

The Nature and Limits of Human Equality

Also by John Charvet

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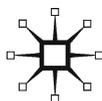
The Nature and Limits of Human Equality

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palgrave
macmillan



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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2013 978-1-137-32915-8

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First published 2013 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-46051-9 ISBN 978-1-137-32916-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137329165

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

In Memoriam

David Lloyd Thomas
1932–2012

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Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to the memory of David Lloyd Thomas, whose friendship and philosophical knowledge and intelligence I valued greatly.

David commented in detail on several drafts of the first two chapters but sadly died suddenly before I had developed sufficient confidence in my arguments to show him the crucial Chapters 3 and 4. I would like to think that he would have been in sympathy with their general direction. He was certainly sceptical of recent justifications of modern egalitarianism and also thought of morality as a kind of convention. But he might well have found my arguments excessively ambitious.

Many thinkers have, over the years, contributed to the formation of my ideas on equality. But I am particularly grateful to Christopher Cherry, Alan Haworth, Margaret Moore, and Lloyd Reinhardt for reading and commenting on all or parts of this book.

Glossary of Key Terms

Basic Equality: A fundamental moral equality of human beings whereby each person is to be treated as an equal end whose interests should be given equal consideration in the determination of the basic structure of a just society. Nevertheless compatible with political inegalitarianism of Platonic type.

Egalitarianism: Expresses the standard view of modern Western political philosophy that an acceptable political ethics must involve a basic sociopolitical structure of equal rights.

Weak Egalitarianism: The basic structure of equal rights understood as rights to certain very important negative liberty rights such as the right to private property. Weak because compatible with opulence and destitution.

Strong Egalitarianism: The equal rights are to equal amounts of some good such as welfare, resources, opportunities for welfare, capabilities. So-called luck egalitarianism is included, although allows for inequalities that arise from free choice. Could be included in the next category.

Moderate Egalitarianism: Any scheme of equal basic rights that balances liberty and welfare rights. Rawls's scheme probably belongs here although he thinks of it as strongly egalitarian.

Ethical Community: A collection of people mutually committed to interacting in pursuit of their non-moral good on ethical terms. Realized, in the first instance, through coercive associations such as states.

Role-Based Ethical Community: Ethical community in which the basic units are individuals as role-bearers, as, for example, the guardians, auxiliaries, and producers in Plato's *Republic*. Included here are kin-based tribal communities.

Individual-Based Ethical Community: Ethical community in which the basic units are individuals in their own right. In the

liberal form of this community individuals enjoy substantial negative liberty rights. In the collectivist form the basic equal right of individuals is to participate in the collective decisions as to what everyone should do.