

On Equality

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ATITUDES to equality differ. It is because people react emotionally to the idea that there is a need to expose irrational and fallacious thinking about it.

The proposition "All men are equal" may be elaborated in order to state the different types of meanings it can be made to bear:

- (1) All men are in fact equal, but are not treated as such.
- (2) Men should be made equal, regardless of their present state.
- (3) Men should all be given an equal chance to show their capabilities.
- (4) Men should all receive equal treatment before the law.

Born Unequal

The first of these is obviously wrong. Not only are people born unequal in respect of intelligence and talents, but upbringing introduces further differences. The present trend for advocates of equality to emphasise the role of environment and to play down the hereditary aspects involves overlooking the facts, presumably because environment can be controlled to some extent whereas heredity is, as yet, beyond our grasp. The fact remains that differences even at birth are greater between humans than between other animals, and people who choose to ignore this might reflect that if differences between individuals are not important then neither is individual worth or freedom to choose a manner of living suited to one's nature.

Meaningless

Moreover, the statement is not only absurd; it is meaningless. For if people are not admitted to be equal in any particular respect, it is a nonsense to say "Men are equal, but not in any special aspect." This type of statement cannot be subjected to any test, even in theory. If one tries to improve it by making it "All men are equal in the sight of God," nothing at all is achieved; this merely turns an idiocy into a strictly theological opinion of uncertain scholastic significance.

Ethical Preference

In fact, people who argue the factual proposition that all men are equal are really uttering a value judgement of the second class of possible meanings, namely that men should be made equal. Having reduced the statement to a mere ethical preference, one is entitled to ask "Why accept it at all?"

If the advocates of social equality object to the tyranny of a medieval hierarchical society where high position comes by birth and is not open to the talents, why do they not object to the tyranny of enforced equality where

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About the Reform Group

THE Reform Group was founded in 1966. It is an association of University Conservatives, both staff and student, who wish to encourage the spread and application of Conservative ideas.

At a time when various left-wing ideologies are attracting much of the publicity concerning university politics, members feel that some of the original right-wing thought taking place in the universities should be made available to the Conservative Party in the country.

The particular views of individual writers are not necessarily in agreement with those of the Group or of the Conservative Party as a whole.

men of special aptitudes are alike repressed and denied the exercise of their abilities?

Preconceived Pattern

What these extreme egalitarians wish to do is to impose a preconceived pattern of distribution on society; in the name of social equality they wish to render unequal treatment to people in order to make them artificially equal in material aspects, and at a level set quite arbitrarily by themselves. Quite apart from the fact that this involves coercion incompatible with liberty, one can reasonably raise the objection that human beings are similar in at least one respect—namely, that no man or group can fully assess or comprehend the capabilities of others. If no one is set so far above his fellows in this ability, why then should we entrust a man or group with powers to determine and set limits to the manner of living and achievement of others? The social egalitarian may have dreamed of an orderly and peaceful society of equals: this is no reason why we should be compelled to act out his dream while he tries to make it come true.

Equality of Opportunity

If we then reject enforced equality in the name of individual freedom, we are left with the doctrine of equality of opportunity. From the liberal idea of the "career open to the talents"—that all should be allowed to try to achieve office, status or wealth by ability alone—has been developed the doctrine that all must be given an equal start in the race, and that no one should enjoy "unfair" advantages brought about by inheritance, education or upbringing.

Consequences of Doctrine

This is a quite open value judgement based on the approval of freedom to employ one's capabilities. Unfortunately for the theorist, however, this doctrine begins to restrict freedom if carried too far. It would rule out, for example, inheritance of material goods, since if one generation starts equal and is allowed to pass on to their children the rewards gained by talent, the next generation does not start on an equal footing. Many people who favour equality of opportunity think nonetheless that the

family as an institution is desirable for the transmission of morality, custom and knowledge. They perhaps do not see that for this to be possible, some continuity of material standards must occur. In any case, the deliberate frustration of the natural propensity of parents to safeguard the future of their children is itself a violation of the freedom one is trying to protect.

Less Acceptable

Furthermore, if parents are not allowed to express natural partiality for their children by providing for them materially, there is the danger that they will attempt to assure their children's future by using influence to place them in positions of status and authority while they themselves are still alive. Societies such as communist ones which ban inheritance of material goods do show a marked tendency to bureaucratic nepotism. It is at least arguable that inequalities produced in this way are less socially acceptable than inequalities caused by inheritance.

Unfair Advantages of Upbringing

The problem is not only one of inheritance. Even where children are not allowed to take possession of goods and wealth accumulated by their parents, they can still claim "unfair" advantages from the manner of their upbringing. The material standards of the parent can make a great deal of difference to the development of the child. If one favours equality of opportunity, why should one allow some children to be brought up in a more favourable environment? Better feeding, a more spacious home, privacy, heating, readier access to books, travel abroad, may all result in a child being better equipped for life than his less fortunate fellows. One can carry the argument further. Why should some children enjoy the "unfair" advantages of a happy home life with kind intelligent parents? The logical implications of equality of opportunity involve eliminating this inequality by taking children away from their parents so they may all be brought up equally in state-run institutions. This is why left-wing egalitarian psychologists are now pointing out how the family is "emotionally stifling" and "outmoded as an institution." The terrible crimes committed by the family are that it is a force for conservatism by the way it passes on moral standards, tastes and custom, and that it is a bar to the egalitarian society of the state-produced robots.

Equality Before the Law

In addition to social equality and equality of opportunity, whose dangers are now evident, there is another equality not much in fashion with egalitarians, for the unsurprising reason that, paradoxically, it recognises and promotes inequalities: this is equality before the law.

Different Aspirations

The argument for liberty assumes that individuals are very different in their abilities, talents, tastes and aspirations. It insists, however, that these differences are not sufficient for governments to treat people differently, and objects to the differences in treatment which are necessary to place very dissimilar people into equal stations in

life. One of the main justifications of liberty is that under equal treatment from the law, people can demonstrate by success the advantages of a particular manner of living? The varieties in human nature, the fact that people have different aspirations, would tend to suggest that each be allowed to live in his own way, to try to achieve individual fulfilment of his aims. It is the success of the few who set new styles in conduct and practices which shows others the example to be followed for improvement. Liberty as a vehicle for social progress has inequality as an essential part of the system; without the rewards of success there is no incentive.

Incompatible

Equality before the law is thus incompatible with material or social equality; the latter is achieved at the price of liberty. The prospect of equality is a plausible and attractive proposition to the majority who do not wish to see the few achieving high position and wealth by the exercise of their abilities. In this form it paints in idealistic colours what is more commonly called envy. People who are tempted by its lure should be very wary; they themselves will certainly wish to behave differently from their fellows in at least some aspect; they themselves will have at least some talent they can exercise to advantage; and if the freedom of others can be infringed, so can their own.

Conclusion

We see, then, that equality of ability does not exist and cannot be achieved by the complete sacrifice of freedom and by allowing others to dictate our actions and our ends. We see that equality of opportunity could be achieved to a much greater degree at a cost of the break-up of our society and its institutions as we have known them. And we see finally that equality before the law is the only equality compatible with liberty.

"Equality" as an emotional slogan is thus at best an incoherence, and at worst a direct attack on freedom.

(LAND & LIBERTY is strictly non-party but we are pleased to give space to views so refreshingly fundamental in approach.)

NEW TREASURER OF THE UNITED COMMITTEE

MR. ANTHONY HAVILAND-NYE has been appointed Hon. Treasurer of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values following the resignation of Mr. R. W. Frost who has served the Committee in this capacity for twenty years. Mr. Frost, who is not so accessible since his retirement this year, will continue to serve on the executive.

The United Committee wishes to record its deep appreciation of the services given to the movement by Mr. Frost and of its debt to him for his particularly wise counsel in all financial matters.