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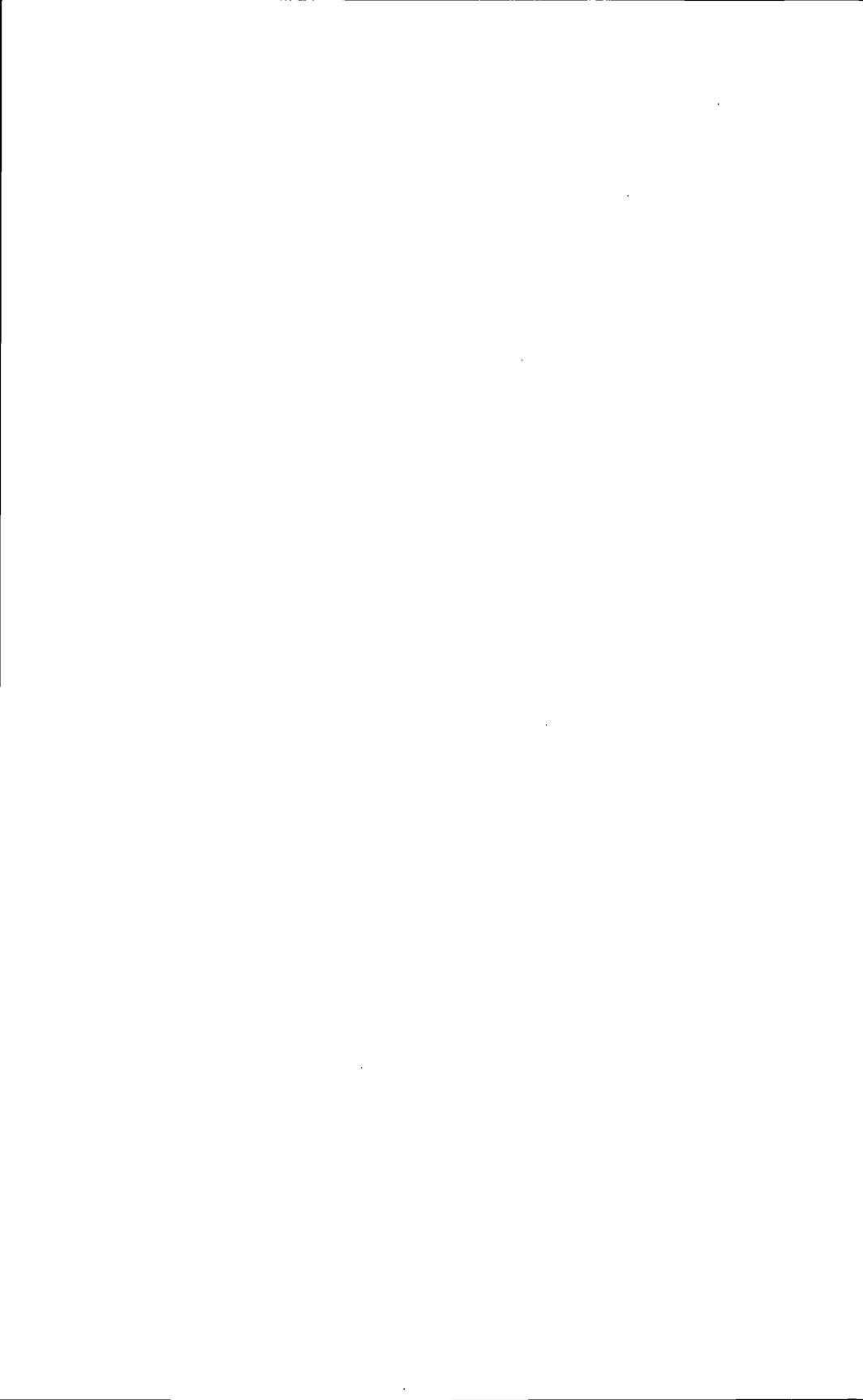
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PART I

The Pursuit of Equality

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In the last few generations, the pursuit of equality has had a high value for large portions of mankind. How far back the idea of equality as an ideal goes is hard to say, and it would take a good deal of historical and anthropological research to document the origins and the immense complexities of this idea. A tentative hypothesis is that it is an offshoot of monotheistic religion. An intricate polytheistic religion, such as Hinduism, is more apt to take on the social function of legitimating inequality through caste, Karma, and other devices, for where there are many gods there can be many levels of mankind. Under the trenchant monotheism of a jealous God, however, human differences diminish in the overpowering perspective of the Lord, and all men become equal in the sight of God, no matter what they are in the sight of their neighbors.

One sees much of the upheaval of the present age as a result of the mingling of two great religious traditions of mankind: one stemming from Moses and producing in turn Christianity, Islam, and Marxism; and the other stemming from the Vedas, with perhaps an independent contribution from China, producing Buddhism and present-day Hinduism. These social genetic strains, of course, are never pure. Christianity has its Trinity and the cult of the saints; mysticism everywhere has moved toward unity and the adoration of the One. Nonetheless, though this distinction may be fuzzy, it does, indeed, exist.

The pursuit of equality in some form characterizes nearly all modern secular ideologies. The United States was ushered onto the stage of history with the trumpet call, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." The democratic ideology pushes constantly toward the principle of one person, one vote; and in that sense, at least, equality of political weight. Marxism dreams, however unsuccessfully, of a classless society.

The pursuit of freedom and the pursuit of equality are equally significant ideals for the Enlightenment, even though they may not be wholly compatible. Yet the pursuit remains as elusive as the pursuit of happiness, and our different interpretations of what we mean by equality are even threatening to destroy us. Considering the enormous symbolic importance of the concept, surprisingly little serious work seems to have been done on it, philosophically, theoretically, or empirically. Perhaps the reason for this is that it is too painful, too contradictory, too confusing, and too important to be the object of anything but rhetoric.

One can see these confusions in considering the impact of the rise of the biological sciences, especially of genetics, on the idea of human equality. On the one hand, in the light of genetics, it is by no means self-evident that all men are created equal. The fertilized eggs which are the first products of the act of human creation come endowed with a great deal of common genetic material, but also with very significant differences. One thing that genetics has taught us, of course, it that a large proportion of this genetic material is common to all of us. We are as equal before deoxyribonucleic acid as we are before God. Genetics also dispels certain illusions about inequality. We know that the genetic differences within the races of mankind are greater than the differences between them, and this has undermined what might be called the "folk" genetic theory of racism.

The enormous complexity of the human genetic structure, however, still stands before us as a continent on which we have barely landed, and it is still too early to say how significant for social systems are the genetic differences among individuals. At the extremes, they are clearly significant; in the large middle range, they seem not to be highly significant; but it is very hard to identify the significant extremes—especially the extremes on the side of excellence. We know much more about genetic defects than we do about genetic superiority. In the human species, indeed, it is extraordinarily hard to disentangle biological genetics from social genetics, that is, transmission of culture. The heretics, like Professor Shockley, at least point to the depth of our ignorance in these matters. On the surface of this ignorance, however, we do seem to have a very broad consensus that in the larger dynamics of society, biological genetics has made a relatively small contribution, simply because of the widespread variety of genetic endowments. The learned obstacles to human

learning, which are essentially cultural, seem far more significant than the genetic obstacles, and it is human learning that dominates social dynamics.

Equality, of course, is not the same thing as identity. A set of identical elements are equal in all respects, but we can have a set of equal elements which are equal in only some respects, not in all, and hence are not identical. It is crucial to the idea of political or social equality that men can be equal when they are different. The difficulty comes in defining what aspects of a set of human beings can be identified in which the concepts of equality or inequality are significant. In the biological species, for instance, all the adult members in good standing, as it were, are presumably equal in their capacity to interbreed. They are not all equal in survival value; otherwise, evolution would never have taken place.

The extraordinary evolutionary success of the invention of sex is due to the fact that it creates genetic inequality within the members of a single species. Unisexual species which reproduce by budding, cloning, or mitosis tend to have great genetic uniformity in individuals. This militates against genetic change, and a species either survives indefinitely in a suitable niche with practically no changes in genetic structure, like the amoeba—or if its niche is destroyed, these species likewise will perish. In sexual species there are constant redistributions of the gene pool, which is larger than that possessed by any individual, among the members of the species. This gives opportunity for much more rapid genetic mutation and introduces new patterns for survival, like sexual display.

I have argued, indeed, that the extraordinary rapidity of social evolution, by comparison with genetic evolution, is precisely because, with the development of the human nervous system, evolution passed into the field of human knowledge and became, as it were, multisexual instead of merely bisexual. The genetic structures of society, such as ideas, constitutions, organization charts, ideologies, and so on, are the result of the interaction of large numbers, not only of individual people, but of individual knowledge components. This very multisexual character of social evolution, however, makes for enormous diversity, which makes the concept of equality difficult, as we seek to identify the attributes for which equality makes sense among enormous diversity and complexity—not only of individuals but of social structures and organizations. If it is hard to identify significant

equalities and inequalities, it is still harder to evaluate and prescribe along this dimension.

Equality or inequality is always, of course, a property of a distribution. A distribution implies that we can identify some aspects of each element in a set which can either be represented by a cardinal number; or in a somewhat limiting case, by an ordinal rank. We cannot get really far in this regard with ordinal numbers. We can distinguish a case of perfect equality in which all the elements of a set are bracketed in rank order, and hence all count as "first." Any deviation from this, in which more than one cardinal number has to be used to rank the elements of the set, introduces inequality. Possibly the simplest measure of inequality here would be the number of ordinal numbers necessary to rank a set, perhaps divided by the number of elements in the set. Thus, suppose we have a set of five elements. If we were to rank these first, first, first, first, and first, this is clearly perfect equality. Ranking them first, second, second, second, and second, or first, first, first, first, and second, would represent the first level of inequality. Various combinations of first, second, and third would be a higher degree of inequality, and so on. This does not seem to be satisfactory intuitively, and we reach almost instinctively for cardinal numbers; that is, when we have a rank ordering, we want to know by how much the first in rank exceeds the second, or the second the third, and so on.

Once we can identify each element of the set with a cardinal number by which a common property of all the elements is measured, many concepts of distribution and measures of inequality are possible. Suppose we take weight as our cardinally measurable quality or aspect. If we have five individuals each weighing 180 pounds, we clearly have perfect equality in weight. If the range between the highest and lowest is only 5 pounds, they are still fairly equal and might well be classified as middleweights. If the range is between 300 pounds and 100 pounds, they are obviously very unequal and could not be put in any meaningful pigeonhole assigned by weight categories. This relationship which appears between equality and taxonomy is by no means accidental. Indeed, the very possibility of taxonomy depends on the discovery of certain sets of objects in the world which are "reasonably" equal in some regard. It may be only the need for economy in language that forces us into taxonomy, but we cannot get along without it. We do not have time to specify every rose

that we talk about. We develop the idea of a general class of roses, in which all roses are approximately equal, at least in their "roseness." Stereotyping is a pathological form of this taxonomic urge. If we assume that all blacks or all whites or all Jews are alike, we will be missing the richness and variety of the inhabitants of these pigeonholes and are, therefore, likely to fall into serious error.

Even when we can identify a cardinally measurable aspect of a set of elements, like weight, the problem of the measurement of inequality remains difficult, indeed, in some sense, insoluble, except as an approximation. The problem is that equality can usually be identified fairly easily. When the set with which we are concerned is a set of identically equal numbers, we know we have perfect equality. As soon as we diverge from this, however, we diverge into a vast set of sets of numbers—each of which has a certain individuality and character of its own—in which it is hard to develop a significant taxonomy and still harder to identify any index which unequivocally measures cardinally the inequality property of these sets. Thus, we know that the set 5, 5, 5, 5, 5 is equal, but is the set 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 more or less equal than the set 1, 1, 1, 1, 5? The first of these has smaller differences among pairs, the second has a subset of equality within it and then a wide difference. The difficulty here is that the significant classification, or taxonomy, of these unequal sets may not correspond to any cardinal measure that we could devise. Any measure will create a taxonomy of sets of equal inequality according to the measure, but in each of the boxes of this taxonomy we may have to put sets which are very different or significantly different from certain points of view, while sets which are significantly similar from certain points of view may find themselves in different boxes. Thus, suppose we took what is perhaps the simplest possible measure—the difference between the highest and the lowest number in the set—divided perhaps by the mean if we wish to compare sets of different sizes. An equal set will, of course, come out with an inequality of zero, which would be a property of any of these measures, but the two sets mentioned above will be equally unequal, although they are very different, even in certain properties that suggest inequality. That this is not a trivial consideration may be perceived if we consider the two sets above to be typical of two different kinds of societies, in each of which the difference between the richest and the poorest member is

about the same; but in one of which, one person is rich and everybody else is equally poor, whereas in the other, there are about equal numbers of individuals in all the income classes.

A measure which concentrates simply on the two extreme members of the set dismisses, in effect, all those between them as irrelevant. It is not surprising, therefore, that more elaborate and sophisticated measures of inequality have been devised. The standard deviation takes into account the deviation of all members of the set from the mean, though in a rather peculiar way: by taking the square root of the sum of the squares of the deviations, rather than by taking the sum of the absolute values of the deviations themselves. As far as I have been able to see, the only reason for this is algebraic elegance, and there certainly seems to be nothing to suggest that as a measure of inequality the standard deviation is any better than the means of the absolute values of the deviations themselves. Again, in order to compare distributions of different sizes, both of these are usually expressed as a proportion of the mean itself, though the information that is lost by this process is sometimes quite interesting.

These principles are illustrated in Table 1, which shows five different sets of numbers, each with five elements, in line 1. Line 2 is labeled Measure I, which is the crudest and simplest possible measure in quality, the absolute difference between the largest and smallest numbers. Case 1 represents perfect equality in which all the measures are zero. Case 6 is extreme inequality. By Measure I, Cases 2, 3, and 4 are perceived as equally unequal; 5 and 6 are much more unequal than these. Line 3 is Measure II, which is the largest number minus the smallest number, divided by the mean. By this measure, Case 4 is now perceived to be more unequal than Cases 2 or 3, because of its smaller mean. Line 4 shows the mean and line 5 the deviations from the mean; line 6 is Measure III, which is the mean of the absolute deviations divided by the mean. Line 7 is Measure IV, which is the standard deviation. Line 8 shows the cumulative distribution. Line 9 shows the cumulative distribution if each number were the mean, that is, the line of equal cumulation. Line 8 corresponds to the Lorenz curve, and Line 9 to the 45° line in the Lorenz diagram if these numbers are expressed as percentages of the total. Line 10 is the deviation of the cumulative distribution from the line of equal cumulation, and line 11 is the Gini index, which is the sum of deviations of line 10

TABLE 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Case	(3,3,3,3,3[15])	(1,3,3,3,5[15])	(1,2,3,4,5[15])	(1,1,1,1,5[9])	(1,1,1,1,11[15])	(0,0,0,0,15[15])
2 Measure I (Highest − lowest)	0	4	4	4	10	15
3 Measure II $\left(\dfrac{\text{Largest − smallest}}{\text{Mean}}\right)$	0	$\dfrac{4}{3} = 1.33$	$\dfrac{4}{3} = 1.33$	$\dfrac{4}{1.8} = 2.22$	$\dfrac{10}{3} = 3.33$	$\dfrac{15}{3} = 5$
4 Mean	3	3	3	1.8	3	3
5 Deviations from mean	0,0,0,0,0	−2,0,0,0,2	−2,−1,0,1,2	−.8,−.8,−.8,−.8,3.2	−2,−2,−2,−2,8	−3,−3,−3,−3,12
6 Measure III $\left(\dfrac{\text{Mean}}{\text{Deviation}}\right)$	0	$\dfrac{4}{5\times3} = 0.27$	$\dfrac{6}{5\times3} = 0.40$	$\dfrac{0.4}{5\times1.8} = 0.71$	$\dfrac{16}{5\times3} = 1.07$	$\dfrac{24}{5\times3} = 1.60$
7 Measure IV $\left(\sqrt{\dfrac{\Sigma x^2}{nM}}\right)$	0	$\dfrac{\sqrt{8}}{5\times3} = 0.19$	$\dfrac{\sqrt{10}}{5\times3} = 0.21$	$\dfrac{\sqrt{12.8}}{5\times1.8} = 0.40$	$\dfrac{\sqrt{80}}{5\times3} = 0.60$	$\dfrac{180}{5\times3} = 1.20$
8 Cumulative distribution	3,6,9,12,15(45)	1,4,7,10,15(37)	1,3,6,10,15(35)	1,2,3,4,9(19)	1,2,3,4,15(25)	0,0,0,0,15(15)
9 Equal cumulative distribution	3,6,9,12,15(45)	3,6,9,12,15(45)	3,6,9,12,15(45)	1.8,3.6,5.4,7.2,9(27)	3,6,9,12,15(45)	3,6,9,12,15(45)
10 Cumulative deviation	0,0,0,0,0	2,2,2,2,0(8)	2,3,3,2,0(10)	.8,1.6,2.4,3.6,0(8.4)	2,4,6,8,0(20)	3,6,9,12,0(30)
11 Measure V Gini index $\left(\dfrac{\Sigma(10)}{\Sigma(9)}\right)$	0	$\dfrac{8}{45} = 0.18$	$\dfrac{10}{45} = 0.22$	$\dfrac{8.4}{27.0} = 0.31$	$\dfrac{20}{45} = 0.44$	$\dfrac{30}{45} = 0.67$

divided by the sum of the equal cumulations of line 9. The Lorenz curves for the five distributions are shown in Figure 1.

Each of these measures has some plausibility; they give rather similar results: for each measure, the order of inequality is the same if we accept the bracketing in Measures I and II—but none of them necessarily correspond to what we would find if we asked people to rate a large number of different sets on a subjective scale of inequality. This indeed would be an interesting subject for an experiment, which could easily be done with the techniques of Kenneth Hammond's Cognograph.[1] We really do not know much about what the actual cues are which people pick up from given distributions in assessing the degree of inequality which they represent. One way of approaching this problem would be to calculate the higher moments of distribution and see how far these affected people's judgments of inequality. It might well be judged,

[1] K. R. Hammond, "Computer Graphics as an Aid to Learning," *Science* 72 (1971):903-8.
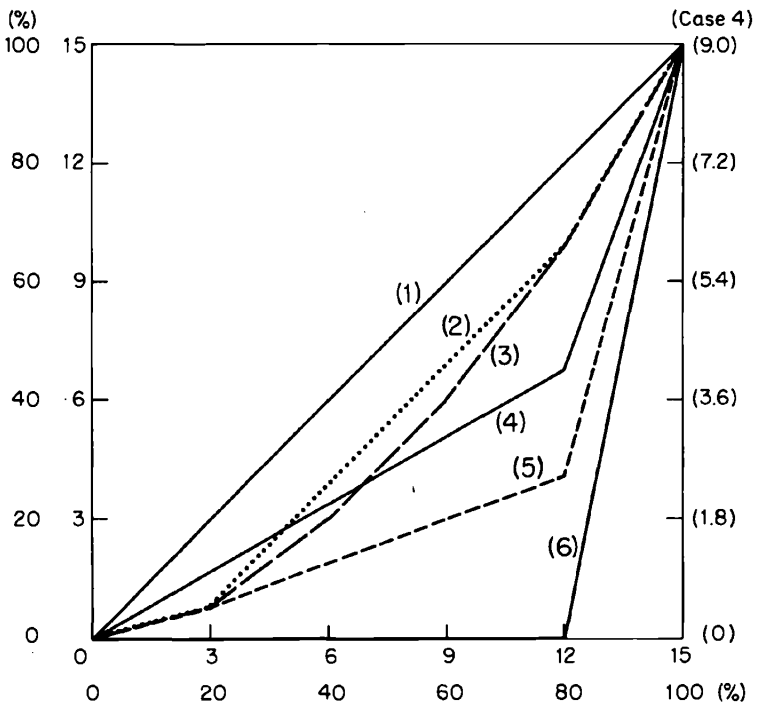

FIGURE 1

for instance, that distributions with the same standard deviation, but which differed in skewness, would be perceived as having greater inequality—with perhaps the more skewed distribution being perceived as more unequal. Other characteristics of distributions, however, which may not even be describable by the higher moments may also come into play. It would be extremely interesting to ask people to classify different distributions and see if there is anything like a subjective taxonomy of these things. A whole field of fascinating psychological experiments seems to be opening up at this point.

An even more fundamental question than the measurement of inequality is its evaluation. We could expand the psychological experiment suggested in the preceding paragraph and ask people to choose out of the six distributions shown in line 1, Table 1, which of each possible pair they prefer. This is by no means impossible. If we can get people to express their preferences between North and South Dakota,[2] we can surely get them to express their preferences between Case 1 and Case 2.

It will be rightly objected that the preferences will depend on what people think the distributions are distributing. Suppose, for instance, in Table 1 that each unit represented 50 pounds of weight. Case 1 would then be five people each weighing 150 pounds. Case 2 would be one kindergartner, three young men, and a fatty. Case 3 could well be a kindergartner, a schoolboy, a young man, an adult, and a fatty. Case 4 would be four kindergartners and a fatty. Case 5 would be four kindergartners and a circus freak, and Case 6 would be four ghosts and a freak. It would certainly be quite reasonable to ask people which group they would prefer to be with, and to extend this inquiry to a large number of other cases.

This illustrates the problem that every distribution is not simply a set of numbers but is a gestalt, and that no matter how many descriptive moments of the distribution we formulate, we will never be able to capture its peculiar gestalt property. What we are pursuing, therefore, is not really equality, except in the very special case in which Case 1, Table 1, is the gestalt which happens to be highest on everybody's value ordering. This seems unlikely, unless everybody happens to be looking for a peer group.

[2] Peter R. Gould, "On Mental Maps," in Roger M. Downs and David Stea, eds., *Cognitive Mapping and Spatial Behavior* (Chicago: Aldine, 1973).

It is not surprising that the problem of the optimum degree of inequality is difficult and perhaps insoluble. The value ordering of the different cases in Table 1 may not correspond to the ordering of our judgment of the amount of inequality simply because our value ordering depends on other things besides inequality, and depends, indeed, on our perception of the whole set of properties of the distribution, some of which we may not even be aware of except subconsciously. Thus, suppose in Table 1 that our subjective ordering of the six cases according to the degree of inequality (from low to high) was 1, 4, 2, 3, 5, 6, and that our ordering according to preference or value (low to high), was 6, 1, 5, 4, 2, 3. (We dislike teenagers and ghosts, and like a warm variety of people.) These seem to be not wholly implausible valuations, assuming that these are parties of people with which one might want to spend a day. If, however, we plot value against inequality, as in Figure 2, there seems to be hardly any linear relationship. There may be evidence of an "Aristotelian mean" at medium inequality (Case 3), but even this may be spurious. We may like Cases 2 and 3 for reasons not connected with inequality.

If now the judgment of equality were the only factor in determining our judgment of value, we would have something like Figure 3, with perfect correlation between equality and value. We very often assume situations like that depicted in Figure 3 almost unconsciously when we are trying to set a value on single components or dimensions of the system, yet one suspects that the condition shown in Figure 2 is much more common than that shown in Figure 3.

The above considerations should have some impact on our consideration of economic equality or inequality. Here we do seem to have a measure, indeed at least two measures—one of wealth and the other of income—which have the appearance of cardinality in the sense that for each individual we can usually attach some sort of number in dollar terms to measure his wealth and income. We can then get distributions of these numbers which we can express, for instance, in a frequency diagram or in a Lorenz curve, and we could apply any of the five measures outlined above—and no doubt half a dozen others that we could think up on fairly short notice. In economics, we are accustomed to thinking of a "theory of distribution" (which usually seems to apply only to the distribution of income), in which we discuss the forces which lead to personal distribution of income and its
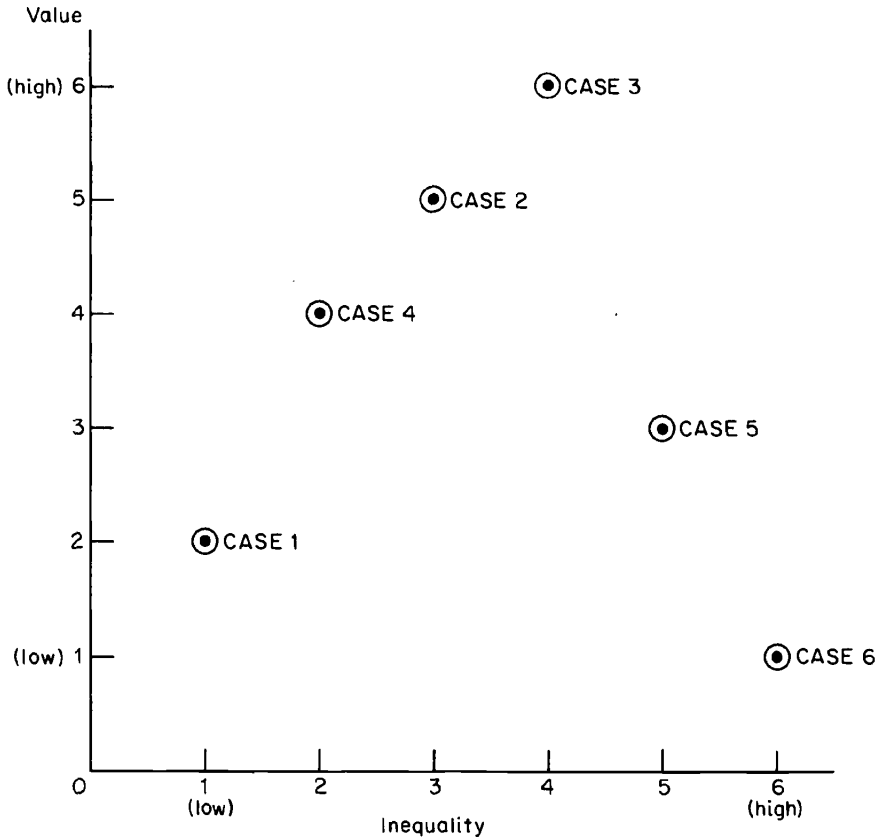
Value

(high) 6 ⊢—   ⊙CASE 3

    5 ⊢—   ⊙CASE 2

    4 ⊢—   ⊙CASE 4

    3 ⊢—   ⊙CASE 5

    2 ⊢—   ⊙CASE 1

(low) 1 ⊢—   ⊙CASE 6

    0   1   2   3   4   5   6
          (low)   Inequality   (high)

FIGURE 2

equality or inequality. A good deal of social policy is justified on
the grounds that it changes the distribution of income, the usual
justification being that it makes this distribution more equal.
Progressive taxation is usually defended on these grounds, and so
are welfare payments, agricultural subsidies, public housing, the
war on poverty, and so on. It is almost always assumed that there
is a high correlation between some measure of equality and some
estimate of social value.

  I find myself in profound sympathy with much of the social-
value function which underlies the pursuit of equality. I have no
liking for feudal societies (Case 4 in Table 1), still less liking for
slave societies (Case 5 in Table 1), and still less for totally mecha-
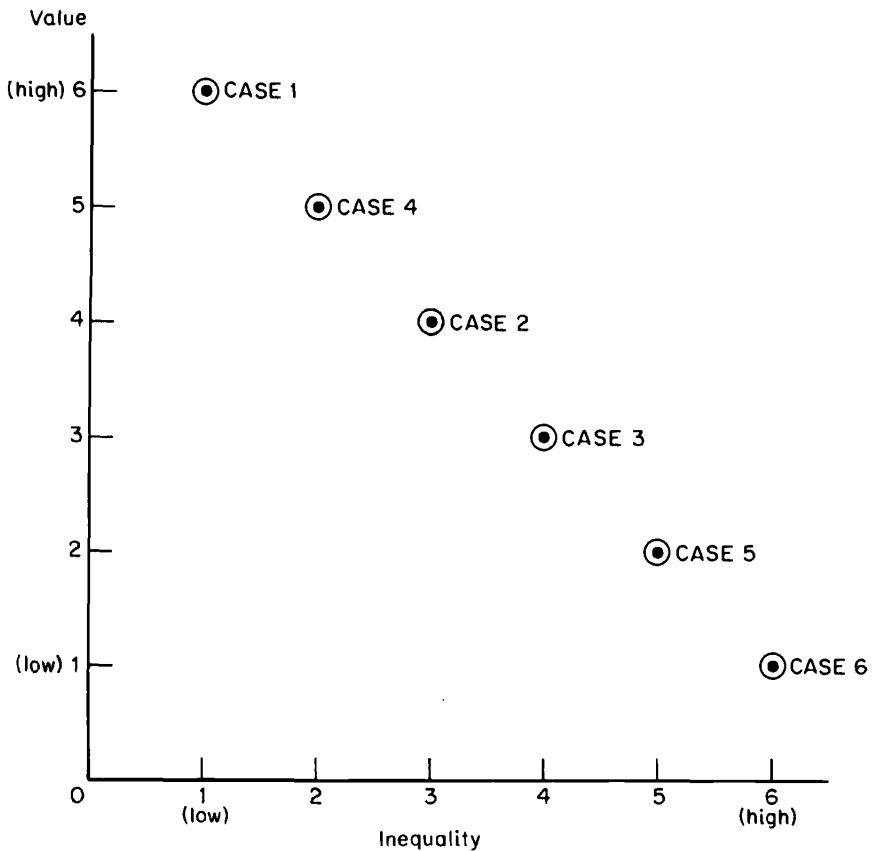nized utopias (Case 6 in Table 1). I must confess, however,

FIGURE 3

that I am bothered by the apparent simplicity of the picture which is presented, largely because the quantification in terms of dollars is, in part, at any rate, an illusion. The dollars that we write down to represent somebody's income (or wealth), in fact represent a very long heterogeneous list of quantities of commodities. Income (or wealth) is not, therefore, a number of homogeneous "dollars," in which all the units are alike, but a vast array of heterogeneous things. A $5,000 a year income for one person may represent genteel poverty, living in grandfather's big old house, eating very little meat, not having a car, wearing last year's clothes, and so on. For another person, $5,000 might mean a large alcohol consumption, neglect of his family, considerable expenditure on prostitutes, and skimping on medical care. We make pigeonholes labeled, say, $5,000–$6,000 or

$30,000–$31,000, and proceed to put all people who have the stated incomes into these pigeonholes. Then, when we look inside each box, we find that we have a fantastically heterogeneous collection of people. In the lower one, we note ministers, graduate students, factory workers, owners of corner groceries, small farmers, landlords, little old ladies living on a pension in Miami, welfare families, and so on. In the upper one, we come upon professors, corporation executives, politicians, gamblers, real estate speculators, coupon clippers. Each list appears endless.

This is not to deny that there are important differences between the $5,000 group and the $30,000 group. The differences within each group, however, may be just as interesting as the differences between them and possibly even more significant. Thus, we are apt to fall into an "income prejudice" very similar to the fallacy of race prejudice. That is, we assume that because people are alike in one quality or measure, they are alike in others. Income prejudice is even worse in some sense, because whereas all black people do presumably have rather similar chromosomes producing melanin, people having $5,000 a year may not even have any special genetic qualities or any consumption pattern in common.

One justification for the great illusive simplicities of economics is perhaps that by simplifying things we may make it easier to do something about them. The concept of income poverty is particularly appealing in this respect. At any one time, we can define a level of income in dollar terms which marks the lower limits of what is socially acceptable and the upper limits of what is defined as poverty. We can then calculate how much we have to redistribute to people with incomes below this level in order to bring them up to it. In a rich society like the United States, it usually turns out that the amount we have to redistribute in order to eliminate income poverty is well within our fiscal resources, generally on the order of ten or twenty billion dollars. This seems like doing a great deal of good with a relatively small proportion of the GNP. Following the principle that the size of the grants economy is largely dependent on the grantor's perceptions of its efficiency—that is, how much good it does per dollar—economics of this kind would certainly seem to lead to a rhetoric for doing good which one would hate to question.

Nevertheless, somebody has to bear in mind, even if he keeps quiet about it, that the distribution of income is not really very much like the cutting up of a pie. This "pie," so beloved of

popular expositors of economics, is a very dangerous image. It suggests that somebody makes the pie and then somebody else cuts it and distributes it. The truth is that the pie is a vast heterogeneous mass of artifacts and activities, so that it is an almost grotesque abstraction to suppose that we can put a single number on it and call it the GNP or national income, and an even greater abstraction to suppose that this single number can be divided among the population. What is really divided is not dollars but Volkswagons and dinners in a nightclub, church services and pants suits, in a medley that makes shoes, ships, and sealing wax look relatively homogeneous. There is no "division of the pie." Instead, there is a vast free school with everybody doing his own thing and making his own tartlets in his own little corner.

I am almost tempted to say that there is no such thing as the distribution of income. I cannot go quite that far, because it is a useful abstraction, but it is very dangerous to forget what a very abstract abstraction it is. I am prepared to give at least one cheer when the Gini index goes down, but my second cheer is paralyzed by the reflection that societies with the same Gini index, or even the same Lorenz curve, may be enormously different in quality, in the sense of community and the overall patterns of life and consumption. At what point then, one asks oneself, is it better to put effort into making a better society with the same income distribution rather than changing the distribution in the hope that such a change automatically makes things better? One worries also about the costs of greater equality in terms of the sacrifice of other social values, such as freedom, variety, and so on.

The pursuit of equality, which looks on first inspection like a very decent and well-ordered chase, has, on closer inspection, alarming tendencies to turn into a caucus race with everybody running off in all directions. We should take a brief look, therefore, at some of the different equalities that might be pursued. A favorite one in American society is, of course, equality of opportunity. It is often implied that if we have equality of opportunity without achieving equality of income, it will be because some people were virtuous and took advantage of their opportunities, whereas others were lazy no-goods who did not take advantage of opportunities open to them, i.e., laggards who richly deserve their poverty. Equality of opportunity, therefore, all too easily becomes a device like Karma for justifying existing inequalities of status and income. The doctrine of Karma is,

indeed, an extreme expression of cosmic equality of opportunity; every soul presumably starts from scratch, and if you happen to find yourself in 1972 as a starving manure collector, it is no doubt because you missed some opportunities in an earlier incarnation. Nevertheless, the equality of opportunity ideal is not to be repudiated outright. It is a weapon in the attack on something which everybody despises unless he has it—that is, privilege. The struggle against what have been felt to be unfair privileges has been an important element in human history for a long time, and we cannot deny there is a great deal of validity in it.

Now, however, we run into another hornet's nest, which is the problem of equality in luck, or uncertainty. Suppose the State of New York, in a fit of madcap generosity, gave everybody in the state a ticket for the state lottery free of charge. What could be more equal? Yet the result, once the tickets are drawn, is a vast inequality, with the winners becoming rich and the losers perhaps a little poorer. The delicate line between the excitement of gambling and the staid respectabilities of insurance is one of the trickiest questions in the evaluation of societies. Would we really want a society in which there was no luck, no uncertainty—one in which everything bad that happened to you was clearly and unmistakably your own fault? Where there is luck, however, there will be inequality, and a society of total cradle to grave no-fault insurance on everything begins to look a little bit like a spiritual Great Plains. We cannot really say peaks Yes, and valleys No, for the only way to get rid of the valleys is to bulldoze the peaks into them. These are moral dilemmas of a high order which underlie, largely subconsciously, a good deal of current discussion, and they contain so much dynamite that one hesitates even to bring them out of the cave.

In a recent paper,[3] I compared the search for justice to the search for the Holy Grail, something which might never be found, and perhaps might even be nonexistent, but the search for which created enormous side benefits. The pursuit of equality is perhaps the most important single part of the search for justice. The quarry is elusive and it is manifold, sometimes seeming like a great herd of pure white unicorns who shoot off in all directions.

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[3] K. E. Boulding, "Social Justice as a Holy Grail: The Endless Quest," in Melvin J. Lerner and Michael Ross, eds., *The Quest For Justice: Myth Reality, Ideal* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, forthcoming).

Nevertheless, what we are pursuing is something real. It cannot be dismissed as a will-o'-the-wisp.

The most satisfactory human relationships are those which are based on some kind of equality—equality of status if nothing else. The unequal hierarchical relationship of superior and subordinate always seems to be corrupting. It corrupts the information system, for the subordinate is apt to tell a superior what he thinks will please him rather than the truth. It is likewise apt to give the superior delusions of grandeur and the subordinate delusions of inferiority, both of which corrupt the process of human learning and development.

The pursuit of equality is also an important component of the search for what might be called "disalienation," the development of a society from which nobody feels excluded, and in which everybody feels that he has value as a person. The net moral worth, that is, the sum of each person's evaluation of himself as a person, is a much more fundamental measure of the value of the society than the gross national product, which can never be more than a collection of intermediate goods.

The pursuit of equality is likely to become more urgent and more important as we move toward the "spaceship earth" and the more stationary society which seems to lie ahead as the human race expands to the capabilities of its niche. The progressive state, as Adam Smith says, is both "hearty and cheerful," partly, at least, because it helps in the legitimation of existing inequalities if those at the bottom end of the scale feel that they have a good chance of rising. In a progressive state, everybody can rise absolutely, if not relatively. In a stationary state, the only way in which the poor can get richer is for the rich to get poorer. This is by no means an agreeable state of affairs. Unless there is a strong legitimation for downward mobility—this is perhaps the real significance of the counterculture—the slowdown toward the stationary state opens up grim possibilities: either increasing social disorganization as a society becomes incapable of legitimating existing inequalities, or a retreat into a kind of Hobbesian tyranny and an attempt to end the war of all against all by a new Leviathan. It may be that the real significance of the radical egalitarian societies, such as Cuba and China, is that they may be at least one means of legitimating stagnation. It is clear that in the next five hundred years, the challenge of finding the right kinds of equality, and the optimum degrees of equality, will be perhaps the

greatest confronting the political and social thought of the human race.

The pursuit of equality is a metaphor and the pursuit of any metaphor, if carried too far, will lead us over a cliff. In this case, the quarry is itself the hunter. One is reminded of Pogo's great principle, "We have met the enemy and he is us." I have formulated what I have called "D'Arcy Thomson's law," for the great biologist and author of *Growth and Form*. It states that "everything is what it is because it got that way." The state of affairs today is the result of the whole process of the universe through time. If any distribution is unequal today, it is because the dynamic processes which produced it made it that way. The inequality of genetic endowment is the result of the whole process of evolutionary mutation and selection. Inequality of capital endowments is the result of a rather similar process by which property grows, declines, is redistributed, and inherited. The distribution of income is largely a function of the distribution of property, including property in bodies and minds, modified by the "grants economy," that is, by one-way transfers or redistributions. The grants economy is also a result of a long historical process, the building up of integrative structures, families, communities, nations, or of threat structures.

When we pursue equality, therefore, we are not pursuing something which is different from ourselves. We are, however, attempting to introduce conscious objectives into the overall dynamic process of society. All we can ever hope to change is parameters. Often, we cannot change them much. Nevertheless, we can change them significantly. We can introduce progressive taxation, inheritance taxes, inheritance regulations, subsidies to rectify inherited deficiencies, Head Start, educational subsidies, boarding schools for the children of the poor, birth control propaganda, and so on. Any one of these things changes the parameters of the dynamics of the system, moving it either toward or away from greater equality, or toward or away from other desirable objectives. Understanding the relations between the parameters of the dynamic process is a great task in the social sciences. Without such understanding public policy is virtually blind and inexorably subject to what I have called the "law of political irony"—that almost everything we do to help people hurts them, and everything we do to hurt them helps them.

The virtues and the excitement of the pursuit of equality,

however, must never blind us to the fact that what we are ultimately pursuing is the good. This is the real Holy Grail, and equality is only one of the arguments, although a very significant one, in the total goodness function. Putting equality in its place, finding out what its costs are, is again part, and perhaps the largest part, of the great task which lies ahead.