

CHAPTER

8

Equality, Envy, Exploitation, Etc.

EQUALITY

THE legitimacy of altering social institutions to achieve greater equality of material condition is, though often assumed, rarely *argued* for. Writers note that in a given country the wealthiest n percent of the population holds more than that percentage of the wealth, and the poorest n percent holds less; that to get to the wealth of the top n percent from the poorest, one must look at the bottom p percent (where p is vastly greater than n), and so forth. They then proceed immediately to discuss how this might be altered. On the entitlement conception of justice in holdings, one *cannot* decide whether the state must do something to alter the situation merely by looking at a distributional profile or at facts such as these. It depends upon how the distribution came about. Some processes yielding these results would be legitimate, and the various parties would be entitled to their respective holdings. If these distributional facts *did* arise by a legitimate process, then they themselves are legitimate. This is, of course, *not* to say that they may not be changed, provided this can be done without violating people's entitlements. Any persons who favor a particular

end-state pattern may choose to transfer some or all of their own holdings so as (at least temporarily) more nearly to realize their desired pattern.

The entitlement conception of justice in holdings makes no presumption in favor of equality, or any other overall end state or patterning. It cannot merely be *assumed* that equality must be built into any theory of justice. There is a surprising dearth of arguments for equality capable of coming to grips with the considerations that underlie a nonglobal and nonpatterned conception of justice in holdings.¹ (However, there is no lack of unsupported statements of a presumption in favor of equality.) I shall consider the argument which has received the most attention from philosophers in recent years; that offered by Bernard Williams in his influential essay "The Idea of Equality."² (No doubt many readers will feel that all hangs on some other argument; I would like to see *that* argument precisely set out, in detail.)

Leaving aside preventive medicine, the proper ground of distribution of medical care is ill health: this is a necessary truth. Now in very many societies, while ill health may work as a necessary condition of receiving treatment, it does not work as a sufficient condition, since such treatment costs money, and not all who are ill have the money; hence the possession of sufficient money becomes in fact an additional necessary condition of actually receiving treatment. . . . When we have the situation in which, for instance, wealth is a further necessary condition of the receipt of medical treatment, we can once more apply the notions of equality and inequality: not now in connection with the inequality between the well and the ill, but in connection with the inequality between the rich ill and the poor ill, since we have straightforwardly the situation of those whose needs are the same not receiving the same treatment, though the needs are the ground of the treatment. This is an irrational state of affairs . . . it is a situation in which reasons are insufficiently operative; it is a situation insufficiently controlled by reasons—and hence by reason itself.³

Williams seems to be arguing that if among the different descriptions applying to an activity, there is one that contains an "internal goal" of the activity, then (it is a necessary truth that) the only proper grounds for the performance of the activity, or its allocation if it is scarce, are connected with the effective achievement of the internal goal. If the activity is done upon others, the only proper criterion for distributing the activity is their need for

it, if any. Thus it is that Williams says (it is a necessary truth that) the only proper criterion for the distribution of medical care is medical need. Presumably, then, the only proper criterion for the distribution of barbering services is barbering need. But why must the internal goal of the activity take precedence over, for example, the person's particular purpose in performing the activity? (We ignore the question of whether one activity can fall under two different descriptions involving different internal goals.) If someone becomes a barber because he likes talking to a variety of different people, and so on, is it unjust of him to allocate his services to those he most likes to talk to? Or if he works as a barber in order to earn money to pay tuition at school, may he cut the hair of only those who pay or tip well? Why may not a barber use exactly the same criteria in allocating his services as someone else whose activities have no internal goal involving others? Need a gardener allocate his services to those lawns which need him most?

In what way does the situation of a doctor differ? Why must his activities be allocated via the internal goal of medical care? (If there was no "shortage," could some *then* be allocated using other criteria as well?) It seems clear that *he* needn't do that; just because he has this skill, why should *he* bear the costs of the desired allocation, why is he less entitled to pursue his own goals, within the special circumstances of practicing medicine, than everyone else? So it is *society* that, somehow, is to arrange things so that the doctor, in pursuing his own goals, allocates according to need; for example, the society pays him to do this. But why must the society do this? (Should they do it for barbering as well?) Presumably, because medical care is important, people need it very much. This is true of food as well, though farming does *not* have an internal goal that refers to other people in the way doctoring does. When the layers of Williams' argument are peeled away, what we arrive at is the claim that society (that is, each of us acting together in some organized fashion) should make provision for the important needs of all of its members. This claim, of course, has been stated many times before. Despite appearances, Williams presents no argument for it.* Like others, Williams looks only to questions of

* We have discussed Williams' position without introducing an essentialist view that some activities necessarily involve certain goals. Instead we have tied

allocation. He ignores the question of where the things or actions to be allocated and distributed come from. Consequently, he does not consider whether they come already tied to people who have entitlements over them (surely the case for service activities, which are people's *actions*), people who therefore may decide for themselves to whom they will give the thing and on what grounds.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Equality of opportunity has seemed to many writers to be the minimal egalitarian goal, questionable (if at all) only for being too weak. (Many writers also have seen how the existence of the family prevents fully achieving this goal.) There are two ways to attempt to provide such equality: by directly worsening the situations of those more favored with opportunity, or by improving the situation of those less well-favored. The latter requires the use of resources, and so it too involves worsening the situation of some: those from whom holdings are taken in order to improve the situation of others. But holdings to which these people are entitled may not be seized, even to provide equality of opportunity for others. In the absence of magic wands, the remaining means toward equality of opportunity is convincing persons each to choose to devote some of their holdings to achieving it.

The model of a race for a prize is often used in discussions of equality of opportunity. A race where some started closer to the finish line than others would be unfair, as would a race where some were forced to carry heavy weights, or run with pebbles in their sneakers. But life is not a race in which we all compete for a prize which someone has established; there is no unified race, with some person judging swiftness. Instead, there are different persons

the goals to *descriptions* of the activities. For essentialist issues only becloud the discussion, and they still leave open the question of why the only proper ground for allocating the activity is its essentialist goal. The motive for making such an essentialist claim would be to avoid someone's saying: let "schmoctoring" be an activity just like doctoring except that *its* goal is to earn money for the practitioner; has Williams presented any reason why *schmoctoring* services should be allocated according to need?

separately giving other persons different things. Those who do the giving (each of us, at times) usually do not care about desert or about the handicaps labored under; they care simply about what they actually get. No centralized process judges people's use of the opportunities they had; that is not what the processes of social cooperation and exchange are for.

There is a reason why some inequality of opportunity might seem *unfair*, rather than merely unfortunate in that some do not have every opportunity (which would be true even if no one else had greater advantage). Often the person entitled to transfer a holding has no special desire to transfer it to a particular person; this contrasts with a bequest to a child or a gift to a particular person. He chooses to transfer to someone who satisfies a certain condition (for example, who can provide him with a certain good or service in exchange, who can do a certain job, who can pay a certain salary), and he would be equally willing to transfer to anyone else who satisfied that condition. Isn't it unfair for one party to receive the transfer, rather than another who had less opportunity to satisfy the condition the transferrer used? Since the giver doesn't care to whom he transfers, provided the recipient satisfies a certain general condition, equality of opportunity to be a recipient in such circumstances would violate no entitlement of the giver. Nor would it violate any entitlement of the person with the greater opportunity; while entitled to what he has, he has no entitlement that it be more than another has. Wouldn't it be *better* if the person with less opportunity had an equal opportunity? If one so could equip him without violating anyone else's entitlements (the magic wand?) shouldn't one do so? Wouldn't it be *fairer*? If it *would* be fairer, can such fairness also justify overriding some people's entitlements in order to acquire the resources to boost those having poorer opportunities into a more equal competitive position?

The process is competitive in the following way. If the person with greater opportunity didn't exist, the transferrer might deal with some person having lesser opportunity who then would be, under those circumstances, the best person available to deal with. This differs from a situation in which unconnected but similar beings living on different planets confront different difficulties and have different opportunities to realize various of their goals. There,

the situation of one does *not* affect that of another; though it would be better if the worse planet were better endowed than it is (it also would be better if the better planet were better endowed than *it* is), it wouldn't be *fairer*. It also differs from a situation in which a person does not, though he could, choose to *improve* the situation of another. In the particular circumstances under discussion, a person having lesser opportunities would be better off if some particular person having better opportunities didn't exist. The person having better opportunities can be viewed not merely as someone better off, or as someone not choosing to aid, but as someone *blocking* or *impeding* the person having lesser opportunities from becoming better off.⁴ Impeding another by being a more alluring alternative partner in exchange is not to be compared to directly *worsening* the situation of another, as by stealing from him. But still, cannot the person with lesser opportunity justifiably complain at being so impeded by another who does not *deserve* his better opportunity to satisfy certain conditions? (Let us ignore any similar complaints another might make about *him*.)

While feeling the power of the questions of the previous two paragraphs (it is *I* who ask them), I do not believe they overturn a thoroughgoing entitlement conception. If the woman who later became my wife rejected another suitor (whom she otherwise would have married) for me, partially because (I leave aside my lovable nature) of my keen intelligence and good looks, neither of which did I earn, would the rejected less intelligent and less handsome suitor have a legitimate complaint about unfairness? Would my thus impeding the other suitor's winning the hand of fair lady justify taking some resources from others to pay for cosmetic surgery for him and special intellectual training, or to pay to develop in him some sterling trait that I lack in order to equalize our chances of being chosen? (I here take for granted the impermissibility of worsening the situation of the person having better opportunities so as to equalize opportunity; in this sort of case by disfiguring him or injecting drugs or playing noises which prevent him from fully using his intelligence.⁵) *No such consequences follow*. (Against whom would the rejected suitor have a legitimate complaint? Against what?) Nor are things different if the differential opportunities arise from the accumulated effects of people's acting or transferring their entitlement as they choose. The case is even

easier for consumption goods which cannot plausibly be claimed to have any such triadic impeding effect. Is it unfair that a child be raised in a home with a swimming pool, using it daily even though he is no more *deserving* than another child whose home is without one? Should such a situation be prohibited? Why then should there be objection to the transfer of the swimming pool to an adult by bequest?

The major objection to speaking of everyone's having a right to various things such as equality of opportunity, life, and so on, and enforcing this right, is that these "rights" require a substructure of things and materials and actions; and *other* people may have rights and entitlements over these. No one has a right to something whose realization requires certain uses of things and activities that other people have rights and entitlements over.⁶ Other people's rights and entitlements to *particular things* (that pencil, *their* body, and so on) and how they choose to exercise these rights and entitlements fix the external environment of any given individual and the means that will be available to him. If his goal requires the use of means which others have rights over, he must enlist their voluntary cooperation. Even to *exercise* his right to determine how something he owns is to be used may require other means he must acquire a right to, for example, food to keep him alive; he must put together, with the cooperation of others, a feasible package.

There are particular rights over particular things held by particular persons, and particular rights to reach agreements with others, *if* you and they together can acquire the means to reach an agreement. (No one has to supply you with a telephone so that you may reach an agreement with another.) No rights exist in conflict with this substructure of particular rights. Since no neatly contoured right to achieve a goal will avoid incompatibility with this substructure, no such rights exist. The particular rights over things fill the space of rights, leaving no room for general rights to be in a certain material condition. The reverse theory would place only such universally held general "rights to" achieve goals or to be in a certain material condition into its substructure so as to determine all else; to my knowledge no serious attempt has been made to state this "reverse" theory.

SELF-ESTEEM AND ENVY

It is plausible to connect equality with self-esteem.⁷ The envious person, if he cannot (also) possess a thing (talent, and so on) that someone else has, prefers that the other person not have it either. The envious man prefers neither one having it, to the other's having it and his not having it.*

* With regard to you, another person, and having a kind of object or attribute, there are four possibilities:

	HE	YOU
1.	has it	have it
2.	has it	don't have it
3.	doesn't have it	have it
4.	doesn't have it	don't have it

You are *envious* (with regard to him and that kind of object or attribute; I suppress the relativization in what follows) if you prefer 4 to 2, while preferring 3 to 4. (The "while" is the "and" of conjunction.) You are *jealous* if you prefer 1 to 2, while being indifferent between 3 and 4. The root idea is that you are jealous if you want it because he has it. The condition formulated says you want it solely because he has it. A weaker condition would say that you are jealous if you want it more because he has it; that is, if you prefer 1 to 2 more than you prefer 3 to 4. Similarly we can formulate a less strong condition for envy. A strongly envious man prefers the other not have the thing if he himself doesn't. A partially envious man may be willing for the other to have the thing even though he himself cannot, but he prefers this less strongly than he prefers that the other have the thing if he himself does; that is, he prefers 2 to 4 less than he prefers 1 to 3. You are *begrudging* if you prefer 3 to 1, while preferring 3 to 4. You are *spiteful* if you prefer 4 to 1, while preferring 3 to 4. You are *competitive* if you prefer 3 to 4, while being indifferent between 1 and 4.

A competitive person is begrudging. A spiteful person is begrudging. There are envious people who are not jealous (in the sense of the weaker condition). Though it is not a theorem, it is a plausible psychological conjecture that most jealous people are envious. And surely it is a psychological law that spiteful people are envious.

Compare the similar though somewhat different distinctions that Rawls draws (*Theory of Justice*, sect. 80). Rawls' notion of envy is stronger than ours. We can formulate a close equivalent of his, by letting $i(X)$ be the i th row in the above matrix for something X ; $i(Y)$ be the i th row for something Y . You are envious in Rawls' strong sense if you prefer 4(X) and 4(Y) to 2(X) and 1(Y); that is, if you prefer that neither of you have either X or Y , rather than that he have both X and Y while you have only Y . You are willing to give up something to erase the differential. Rawls uses both "jealous" and "begrudging"

People often have claimed that envy underlies egalitarianism. And others have replied that since egalitarian principles are separately justifiable, we need attribute no disreputable psychology to the egalitarian; he desires merely that correct principles be realized. In view of the great ingenuity with which people dream up principles to rationalize their emotions, and given the great difficulty in discovering *arguments* for equality as a value in itself, this reply is, to say the least, unproven. (Nor is it proven by the fact that once people accept egalitarian principles, they might support the worsening of their own position as an application of these general principles.)

Here I prefer to focus on the *strangeness* of the emotion of envy. Why do some people *prefer* that others not have their better score on some dimension, rather than being pleased at another's being well-off or having good fortune; why don't they at least just shrug it off? One line seems especially worth pursuing: A person with a score along some dimension would rather another person with a higher score H had scored less well than H , even though this will not raise his own score, in those cases when the other person's having a higher score than himself threatens or undermines his own self-esteem and makes him feel inferior to the other in some important way. How can another's activities, or characteristics, affect one's own self-esteem? Shouldn't my self-esteem, feeling of worth, and so forth, depend only upon facts about me? If it is me that I'm evaluating in some way, how *can* facts about other persons play a role? The answer, of course, is that we evaluate how *well* we do something by comparing our performance to others, to what others can do. A man living in an isolated mountain village can sink 15 jump shots with a basketball out of 150 tries. Everyone else in the village can sink only 1 jump shot out of 150 tries. He thinks (as do the others) that he's very good at it. One day, along comes Jerry West. Or, a mathematician works *very* hard and occasionally thinks up an interesting conjecture, nicely proves a theorem, and so on. He then discovers a whole group of whizzes at mathematics. He dreams up a conjecture, and they quickly prove

for our "begrudging" and has nothing corresponding to our "jealous." Our notion of spite here is stronger than his, and he has no notion corresponding to our "competitive."

or disprove it (not in all possible cases, because of Church's theorem), constructing very elegant proofs; they themselves also think up very deep theorems, and so on.

In each of these cases, the person will conclude that he wasn't *very good* or *adept* at the thing after all. There is no standard of doing something well, independent of how it is or can be done by others. At the end of his book *Literature and Revolution*, in describing what man will be like (eventually) in a communist society, Leon Trotsky says:

Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser, and subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise.

If this were to occur, the average person, at the level *only* of Aristotle, Goethe, or Marx, wouldn't think he was very good or adept at those activities. He would have problems of self-esteem! Someone in the circumstances of the described basketball player or mathematician might prefer that the other persons lacked their talents, or prefer that they stop continually demonstrating their worth, at least in front of him; that way his self-esteem will avoid battering and can be shored up.

This would be *one* possible explanation of why certain inequalities in income, or position of authority within an industry, or of an entrepreneur as compared to his employees, *rankle* so; *not* due to the feeling that this superior position is undeserved, but to the feeling that it *is* deserved and earned. It may injure one's self-esteem and make one feel less worthy as a person to know of someone else who has accomplished more or risen higher. Workers in a factory started only recently by someone else previously a worker will be constantly *confronted* by the following thoughts: why not me? why am I only here? Whereas one can manage to ignore much more easily the knowledge that someone else somewhere has done more, if one is not confronted daily with him. The point, though sharper then, does not depend upon another's deserving his superior ranking along some dimension. That there is someone else who is a good dancer will affect your estimate of how good you yourself are at dancing, even if you think that a large part of grace in dancing depends upon unearned natural assets.

As a framework for discussion that embodies these considerations (and *not* as a contribution to psychological theory), consider the following *simple* model. There are a number of different dimensions, dimensional attributes along which people can vary, D_1, \dots, D_n , that people hold to be valuable. People may differ as to what dimensions they think valuable, and they may differ as to the (nonzero) weights they give to the dimensions they agree in considering valuable. For each person, there will be a *factual profile* that presents his objective position along each dimension; for example, on the jump-shot dimension, we might have "able regularly to score ____ jump shots out of 100 tries from 20 feet out," and a person's score might be 20, or 34, or 67.

For simplicity, let us assume that a person's beliefs about his factual profile are reasonably accurate. Also there will be an *evaluative profile* to represent how the person evaluates his own scores on the factual profile. There will be evaluative classifications (for example, excellent, good, satisfactory, poor, awful) representing his evaluation of himself for each dimension. These individual evaluations, how he gets from the factual score to the evaluations, will depend upon his factual beliefs about the factual profiles of other similar beings (the "reference group"), the goals he was given as a child, and so on. All shape his level of aspiration, which itself will vary over time in roughly specifiable ways. Each person will make some overall estimate of himself; in the simplest case this will depend solely on his evaluative profile and his weighting of the dimensions. *How* it depends upon this may vary from individual to individual. Some may take the weighted sum of their scores over all the dimensions; others may evaluate themselves as OK if they do well on some reasonably important dimension; still others may think that if they fall down on any important dimension they stink.

In a society where people generally agree that some dimensions are very important, and there are differences in how people fall along these dimensions, and some institutions publicly group people in accordance with their place along these dimensions, then those who score low may feel inferior to those with higher scores; they may feel inferior as persons. (Thus, *poor* people might come to think they are *poor people*.) One might try to avoid such feelings of inferiority by changing the society so that either those dimensions

which served to distinguish people are downgraded in importance, or so that people do not have an opportunity publicly to exercise their capacities along these dimensions or to learn how others score on them.*

It might appear obvious that if people feel inferior because they do poorly along some dimensions, then if these dimensions are downgraded in importance or if scores along them are equalized, people no longer will feel inferior. ("Of course!") The very reason they have for feeling inferior is removed. But it may well be that other dimensions would replace the ones eliminated with the same effects (on different persons). If, after downgrading or equalizing one dimension, say wealth, the society comes generally to agree that some *other* dimension is most important, for example, aesthetic appreciativeness, aesthetic attractiveness, intelligence, athletic prowess, physical grace, degree of sympathy with other persons, quality of orgasm, then the phenomenon will repeat itself.⁸

People generally judge themselves by how they fall along the most important dimensions in which they *differ* from others. People do not gain self-esteem from their common human capacities by comparing themselves to animals who lack them. ("I'm pretty good; I have an opposable thumb and can speak some language.") Nor do people gain or maintain self-esteem by considering that they possess the right to vote for political leaders, though when the franchise was not widely distributed things may have been different. Nor do people in the United States today have a sense of worth because they are able to read and write, though in many other societies in history this has served. When everyone, or almost everyone, has some thing or attribute, it does not function as a basis for self-esteem. Self-esteem is based on differentiating characteristics; that's why it's self-esteem. And as sociologists of reference groups are fond of pointing out, who the *others* are changes. First-year students at prestige colleges may have a sense of individual

* If a society's most important dimension, by common consensus, is undetectable in that it cannot directly be determined where along it a person falls, people will come to believe that a person's score on this dimension is correlated with his score on another dimension along which they *can* determine relative positions (the halo effect). Thus, people for whom the presence of divine grace is the most important dimension will come to believe other worthy detectable facts indicate its presence; for example, worldly success.

worth based on attending those schools. This feeling is more pronounced, indeed, during their last two months of high school. But when *everyone* they associate with is in a similar position, the fact of going to these schools no longer serves as a basis for self-esteem, except perhaps when they return home during vacation (or in thought) *to those not there*.

Consider how you would set about to bolster the self-esteem of an individual who, perhaps from limited capacity, scored lower than all others on all the dimensions others considered important (and who scored better on no dimension one plausibly could argue was important or valuable). You might tell the person that though his absolute scores were low, he had done well (given his limited capacities). He had realized a greater proportion of his capacities than most and fulfilled more of his potential than others do; considering where he had started, and with what, he had accomplished a great deal. This would reintroduce comparative evaluation, by citing another important (meta)dimension along which he *does* do well as compared to others.*

These considerations make one *somewhat* skeptical of the chances of equalizing self-esteem and reducing envy by equalizing positions along that particular dimension upon which self-esteem is (happens to be) importantly based. Think of the varied attributes

* Is there any important dimension along which it is inappropriate to judge oneself comparatively? Consider the following statement by Timothy Leary: "It's my ambition to be the holiest, wisest, most beneficial man alive today. Now this may sound megalomaniac, but I don't see why. I don't see why . . . every person who lives in the world, shouldn't have that ambition. What else should you try to be? The president of the board, or the chairman of the department, or the owner of this and that?" *The Politics of Ecstasy* (New York: College Notes and Texts, Inc., 1968), p. 218. There certainly is no objection to wanting to be as holy, wise, and beneficial as possible, yet an ambition to be the holiest, wisest, and most beneficial person alive today is bizarre. Similarly, one can want to be as enlightened as possible (in the sense of Eastern traditions), but it would be bizarre to want especially to be the most enlightened person alive, or to be more enlightened than someone else. How one values one's degree of enlightenment depends only upon it, whatever others are like. This suggests that the absolutely most important things do not lend themselves to such comparative evaluation; if so, the comparative theory in the text would not hold universally. However, given the nature of the exceptions, this fact would be of limited sociological (though of great personal) interest. Also, those who do not evaluate themselves comparatively will not need equalization to take place along

one can *envy* another's having, and one will realize the vast opportunities for differential self-esteem. Recall now Trotsky's speculation that under communism everyone would reach the level of Aristotle, Goethe, or Marx, and from his ridge new peaks would rise. Being at this ridge would no more give everyone self-esteem and a feeling of individual worth than does the ability to speak a language or the possession of hands able to grasp things. Some simple and natural assumptions might even lead to a principle of the conservation of envy. And one might worry, *if* the number of dimensions is not unlimited and if great strides are made to eliminate differences, that as the number of differentiating dimensions shrinks, envy will become more severe. For with a small number of differentiating dimensions, many people will find they don't do well on *any* of them. Though the weighted sum of a number of independently varying normal distributions itself will be normal, if each individual (who knows his score on each dimension) weights the dimensions differently from the way other persons do, the total sum of all the different individuals' differently weighted combinations need not itself be a normal distribution, even though the scores on each dimension are normally distributed. Everyone might view themselves as at the upper end of a distribution (even of a normal distribution) since each sees the distribution through the perspective of the particular weights he assigns. The fewer the dimensions, the less the opportunity for an individual successfully to use as a basis for self-esteem a nonuniform weighting strategy that gives greater weight to a dimension he scores highly in. (This suggests that envy can be reduced only by a fell-swoop elimination of all differences.)

Even if envy is more tractable than our considerations imply, it would be objectionable to intervene to reduce someone's situation in order to lessen the envy and unhappiness others feel in knowing of his situation. Such a policy is comparable to one that forbids some act (for example, racially mixed couples walking holding hands) because the mere knowledge that it is being done makes others unhappy (see Chapter 10). The *same kind* of externality is involved. The most promising ways for a society to avoid widespread differences in self-esteem would be to have no common weighting of dimensions; instead it would have a diversity of dif-

each person's chance of finding dimensions that *some* others also think important, along which he does reasonably well, and so to make a nonidiosyncratic favorable estimate of himself. Such a fragmentation of a common social weighting is not to be achieved by some centralized effort to remove certain dimensions as important. The more central and widely supported the effort, the more contributions to *it* will come to the fore as the commonly agreed upon dimension on which will be based people's self-esteem.

MEANINGFUL WORK

Often it is claimed that being subordinate in a work scheme adversely affects self-esteem in accordance with a social-psychological law or fundamental generalization such as the following: A long period of being frequently ordered about and under the authority of others, unselected by you, lowers your self-esteem and makes you feel inferior; whereas this is avoided if you play some role in democratically selecting these authorities and in a constant process of advising them, voting on their decisions, and so on.

But members of a symphony orchestra constantly are ordered about by their conductor (often capriciously and arbitrarily and with temper flareups) and are not consulted about the overall interpretation of their works. Yet they retain high self-esteem and do not feel that they are inferior beings. Draftees in armies are constantly ordered about, told how to dress, what to keep in their lockers, and so on, yet they do not come to feel they are inferior beings. Socialist organizers in factories received the same orders and were subject to the same authority as others, yet they did not lose their self-esteem. Persons on the way up organizational ladders spend much time taking orders without coming to feel inferior. In view of the many exceptions to the generalization that "order following in a subordinate position produces low self-esteem" we must consider the possibility that subordinates with low self-esteem begin that way or are forced by their position to face the facts of their existence and to consider upon what their estimate of their own worth and value as a unique person is based, with no easy answers forthcoming. They will be especially hard

pressed for an answer if they believe that others who give them orders have a right to do so that can be based only upon some *personal* superiority. On an entitlement theory, of course, this need not be so. People may be entitled to decide about certain resources, the terms on which others may use them, and so on, through no sterling qualities of their own; such entitlements may have been transferred to them. Perhaps readers concerned about differential self-esteem will help to make the entitlement theory better known, and thereby undercut one ground for lesser self-esteem. This will not, of course, remove all such grounds. Sometimes a person's entitlements clearly *will* stem from his own attributes and previous activities, and in these cases comparisons will be unpleasant to face.

The issue of meaningful and satisfying work is often merged with discussions of self-esteem. Meaningful and satisfying work is said to include: (1) an opportunity to exercise one's talents and capacities, to face challenges and situations that require independent initiative and self-direction (and which therefore is not boring and repetitive work); (2) in an activity thought to be of worth by the individual involved; (3) in which he understands the role his activity plays in the achievement of some overall goal; and (4) such that sometimes, in deciding upon his activity, he has to take into account something about the larger process in which he acts. Such an individual, it is said, can take pride in what he's doing and in doing it well; he can feel that he is a person of worth, making a contribution of value. Further, it is said that apart from the intrinsic desirability of such kinds of work and productivity, performing other sorts of work deadens individuals and leads them to be less fulfilled persons in *all* areas of their lives.

Normative sociology, the study of what the causes of problems *ought to be*, greatly fascinates all of us. If X is bad, and Y which also is bad can be tied to X via a plausible story, it is very hard to resist the conclusion that one causes the other. We *want* one bad thing to be caused by another. If people *ought* to do meaningful work, if that's what we want people to be like,⁹ and if via some story we can tie the absence of such work (which is bad) to another bad thing (lack of initiative generally, passive leisure activities, and so on), then we happily *leap* to the conclusion that the second evil is *caused by* the first. These other bad things, of course, may