 1993). Among other liberal egalitarians we would include Dworkin (2000), which includes work first published in the 1980s, Walzer (1985) and Williams (1962). Some key discussions of liberal egalitarians are Barry (1989, 1995, 2001), Arneson (1989), Cohen (1989), Sen (1992) and Van Parijs (1995).

⁴ Some relevant sources are Mortimore (1968), Rawls (1971, sec. 15, 1993, sec. 5.4; 2001, secs. 17, 51, 53), Landesman (1983), Norman (1987), Arneson (1989), Cohen (1989), Daniels (1990), Sen (1992), Nussbaum and Sen (1992), Fraser (1997a, 1997b), Phillips (1999), Levine (1998, ch. 2), Dworkin (2000) and Young (2001).

⁵ The five dimensions are chosen for ease of exposition and to provide a coherent framework. The first four headings correspond to the classic and ultimately inescapable Weberian trio of class, status and party (Weber, 1958), recently adapted by Fraser (1997a, 1997b, 2000), although neither distinguishes between work and resources under the heading of class/redistribution. The second, third and fourth dimensions broadly correspond to the

three parts of Rawls's two principles (1971; 1993; 2001). Phillips (1999) distinguishes between economic and political equality, including both status and power in the latter. One way or another, the five headings cover most of the goods discussed by Walzer (1985). The discussion below is also indirectly influenced by the capabilities approach of Sen (1992) and Nussbaum (1995), especially in respect to the category of love, care and solidarity.

⁶ A third conception of equal opportunity, which Roemer (1998) calls 'level-the-playing-field', maintains that individuals should not be helped or hampered by any circumstance outside their control. Depending on how it is interpreted, this view of equal opportunity goes well beyond the traditional views of liberal egalitarians in the direction of equality of condition. What it seems to share with traditional liberal views is a belief that once equal opportunity is in place, major inequalities of outcome are legitimate.

⁷ In fact, liberalism makes several different public/private distinctions. The distinction discussed is the one most relevant to liberal conceptions of equality.

⁸ The liberal protection of the family as a private sphere has in recent times been used to defend a wider variety of family forms, such as one-parent families and single-sex couples. Two key issues distinguishing liberal egalitarianism from equality of condition on such questions are whether this variety should be 'tolerated' or 'celebrated' and whether such family forms are viewed as exempt from or open to critical scrutiny.

⁹ There has always been some tension between these beliefs. Although some liberal egalitarians, emphasising equal opportunity, take the view that individuals who deliberately squander their advantages deserve no help from society, we think it is more accurate to the liberal egalitarian tradition to distinguish between equal opportunity and the safety net and to acknowledge the tension.

¹⁰ Rawls himself thinks of the difference principle as more demanding (1993, p. 229), but the same passage expresses his view that ‘a social minimum providing for the basic needs of all citizens’ is a ‘constitutional essential’, while the difference principle is a more controversial claim about ‘basic justice’. (See also Rawls, 2001, 129-130, 158-162.) At first glance, Dworkin’s (2000) principle of equality of resources seems much more radical than either the anti-poverty principle or the difference principle, and indeed he explicitly distances himself from the anti-poverty position as too subjective and undemanding (p. 3). But what Dworkin means by equal resources is a type of equal opportunity, and his hypothetical insurance market functions as a form of safety net.

¹¹ On the right to work, an exception is Arneson (1990). Rawls comments briefly on the obligation to work (2001, sec. 53) and the issue arises explicitly in discussions of basic income (e.g. Van Parijs, 1995 and Barry, 1997). But the issue of the obligation to work tends not to be incorporated into liberal-egalitarian theories of social justice.

¹² There is a close connection between this limitation and the public/private distinction mentioned earlier, but in this case even the economy is brought within the idea of the private.

¹³ A few authors have attempted to incorporate love, care and solidarity into broadly liberal-egalitarian theories of justice. Walzer (1985) treats love and kinship as a separate sphere, based on freely exchanged love between adults but subject to a ‘rule of prescriptive altruism’ that expects family members to love and care for each other and so aims to guarantee them ‘some modicum of love, friendship, generosity, and so on’ (pp. 229, 238). Nussbaum (1995, p. 84) treats ‘being able ... to love, to grieve, to experience longing and gratitude’ as one of the basic human functional capabilities that societies ought to support. Kittay (1999, p. 103) suggests that ‘the good both to be cared for in a responsive

dependency relation if and when one is unable to care for oneself, and to meet the dependency needs of others without incurring undue sacrifices oneself is a primary social good in the Rawlsian sense' which requires a separate principle of justice.

¹⁴ Rawls (2001, secs. 41-42) criticises the limitations of the welfare state, contrasting it with both a property-owning democracy and with liberal (democratic) socialism. In this respect, he is at least partially exempt from the point made in this paragraph. What remains unclear, as with the difference principle itself, is the degree of inequality Rawls considers to be inevitable.

¹⁵ Among proponents of equality of condition we would include Schaar (1967), Carens (1981), Nielsen (1985), Norman (1982; 1987; 1991), Baker (1987), Okin (1989), Cohen (1981; 1989; 1991; 1995; 1997; 2000), Young (1990, 2001), Fraser (1989; 1997, 2000) and Phillips (1999). There are of course many differences among these authors and some of them would reject some of the views we include in this section. Our aim here is to draw together what we see as their most important insights.

¹⁶ These oppressive systems include structures which systematically exclude people with impairments from participating fully in their societies, structures which socially construct a division between 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' persons and privilege the former over the latter, and systems which privilege dominant over subordinate ethnic groups. No attempt is made here at a complete list of oppressive relationships and no inferences should be drawn as to their relative importance. The key point is that equality of condition depends on a more radical analysis of the causes of inequality than liberal egalitarianism.

¹⁷ Although John Stuart Mill is considered the paradigm of liberalism, his commitment to diversity is in this respect closer to what we take to be equality of condition (cf. Mill 1854,

ch. 3). The example of Mill underlines the point that our classification is meant to indicate broad differences of principle and not to categorise individual thinkers.

¹⁸ There are useful discussions of this issue in Parekh (1996; 1997, 2000), Nussbaum and Sen (1992), Nussbaum and Glover (1995), and Barry (2001, esp. ch. 7). Okin?, Nussbaum?

¹⁹ In this section we are deliberately using ‘resources’ in a wider sense than that appropriated by Dworkin (2000) for what he calls ‘equality of resources’, since Dworkin’s approach treats resources as a form of private property. The concept is too important to be monopolised by a particular theorist.

²⁰ A major question here is the alleged need for incentives; see Carens (1981), Baker (1987: ch. 9) and Cohen (1991; 2000) for relevant discussions.

²¹ The position Mill takes in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) reveals a typically liberal attitude towards this kind of work. He says that in choosing to marry, a woman accepts the role of housewife and the duties that go with it. The question of whether this division of labour is just does not arise: all that matters is that the choice takes place under conditions of equal opportunity.

²² Some of the problems involved in thinking about work and income are discussed more thoroughly in Baker, 1992.

²³ Some of these arguments are put in more detail in Baker, 2002.

²⁴ The point about class was made as early as Macpherson’s (1973) discussion and never really addressed. The classic gender-based critique of Rawls is Okin (1989). Rawls’s later work (1993, p. xxix; 2001, pp. 64-66, 162-168) briefly acknowledges the issue of gender inequality but in a way which seems to continue to ignore its depth.

²⁵ For more arguments, see Nielsen (1985), Norman (1987), Baker (1987), Okin (1989), Young (1990) and Cohen (1981; 1989; 1991; 1995; 1997; 2000). One general upshot of these arguments is that, contrary to appearances, it is liberal egalitarians who are unrealistic or utopian, because their limited aims are in fact unrealisable in a world marked by severe inequality and because they neglect the real influence of social structures. Of course, this does not show that equality of condition is any less utopian: perhaps, as many critics of equality believe, both sets of aims are out of reach.

²⁶ A more extended treatment of some of the groups and issues discussed here is given in Equality Studies Centre, 1995.

²⁷ Some relevant sources for the analysis of this paragraph are Combat Poverty, 1994; **add additional disability refs**

²⁸ Daly, 1987; Nolan and Watson, 1999; Kittay, 1999; etc. **add additional feminism refs**

²⁹ Phillips, 1999; Bourdieu, 1984; **add additional class sources**

³⁰ This is only a tendency because different groups may have innocently different cultural norms and aspirations. So a more precise way of putting the point is that differences in outcome should not exceed those attributable to such innocent differences.