equality in action

Equality in four dimensions: the Moral Basis for a Politics of the Left

By John Wilson

With a foreward by the Prime Minister
Rt. Hon Tony Blair MP

The Smith Institute

THE SMITH INSTITUTE

equality in action

Equality in four dimensions: the Moral Basis for a Politics of the Left

By John Wilson

With a foreward by the Prime Minister
Rt. Hon Tony Blair MP

Published by The Smith Institute

ISBN 1 902488 07 5

© The Smith Institute 2000

Foreward

The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair MP

Prime Minister

I have always believed that politics must be based on values and ideas. That requires critical engagement with difficult questions. Few are more difficult than what we mean by equality.

There was a period in the late 1980s when it became difficult to talk about equality at all. But since everyone, or almost everyone, believes in equality of something - at a minimum equal civil and political rights - this always struck me as silly. The real question is what we should mean by equality and specifically what progressive movements of the centre left should mean by it. In my speech to the Labour Party Conference in September 1999, I argued for a new form of politics based on the equal worth of all, and the need for a successful country to liberate the individual potential of every single person in it. I believe that now is the time to move beyond the false opposites of equality of opportunity and equality of result, and develop a meaningful and realistic concept of equality that can help guide our society in the years ahead.

I am therefore delighted that in the last year The Smith Institute has been looking at equality, and inequality. The policy ideas arising from their seminars and pamphlets will be important. But we must also get to grips with the philosophical and ethical issues involved, and that is why I hope there will be a serious debate about the ideas advanced by John Wilson in this pamphlet. The ideas are necessarily complex; but

John Wilson has set out the many layers required in any rich notion of equality, and has provided a valuable addition to the debate. True equality matters to millions of our fellow citizens whose potential is not developed, whose life chances are limited, whose capacities are not developed. They are poorer as a result, and so are we all.

I said in September 1999 that the 20th Century politics of class warfare may be over but that the struggle for true equality had only just begun. It is entirely fitting that an institute set up in the name of John Smith should be tackling these questions. He would see the debate about equality as critical to our future, and he would be right.

January 2000

1. Introduction

The clearest boundary stone that divides political left from right is a belief in equality. A political party can be defined as being to the left of centre when a strong commitment to human equality is the central moral purpose underlying its approach to policy. It does not follow that a politics of the left must aim to bring about equality across the board. People need diversity to flourish. The defining aim is rather to create social conditions that give very different individuals the equal chance for a full and flourishing life.

Part of living a full life is about enjoying an equal personal freedom to choose how to live, an aspect of equality that will have its own inevitable effect on outcomes. Politics should not invade people's freedom of choice, it should underpin this freedom with a basis of equality. Given this equal basis, there is no case for further interference with the many choices and activities of everyday life. This means tolerating the emergence of inequality in certain forms, when they do not threaten the essential social underpinning of an equal freedom. But if human equality does not imply an equality of outcome, it becomes the more important to have a clear view of what it does imply.

A Moral Starting Point

The purpose of this pamphlet is first to set out the conception of human equality that seems to offer most prospect of moral coherence; and then to identify the main features of the equal social setting which follows as a consequence. This makes an important distinction between equality as a moral starting point for political action, and equality as an

end of political action. The former must precede and inform the pursuit of the latter. The equality that is a moral starting point attaches an equal value to every person. The forms of equality that could be among the ends, e.g. equality of opportunity, equality of health, are ways in which people are not yet equal but could become more so, given appropriate political action. Ends of this kind cannot provide politics with its ultimate moral basis, for their status as ends derives from that basis. The moral root of political action lies in the existing presence of an equal human value, one that gives both reason and shape to the equal social setting that a government of the left will seek to set in place.

The equality that gives the left its moral premise for political action is the equal intrinsic worth of every human being. This is not a purely formal premise: correctly understood it carries enormous social implications. Human worth is the equal value with which every person comes into the world, simply through being born a unique and irreplaceable human individual. This value therefore rests in individuality. To flourish as a human is to flourish as an individual. True individuality cannot however be attained in social isolation; it requires the kind of supportive context and enlargement of individual possibility that comes from living in the society of other people. To ground political action in equal worth is to embrace a commitment to create the social conditions that allow each person the equal prospect of a true individuality. It is these social conditions that serve to define what we mean by an equal social setting, and thus determine the proper scope and ends of political action.

The Four Dimensions

The bridge between the moral basis of equality and the proper ends of political action lies in understanding the distinctive and complex nature of human individuality. This individuality is found, I shall argue, in four different but connected human dimensions: need, action, potential and meaning. Any human life is lived within these four dimensions, and to flourish as an individual is to flourish in each. Within each dimension, every human life is unique, yet also interdependent with the lives of others. The social institutions through which people interrelate must therefore be analysed for their adequacy and their contribution to equality from all four points of view. The existing social order still fails far too many people: it fails to meet their needs; it denies them a chance to act on their own behalf; it stunts or deforms their potential; and it dismisses both them and their distinctive points of view as inferior, insignificant and of little account in social life. We, as a society, are now in a material and social position to establish the fairer social order within which each individual might enjoy a four-dimensional life.

The four dimensions are hierarchically ordered: in a broad sense the second dimension (action) offers the key to the first (need), the third (potential) to the second, and the fourth (meaning) to all the others. This holds true both at an individual and a social level. The high political road to a better meeting of human need lies through the enablement of effective action, the high road to this through the realisation of human potential, and the high road to this through the application and enhancement of our shared human capacity for understanding ourselves and the world in which we live. It should be

clear that the basic egalitarian purpose for the left goes beyond some form of equality in the first dimension of need. It lies rather with social arrangements that forge stronger and more empowering connections between need, action, potential and meaning, both in the individual and society as a whole, while favouring each person equally in all four dimensions.

When this four-dimensional perspective is applied to the wide range of processes, institutions and ways of relating that make up social life, a clearer view emerges of the social policies needed for each person to enjoy a full individuality. Just as work can fulfil in each dimension, so the damage of unemployment extends beyond material hardship to the longer term effects of enforced inactivity, thwarted potential and a loss of self-belief and social esteem. A solution that merely relieves the hardship is therefore incomplete; a four-dimensional problem requires a four-dimensional solution. Similar principles apply throughout the welfare state. For a young person living in a residential home, the quality of care is not measured purely by immediate need; it is just as important what self-image the young person carries forward into adult life. Even when need is the main consideration, some ways of meeting it do more than others to involve the recipient as an active participant, or to enlarge the person's potential, or to take account of the person's own system of meaning and values. Old people, for example, are sometimes prevented by pride from applying for means-tested support. Social provision will only succeed if it takes such values into account.

While meanings and values are important, the other dimensions matter as well for a full sense of equality. Inclusion in social life means

inclusion as an equal in all four dimensions. In those cultures that instil in women the seeming acceptance of a lesser role, they are not equal to men in their scope for action or for realising true potential. But society is not simply important as an instrumental means for the individual. Individuality itself is expressed in a social way when we meet emotional needs, act collectively, realise our potential as social beings, ground our sense of identity in social groupings, or enter into dialogue with others. Social groups also offer policy-makers their best measure of equal value. An equal worth society would allow great variations of individual fortune, but group fortune should be generally similar. Inequality of individual outcome does not necessarily mean an inequality of social treatment, but it points strongly in that direction if there is a systematic difference of outcome between those of different sex, race, religion or social background.

Ends of Political Action

Any general aspiration needs to be translated into goals we can work towards. I shall argue that progress towards a society that gives expression to equal worth requires the development of six interlocking strategies aimed at sufficiency for all, equal opportunity, fairness of outcome, social equality, political equality, and a freedom from domination by others. All are essential: to omit any of the six would leave a significant and perhaps dangerous hole.

Each of these six ideals provides a separate starting point for approaching policy-making - even if many specific policies are likely to be included under more than one heading. Together, the six can be said to define a practical and realistic view of the equality objectives

at which any government of the left should now be aiming. The discussion seeks to show that each of these ideals, which are necessary and important consequences of our equal worth, can be illuminated by being seen in four-dimensional terms. Specific policies should be evaluated not just for their bearing on human need, but for their enablement of human action, for their development of human potential and for the human meanings and values which they invariably express.

There is of course a more straightforward kind of equality that some on the left have taken to be the ultimate - if perhaps distant - end of political action: an equality of income and wealth. This identification of equality of outcome as the only true egalitarian goal reflects a shallow or one-dimensional understanding not only of the complex and rich human worth of individual people but of what follows from the equal worth of individuals. On a proper understanding, it is clear that equality of income and wealth does not follow in any direct or obvious way from an equality of worth; in fact the two can be shown to be at odds with each other. The goals to which equal worth truly gives rise may each have their own more complex bearing on questions of income and wealth; the goals of sufficiency for all and fairness of outcome clearly have a bearing. But to pursue equality of income and wealth as a morally desirable goal in and of itself is inconsistent with a view of human worth that embraces its four dimensions.

There is a danger, furthermore, that by tying the value of equality to a patently unrealistic aspiration, we might discredit the value itself and end up with no concern for equality at all. It is a deeper understanding of equality, not a reluctant bowing to unhappy practicality, that stills

this particular levelling urge. It is an understanding that creates a strong spur towards a great many egalitarian objectives which are now certainly achievable. To extend the idea of equality to all four dimensions of human worth is to raise one's political sights, not to lower them. The realistic and indeed the moral course for the left is not to abandon equality, but to think harder about just what equality implies. To spell out its meaning clearly at the level of basic values is the necessary prelude to determining what policies might best reflect those values.

This discussion is a contribution to the first of these tasks, not the second. It does not claim to offer a definitive map of the connections between values and policies, let alone a comprehensive programme of action. But while it focuses on underlying values rather than policies as such, it also seeks to illustrate how policy concerns of many different kinds might find a place within its egalitarian schema.

An underlying commitment to human equality is not expressed merely in the long-term objectives of political action. If equality relates to action, to potential and to meaning as well as to need, this must always influence the choice of means. The present Government's preference for a welfare to work approach is itself rooted in equality. A proper understanding of equality is relevant to the fine detail of many other policies, and to their objectives. Any policy debate is likely to involve implicit questions of moral value as well as more explicit issues of practicality and cost. The former should always be held somewhere in mind, and on occasions need to be brought out clearly into the open. It is hoped that what follows may be of some help in setting out the

terms of moral discussion, even if it yields little by way of clear-cut answers.

2. Equality

Equality remains the most central value for the political left. If there are those who now talk of inclusion, this is shorthand for an equal inclusion of people of every kind and background, on an equal basis and equal terms. 'Inclusion' certainly adds something of importance to the bare idea of equality, for it draws attention to the fact that a true human equality can be expressed as much in social relationship between people as in the sharing out of material goods. But the principal stress must surely fall on an *equal* inclusion. Many traditional societies have given every person, usually from birth, an allotted place within a fixed social hierarchy. These societies could be called inclusive in that all their members were included within a single social system, but those who worked on the land were included in a very different way from those who lived in the manor. All human societies are bound, likewise, to have included women as well as men - or they would have been of rather brief duration - but for most of human history women have been relegated to a far from equal place. We object to such forms of inclusion because of their very unequal basis. The left's distinctive commitment is surely to be found not in inclusion as such, but in the aspiration to include every person, of whatever sort, in an equal way.

But what does this mean? How should we understand the basis of equality, which includes every person in an equal way? At a minimum,

the principles of social inclusion must not discriminate on account of human differences such as sex, race, religion or social origin. Few would now dispute this, yet if we asked everyone who endorsed the principle of non-discrimination what else is required for an equal inclusion, conflicting answers would certainly emerge. 'Levellers' would insist on an equality of material conditions; 'meritocrats' would restrict the extra requirement to a narrow understanding of equality of opportunity and a stress on merit and desert as the primary basis of reward. Given an equal chance for equal merit, they would recognise no inequality of inclusion if income, wealth or other social goods were then distributed in a most uneven way. Both camps reject discrimination against individuals on arbitrary grounds and might claim to offer equal terms of inclusion to all, yet they see the social and economic implications very differently.

A Deep Equality

I suggest that it is wrong to give allegiance to either camp. Nor is the answer simply to split the difference between them. Equality needs to be rooted at a far deeper human level which refutes the views of 'levellers' and 'meritocrats' and shows them to be superficial. This view is not some derivative of the other two; its conception of human nature and social life has the oldest as well as the deepest roots. It can be called deep equality. A plural and varied society is needed for deep equality, for only such a society can give very different individuals an equal place. The concept of equality is quite distinct from that of sameness, even if some opponents of equality have tended to confuse the two. An equal society does not imply a drably uniform society, nor is human diversity a bar to human equality. The many dimensions of individual

difference are more rightly seen as the potential source of a great social richness.

On this view, the fundamental equality is not an equality of income and wealth, nor an equality of opportunity, nor any equality of circumstance, but an equality of people themselves. The moral starting point is far-reaching: a belief in the equal intrinsic worth that resides in every human being, just as a human being. An equal society will reflect this equality of human worth by assigning every person an equal importance within its arrangements. Deep equality means spelling this out through a rich understanding of human worth. The social conditions that best reflect this understanding, and include each person as an equal person, are those that offer the nearest to an equal weighting for each person in four separate human dimensions: the dimensions of need, action, potential and meaning.

Sometimes society should simply meet people's needs on an equal basis. In deciding when this is so, the key factor is responsibility. In spheres such as health or exposure to crime, it would be unfair and inefficient to hold individuals responsible for dealing with the main causes of suffering and misfortune, for these have little to do with their own deliberate actions. While the effects on their lives are potentially disastrous, protection rests with preventive or remedial measures that many could not afford, if indeed they could be supplied on an individual basis at all. When people are vulnerable through no fault of their own, the guiding social principle can only be an equal recognition of need. This is why deep equality would require a government of the left to remain as firmly committed as ever to socially provided health

care, free at the point of need, and to equal protection from crime.

Given a sufficient assurance of health and social order, individuals pursue their diverse ambitions and purposes far beyond the mere avoidance of misfortune. In these matters of individual option, most people already enjoy a much larger measure of responsibility for their own fate, while those who don't would like it. Reforming social arrangements could enlarge everyone's capacity for self-determination. Where this is the case, social arrangements will best reflect human worth if they focus primarily on the equal enablement of responsible action, leaving individuals to attend to their own needs and purposes however they choose. To consider all four dimensions of human worth is to push the social implications of equality even further, for the standard for judging social arrangements becomes their effect on human potential and meaning as well as action.

In the economic sphere in particular, many people already exercise a substantial degree of personal control, within the limits that its social nature inevitably imposes. Truly equal enablement would seek to extend a similar richness of possibility to all. In today's world there is not only a moral case but also an economic case for pursuing this egalitarian aim. The conditions for a real and lasting prosperity and the conditions for social fairness are now largely aligned. The moral case, however, is more certain and comprehensive than the economic case: it relies on no factual premises of the sort that might be challenged, and it extends to every person, no matter how small their economic contribution. Economic prosperity might not suffer greatly from a lesser attention to the bottom 20 per cent; fairness certainly would. The

four-dimensional view of human worth provides a surer starting point than economics itself for an egalitarian approach to economic life.

The fair distribution of income and wealth is certainly required by deep equality, but only on a shallow or one-dimensional view could fairness be taken to imply an equal distribution. The levellers, in making such an equation, are misled by their restricted conception of human worth. A deep view of equality redirects attention away from equality of outcome - unachievable in practice and wrong in principle - to a host of economic and social objectives which are achievable and right. But the meritocrats are no less wide of the mark. The same deeply based view of equal inclusion leads to a more comprehensive approach to equal opportunity than meritocrats have in mind; it considers how, over an individual's entire life span, social arrangements could offer more equal support to each individual's action, potential and distinctive point of view. More than this, equal worth dictates a social equality which is just as opposed to merit-based claims to social privilege as to the more traditional forms of social hierarchy.

An adequate view of equality must confront not only issues of wealth but also of power - and the connections between them. Although great concentrations of the one can lead to equally great concentrations of the other, or a lack of one to the lack of the other, they represent different aspects of human relationships and raise different questions of equality. The desire to dominate or control other people is a distinct desire from that for possessions and wealth, extending well beyond the economic sphere; it is more threatening ultimately to a true human equality. Domination of another is by its very nature a more direct

affront to equality than any material desire and it can be expressed in individual relationships no less than in the largest ranges of political and social life. But the dangers associated with power are not simply the product of human pathology. Individual freedom of action can be hemmed in or denied by the impersonal exercise of power by firms, bureaucracies and other corporate bodies, not just the dominating will of powerful individuals.

It is clearly not sensible to demand equality of power between a person and a massive organisation, but it is of the utmost importance for equal human worth that social arrangements protect the weaker power from undue subjection to the stronger. The idea of social enablement must therefore include social intervention to empower the weak, or to constrain powerful individuals or organisations from abusing their power or swamping the lesser power of others. Like wealth, power is not to be viewed as a fixed sum: the right social framework will increase the total holdings of both power and wealth within society, while the wrong framework could compound a kind of social gridlock with economic decline. Deep equality need not depend on reallocation within an existing stock, it may be advanced just as much by setting in motion the kind of virtuous spiral upwards through which all stand to benefit. But both equality and inclusion call attention in this to the equal worth of the poor and powerless.

The Six Ideals

Equal worth is a premise of social action, not a target. But deep equality yields six social ideals or egalitarian purposes that together give a government of the left its targets for action. Three are primarily

economic: sufficiency for all, equal opportunity and fairness of outcome. Three are more social or political in character: social equality, political equality, and freedom from domination by others. While closely connected, each expresses a different and essential implication of equal human worth, contributing a separate element to the practical meaning of inclusion 'on an equal basis and equal terms'. Each should become a separate head for government action.

While an enabling government must of course pursue many other objectives in harness with those of deep equality, it will take these six ideals very seriously. This means consciously articulating a set of interlocking strategies for assuring economic sufficiency; equalising opportunity; promoting greater economic fairness; countering the many sources of hierarchy and social distinction; turning the political system itself into a more democratic system; and, in a broader sense, empowering the powerless and curbing abuses of power. An enabling government will look to be judged by how well it has furthered these central objectives across the whole range of policy. It will adopt equal worth as its ultimate guide to means as well as ends, adhering to its values both in times of prosperity and economic adversity.

Equal worth does not yield a separate strategy for redistributing income and wealth as a seventh social purpose in itself. Redistribution could still enter the picture in several different ways. Although some inequalities are fair, an analysis of fairness might show up existing inequalities as beyond what is fair. Redistribution might, alternatively, be an empirical precondition for one of the other strategies, for instance if massive accumulations of wealth invariably cause unequal

opportunity, or social inequality, or overweening power, or the economic processes producing wealth for some also lead inexorably to insufficiency for others. Some might argue, thirdly, that the only way to achieve economic sufficiency for all is through a transfer of some of the rich's money. If enabling social provision offers a better course to the same end, it must still be paid for; some redistribution might be the unintended side-effect of a fair tax base for funding it. Finally, the successful promotion of more equal opportunity or greater sufficiency could itself produce more equal income or wealth. But whether a strategy is best advanced by redistributive measures is never, within deep equality, a matter for dogmatic pronouncement. It can only be settled through case by case debate.

The six ideals will be of little use to social policy unless they are honed into the sorts of organising principles that can then be acted upon. The first step may be a further clarification of meaning, perhaps in the form of subordinate goals. Equal opportunity might, for instance, be broken down into separate ideas of an equal start, of non-discrimination, of lifetime opportunity, of bridges to opportunity for those facing generic impediments such as disability, and so forth. These ideas can then be applied to different policy spheres, so that broad equal opportunity goals are converted into specific objectives for education, employment, recruitment to public service, housing, culture and other areas of policy. Government must decide its priorities and select empirical benchmarks of progress towards its goals, if it is finally to arrive at the realistic evaluation of alternative policies that must weigh practicability, effectiveness and cost along with conflicting aims and values. Equal worth is the essential guide through all these stages of analysis to the

stage of decision.

While an enabling government should be able to articulate six separate strategies, organised around six separate principles, many component policies will of course serve as multipurpose instruments, advancing several objectives at once. For example, a drive for universal adult literacy is likely to be a connecting link within the strategies for economic sufficiency, equal opportunity, social equality and empowerment, if not economic fairness and further democratisation as well. The same goes for measures to regenerate decaying urban centres or to improve conditions on the poorest housing estates. Freedom of information offers a rather different sort of case. Several purposes can give separate reasons for the same policy, each rooted in human worth. Even if many policies prove to be of this kind, clear thinking and honest self-assessment are best served by an overall framework that keeps the goals distinct. It also allows a clearer view of how to handle potential conflicts between them.

Deep equality derives moral and intellectual coherence from its rich concept of equal worth, for this links the six ideals into an integrated whole and gives each its determinate content. But political coherence is needed as well: the only source for this is the radical and effective commitment of a government that grounds its general sense of direction and choice of means in the equal human worth of all. The six ideals offer an empirical framework for describing and appraising the existing state of society, a practical framework for assembling policies into a programme of change, and, not least, a moral framework for mobilising the necessary groundswell of popular support. The

following sections develop the core idea of equal worth and show how a four-dimensional view gives distinctive shape to each of the six ideals.

3. Equal Worth

Equal worth is the equal value that every person possesses from the moment of birth, simply through being born a human being. However much we may differ from one another, we all share a common status as human individuals. Neither sex nor race makes a person more or less of a distinctive individual than any other person. No more does family background, wealth, accomplishment, age, health, religion, national origin, innate ability, physical attractiveness or any of the other ways in which we are different. No such human variation can increase or diminish the equal inherent value of human worth, for this rests simply in the bare fact of a human individuality. It follows that no human being can be made better or worse than others through the accidents of ancestry, and that the mere membership of one human grouping rather than another can never confer or detract from a person's essential human value.

A true human individuality will only flourish in the right social setting. The belief in equal worth is a commitment to extending this setting to those now denied it. But if equal worth is the most basic form of human value, it is not the only form that needs social recognition. This equal realm coexists with two other realms of value in which people certainly vary: the realms of merit and of personal value. The different forms of merit are rooted in our many ways of grading or ranking people, on the

basis of what we think of as objective differences in their qualities, talents or achievements. Personal value is the more subjective value that stems from the particular attachments that all human beings tend to form with other human beings. Some people - my family and friends - matter to me, not through any special merit that other people lack, but because of the special relationship that exists between us. We expect others to echo our judgments of merit and fault, but to mirror our attachments in their own different attachments.

Some on the political right might say they believed in equal worth, just as those on the left will readily acknowledge differences of merit. The moral divide between left and right can be seen as a disagreement as to which provides the more fundamental principle for social life. A mistake often made by the right is to run together different forms of merit, as though this were a single dimension of value. In fact it has as many sub-varieties as there are possible scales for ranking people in order. If we compared the same set of people for their moral qualities, their economic achievements, their academic record and their sporting excellence, we should almost certainly arrive at four very different rankings - and this of course greatly understates the case, for each of these scales would in turn sub-divide. To base social arrangements on an equation of economic success with moral value is to base them on a very false equation. Personal value, likewise, is relative to the valuer. This leaves equal worth as the only solid and unequivocal principle on which to found society.

Each form of human value is associated with a kind of motivation: merit with the desire for achievement, whether moral, economic or of

another kind; personal value with a particular care for family and friends; equal worth with an altruistic concern for people in general. Social arrangements rooted in equal worth are only likely to endure if they allow an appropriate place for other forms of value as well, and for all three kinds of motivation. The same forms of value may be further linked to different ways of perceiving and reacting to others, or ourselves: considered judgments of merit and fault, spontaneous emotion, the dispassionate search for causal explanation. While these stances towards human behaviour are not always easily reconciled, at least in the same moment, they too all belong somewhere in a balanced social view.

The Four Dimensions of Worth

Human worth being the value that inheres simply in human individuality, the first step towards establishing the social implications of equal worth is to separate out the different dimensions of human individuality. This means asking: what is it that makes each person a unique individual, distinct from every other individual? What would be lost irreparably if a person were to vanish, even if an identical twin were left behind? These questions direct us to four different sets of human capacities. Each person is a separate centre of experience from every other person, subject to their own pleasures and pains and endowed with their own set of material and emotional needs. Each person is a separate source of self-generated action. Each person is born with a separate potential for growth, development and change over the course of life. Finally, each person is a separate creator, understander and user of meaning, with their own sense of identity and their own capacity for thought and reflection, for making sense of the world, and for forming

and living by a personal point of view.

Human beings do not simply lead some kind of fragmented existence in each of these separate dimensions, as if they bore no relationship to one another. The capacities clearly connect together in a kind of chain, so that each aspect of human capacity bears on the one before. If human worth is the value of human individuality, then an acknowledgement of equal worth demands social arrangements that assign an equal value to each person in all four dimensions. Such arrangements should support the links between them: the bearing of action on need, of potential on action, and of the person's own sense-making capacities and point of view on all the dimensions. Only in this way will the arrangements give each person true and equal value as an individual; and only in this way can they reflect the depth and complexity of the total human picture.

It is important to stress that the equal value attaches to capacity: to a person as subject of needs, not to actual needs at a particular time; to a person as agent, not to actual actions; to a person with potential for growth and development, not to the nature of their actual potential; to a person as source and handler of meaning, not to actual thoughts or views. It is not the needs or the actions which possess equal importance, but the individuals. This means that the potential of a profoundly handicapped person should be given no less social weight than that of anyone else and that the greatest effort should always be made to establish that person's own views and to take them into account.

Society can be seen as providing a general framework for human exchange and interaction, both horizontally between individuals and

vertically between the four dimensions of individuality. Equal value finds practical expression in the terms of exchange and interaction implicit in economic or social arrangements. Social exchange extends beyond literal exchanges of goods to the metaphorical exchanges of family life, and to the many ways in which individual goods emerge through processes of social pooling. Many social goods and resources only confer benefit on individuals by retaining a social character, goods such as law and order, well-maintained roads, public parks and a clean and safe environment. Equality must relate, not just to the terms of access to these social goods, but to the achievement of an overall balance between social goods and goods of a purely individual sort. The political face of an equal society is no less important than its economic face.

A social view that sought to remain in the first dimension of need could never get off the ground: for a need to be met, someone must meet it. Any system of distribution presupposes a system of production. Need points inevitably to action and those who are subject to needs are also the only available source of agency for meeting need. The need dimension raises issues of maximisation as well as those of distribution, for human worth demands not just an equal value for each person in each dimension but a high value. The greater overall meeting of need gives general reason to prefer a system of co-operative exchange between individuals to one of pure self-sufficiency.

The question of incentives is thus inescapable, given the proven weakness of altruism as a motivating force. Within the family, personal attachment may motivate a person to act on another's behalf; once the

network of social exchange passes beyond this restricted sphere of personal value, motivation can only be maintained through arrangements that lead inevitably to inequality of outcome. The interpretation placed on an equal value within the need dimension cannot be that of equal income and wealth. The dimension of need is, nevertheless, of special importance both in defining a social floor and as a distributive criterion in those areas of social provision such as health, where individuals will always remain largely at the mercy of circumstances, however they choose to act.

Action is the second dimension that equal worth establishes as a realm of equal value, but in its own right, not simply for its instrumental bearing on need. Other things being equal, it is better for adults to control their own fate and well-being than to have these determined by others, even when the effect on need is the same. Freedom and personal responsibility are themselves matters of value, and must enter into any reckoning of what it is to be equal. In the many areas of life where outcomes should reflect personal choice and preference, a direct meeting of need by the state would annul personal responsibility. In these areas, social arrangements will best assign equal value through the equal enablement of the individual's own responsibility.

If personal responsibility bestows a value on work, as a form of activity in which people earn the means for meeting their own material needs and those of their families, then it extends beyond work into family itself. This is just as much a sphere of creative action, though its roots are in personal value rather than merit. Social enablement must be understood as enabling a reconciliation between the often conflicting

calls of family and work. On a full view, both personal responsibility and social enablement extend even further, into the public spheres of civic and political life.

When considering human action, a clear distinction is therefore required between questions of human value and those of remuneration or reward. Unpaid caring or civic activities are of no less human value than the paid activities of work; and the human value of work may itself bear no clear relationship to the economic value reflected in its pay. Both paid and unpaid activities can equally serve as outlets for human creativity and as proper subjects of social enablement.

To add the second dimension of action to the first dimension of need still leaves a very limited view of human individuality and human worth. It omits a central fact about human beings, that they grow, develop and change over their lifetime. Every child is endowed at birth with an enormous and distinctive bundle of as yet unrealised potential. At any stage in most people's lives, a further reservoir will still lie untapped; we could all become more than we already are, or change in significant ways. A person's scope for action depends on how well their latent talents and capacities have been fostered as much as it depends on the external openings for action; but this fostering of talents and capacities is itself highly dependent on the external context in which a person lives, grows and learns. Just as agency has its own independent human value, so too is individuality extended by the fuller flowering of a person's true potential. For intrinsic as well as instrumental reasons, therefore, the idea of equal enablement must extend beyond action as such into this third dimension, calling for social arrangements that

place an equal value on each person's distinctive capacity for continued growth and inner change.

Within the third dimension, the patterns of human development inevitably produce a special egalitarian focus on the early years of childhood. If children are born of equal worth, they are not born into equal situations. Some face personal disadvantages, such as disabilities; some grow up in conditions of poverty or family stress, or in a culture that dampens expectations; sex, race and social background can still restrict chances in the wider society; families themselves differ in many complex ways. The responsibility for disadvantage does not rest with the child who is disadvantaged. Given the critical bearing of childhood years on the prospects for an equal human life, any egalitarian view is bound to give a high priority to the kinds of social compensation that will help to ensure that no child is held back from realising true potential. Yet many childhood needs, especially emotional ones, can only be met through the medium of the family (meaning by this a structure of particular attachment that could well assume a number of different forms). In these early stages, social enablement means supportive social back-up for the family's performance of its own irreplaceable role, as well as a more direct support for the child through education.

Since growth and change are human processes that need never cease, so long as life itself continues, the third dimension requires a 'whole life' view of the individual. The equal value of worth, attaching to a person over a lifetime, implies the lifetime possibility of recovery from earlier failure or of reparation for earlier wrong-doing. At every age, not just

in childhood, the further flowering of potential remains conditional for most people upon access to enabling social institutions, though in adulthood these offer the supportive conditions for a self-improvement which falls more clearly within the individual's own responsibility. A whole life view of potential will recognise too that a rounded human life rests as much on relationships as personal achievements. Enabling social arrangements should foster our human potential for lifetime growth not just as an individual but also as a social being.

An enabling social framework, sensitive to the fact that potential, like an iceberg, may be nine-tenths hidden, must offer the continuing prospect not just of self-improvement but of the knowledge and self-discovery on which it depends. Here as in many other ways the trail of equality leads inescapably into the fourth dimension of meaning. Equal worth bestows an equal value on each person's capacity to form, amend, express and act upon his or her own personal judgment of needs, options for action and potential for change and development. This human capacity for thought and reflection is, like the others, of intrinsic as well as instrumental value. Its raw material may be drawn largely from social sources, but each person makes distinctive use of these to establish and modify a system of understanding and values which is never quite the same as that of anyone else. Each of us has our own unique sense of what matters most to us and of who and what we are. This fourth dimension is the most individuating of all, and the most distinctively human. It is the dimension of human dignity.

Each person must therefore be accorded equal social weight as a sense-making being with an individual point of view - and, importantly,

the capacity to modify it in the light of experience, persuasion or reason. Enabling social arrangements both draw on and enlarge this capacity. Their ultimate purpose is to empower individuals to assume a genuine control over their own lives, and to share control of social life itself. This means a social context that supports individuals in their own pursuit of meaning and in exchanges of meaning with others. Not every belief is equally valid or true. A truly enabling framework must challenge views as well as affirm them. But truth is always elusive; its discovery depends on the free interplay of many competing ideas, not some single source of wisdom.

The fourth dimension is grounded in language, giving us the means to integrate and reconcile our human totality both at an individual and a social level. Language allows different points of view to be brought into mutual and peaceable relationship - the basis of human society and of politics itself. It follows from human worth that the processes of government should be open processes, offering each person the maximum social say. Because truth itself cannot hang on a vote, this means a democratic pluralism in which dissenting voices can be clearly heard, not an undue deference to majority opinion. It follows also that the largest possible area of human existence should remain a terrain of private choice. Government's role should go beyond enablement only to the extent necessary to protect every person's equal dignity and equal freedom of choice.

The systems of social enablement needed to give each person an equal chance to flourish as an individual must at the same time be systems of social negotiation for the many conflicts that are bound to arise within

each of the four dimensions. Equality does not imply an end to conflict as such, merely to those manifestations of conflict that tend to inflict suffering, restrict freedom or otherwise impede human flourishing. Given a secure basis of equality, the existence of conflict can be seen as a welcome and positive expression of individual human freedom and a major contributor to personal and social advance. It is, after all, through a process of contained conflict that children grow to their adult maturity.

Subject to the correct containing conditions, many forms of conflict serve human beings well: fair economic competition, industrial bargaining, democratic political process, sporting contests, academic debate, friendly international relationships, differences of professional view, even a good marriage. Nothing would be gained in any of these cases by seeking to substitute a stultifying and unrealistic harmony. Just as conflict is implicit in the very notion of a full and maturing human individuality, and of human worth itself, so it should be embraced at the general social level as one of the most essential elements in a human society's continuing life. But social intervention is needed to ensure that it remains truly a conflict of equals, tempered even at its sharpest by a mutual respect for each person's equal human worth.

The society that draws most broadly on the insight, imagination and experience of its members will not only be the most equal society, in each of the four dimensions, but offer the best prospects for a worthwhile human life. A full life does not stop at material comfort and social peace, it calls for rich, diverse and challenging sources of

reflective stimulation and recreational pleasure. Quality and equality are not enemies; equality brings quality within the reach of every person. An equal enablement will extend into the sphere of culture, preserving our existing heritage, encouraging new creative talent and opening up cultural chances to all.

The Radical Thrust of Deep Equality

The fourfold analysis of human worth leads to a practical interpretation of equality that is deep as well as universal, questioning traditional patterns of life. Deeply equal arrangements must value each person equally in each of the four dimensions. This pushes equality between the sexes beyond the dimensions of need, action and potential into that of meaning itself. It would be a shallow equality that merely gave women an equal chance in a male-constructed world; deep equality requires an equal social stress on the value systems of women and men. In principle the same holds true for other cultural bases of social identity, so long as these are consistent with the core values of equal human worth. Equal worth cannot be consistent with any basis of identity that rests on the intrinsic inferiority of those who are different.

This approach is radical in a second equally important respect: it recognises that the equal social claim of those who are poor or powerless can only be met through a greater degree of social help than others receive. The measure is what will enable them to flourish as individuals within all four dimensions, not just that of need, on an equal footing with others. Equality does not imply an equal allocation of social resources but rather the allocation necessary to transform equal human value into a genuinely equal basis for social inclusion.

From a perspective of equal worth, human societies exist for the sake of individual people, and must be judged by this gauge alone. This approach could well be termed a social individualism or an equal individualism. It attaches the sole ultimate value to individuals, but differs from other versions of individualism in recognising that human beings can only grow and flourish as individuals in a supportive and enabling social context. In this context, each individual has an equal social claim that spans the four dimensions of need, action, potential and meaning. A social individualism appreciates that many of our needs are for social goods, that our capacities extend to collective as well as individual action, that our full potential can only be reached through social relationships with others, and that our sense of ourselves as individuals is bound up with the various human groupings to which we belong. In all these ways, individuals express and realise their individuality not in opposition to society, but in and through a society which each individual plays a small part in creating.

The best social conditions for meeting human need, for the free exercise of maximum choice, for realising latent potential in all its varieties and for pursuing a life of personal meaning are those of rich human diversity. Because it resides in individuality, equal worth can unite society without imposing sameness. Individuality encourages rather than suppresses human difference; there would be little gain from a community of clones. Equal worth connects each person's own individuality to peaceable social interaction with the equal but different individuality of others. To believe in equal worth is to locate difference within a framework of basic human sympathy - so that others are seen and respected as also having needs, but different needs, as also

exercising choice, but different choice, as also possessing as yet unfulfilled potential, but different potential, as also having a point of view, but a different point of view. A belief in equal worth is thus the source of a non-repressive solidarity.

Equal worth therefore creates the moral basis for an equal inclusion that reconciles the values of individual choice and difference with those of social cohesion. To place a value on human individuality as such, and to enable it to flourish, is the only equal way to bring unlimited human diversity within the compass of a constant and uniform value. It generates a sense of 'us' that requires no contrasting 'them', a social bond deriving from a mutual recognition of our common humanity, not membership of any exclusive group. A society found upon equal worth can embrace internal difference without turning it into a matter of better and worse; it can develop its own solidarity without need for external enemies. The full embrace of equal worth extends across communities to human beings everywhere.

There is a wide gap, nevertheless, between this broad moral view of equality and the many policy choices facing a government that holds such a view. The connection lies through the six general objectives discussed in the following sections. Within the framework they provide, a government of the left can establish its more particular priorities, translate them into action and be held to account at the end of the day for the seriousness with which it has pursued its commitment to equality.

4. Sufficiency

I have identified six main features of an equal social setting. Each is needed for society to offer each of its members the full and equal prospect of a four-dimensional life. Each is itself to be understood in four-dimensional terms. If one has primacy, it must clearly be the assurance of an economic sufficiency for all. This may be neither the essence nor the guarantee of a full life, but in its absence such a life can hardly be attained. Sufficiency includes but goes beyond an end to poverty, though that is surely the litmus test of a government's true commitment to the equal worth of all. To see sufficiency in a four-dimensional way helps avoid the danger of treating those who are poor or excluded as a sort of race apart. The special help they need to escape their poverty is merely one aspect of the more general framework of social support that enables all individuals, not just the poor, to pursue their economic ends in the most effective way.

Sufficiency and equality are different ideas. In simple terms, sufficiency exists in respect of X when everyone has enough of X for a decent life. Equality exists when everyone has the same amount of X. In the economic sphere at least, sufficiency for all is consistent with a great range of variation above the minimum level. Equal worth creates a cast-iron case for social action to ensure that no-one is deprived of the economic basis for a decent life, but that in itself does not rule out - and might indeed require - inequalities of income or wealth above the sufficiency line.

On a broad view, sufficiency is not just a matter of economics, nor is

it restricted to the meeting of basic needs. The four dimensions of human worth define four general ills of insufficiency, or types of human deprivation: suffering and unmet need, frustration of activity, waste of human potential, the various sorts of exclusion that relate to truth, self-respect and meaning. Economic exclusion reflects these in economic forms: material hardship, exclusion from the labour market, exclusion from work that matches or extends potential, being tied to employment that seems lacking in value or denies one a say in the working context. A true economic sufficiency implies a four-dimensional inclusion.

The Road to Economic Sufficiency

Equal worth institutes economic sufficiency as a social purpose, but equal worth also influences the choice of means. Income being a transferable good, a government could in principle opt to meet economic need by recycling income directly from those with a surplus to those with a deficit. Alternatively a government could establish the enabling conditions for all who can work to earn their own sufficient income through an active process of exchange. In a four-dimensional perspective, the power to act and the assumption of personal responsibility are themselves aspects of human equality. A person forced unnecessarily into a passive dependency on social benefits is not treated equally with others who enjoy the active opportunity to earn their own income. To empower that person to earn is a more truly equal approach.

The core of a strategy for economic sufficiency is therefore the construction of pathways to economic opportunity: pathways to work

for those who are workless, pathways to better or more fulfilling work for those already employed, pathways to economic responsibility for those in positions of subservience. The New Deal policies of welfare to work and lifelong learning link sufficiency to equal opportunity; the next section will discuss the latter as an end in itself, not just as a means. But opportunity is not the sole cure for insufficiency. While worklessness is now the major cause of poverty, economic security must also exist for those whose income cannot come from work. The work road itself requires the right mix of opportunity, external incentives and inner motivation. Where deprivation and exclusion are most firmly entrenched, all three sides of this triangle must be put in place to engage an individual or community's own framework of meaning, latent potential and powers of action in the effective self-provision of need.

The basic strategic principle calls for government to intervene when individuals cannot reasonably arrive at economic sufficiency by acting on their own, or by acting together with others on a voluntary basis, but to do so in a way that tends to buttress these kinds of agency, not to undermine them. A strategy to end in-work poverty must therefore include a legal minimum wage, decent working conditions, tax and benefit reforms to improve the return from work, better pay for women, the legal basis for a fair trade unionism, and a system of family support that recognises the equal value and social claims of all children, regardless of the working or marital status of their parents. All conditions of effective economic action, these are beyond the reasonable power of many individuals to secure for themselves. But a strategy for sufficiency must look beyond incentives and opportunity

to the social conditions for inner motivation. The precondition for confident action on one's own behalf is a firm sense of one's own human worth. Where social surroundings challenge that, government must intervene at a community as well as an individual level. It must maintain a broader social fairness, for nothing saps motivation more than a feeling of unfairness.

For most people, work and opportunity provide the equal worth road not just to sufficiency of income but to an economic sufficiency that extends across all four human dimensions. If, other things being equal, it is more consistent with human worth to earn one's own income than to rely on the state for one's income, it is also more consistent to work in a way that extends and fulfils potential than to be trapped in a job that leaves it frustrated, and to engage in the kind of work that provides a source of value and meaning, allowing scope for creative contribution, than to work in a solely instrumental or subordinate way for monetary reward. For those who can work, a full system of social enablement will extend the chance to enjoy all these aspects of sufficiency, not merely the chance to earn.

But other things are not always equal. A broad view of social enablement should affirm both the equal worth of those who cannot work and the equal human value of the many forms of unpaid activity that contribute to human well-being. A one-sided conception of sufficiency could end up devaluing the individuals and activities that fall outside its scope. Those who work, moreover, are consumers too. The full conditions of sufficiency support economic action of every kind. After a closer look at poverty, the equal worth approach to

sufficiency must be extended to take in concerns that lie beyond the workplace.

Poverty and Sufficiency

Since the measure of any anti-poverty programme is the extent to which it does actually relieve poverty, it follows that poverty itself needs a measure. A strategy for ending poverty should define a sufficient income, both as an index of its own success and as a basis for setting levels of benefit and a minimum wage. A reasonable income must go beyond the minimal requirements of biological need, but merely to pick some fixed proportion of the social average could attach the label 'poor' to the same number of people even after a general rise in living standards. A sufficiency threshold needs a coherent and persuasive rationale, relating poverty to social context as well as essential need, capturing its genuine and wide-ranging impact on human lives, but allowing for its future disappearance.

Deep equality identifies poverty as a condition that differs in kind, not just in degree, from a state of sufficiency. A sufficient income is the income needed within a given society for a life in four dimensions. Those who are poor do not just have a lower income than others, but a life so constricted by low income that by the normal reckoning of their own society it lacks many of the essentials for a good human life. As empirical studies make clear, this condition is transmitted all too often to the next generation, affecting a child's development even before the age of school. In a human worth perspective, the bane of poverty is not just immediate hardship but the difficulty of escaping to something better. Poverty is a trap that prevents the poor from using their own

latent capacities to improve their position, but a trap for which social action can offer the key to escape. Deep equality directs the main practical focus to unlocking the trap of poverty, not to a mere alleviation of hardship for those caught in its grip.

A four-dimensional view spells out the implications of poverty for need, action, potential and meaning. In relation to need, these extend beyond low income to the more general ills with which it is associated, ills such as poor health, shorter life expectancy, bad housing conditions, increased risk of family breakdown, a higher likelihood of emotional deprivation in childhood, a greater exposure to crime. To fall below a certain level of income excludes adults from the sorts of activities that are taken for granted within their society, including those necessary to a proper care for themselves and their families. It greatly depresses their children's chances of realising their full potential. When most people are not poor, poverty produces isolation from the rest of society. It becomes practically difficult to live in a way that sustains self-respect, and attracts the respect of others, even when the worst effects of deprivation are kept at bay. To be poor is to run the risk of scorn, and of losing a proper sense of one's own intrinsic value. A sufficient income should remove all these bars to shared participation in a good human life.

But the same reasoning shows that one cannot give a money value to sufficiency without taking account of the extent and quality of social provision in the non-market sphere. A strategy for sufficiency must integrate its income side with the good public services that are also needed to extend to those now excluded a common foundation of

health, security and amenity. The better these services are, the less income it takes for sufficiency. Nor can one determine how much is truly 'enough' without asking how far social values bearing on self-respect are grounded in money and wealth. If materialistic values tie a sense of worth to being better off than other people, they will continue to define those on the lowest incomes as inferior, however far the floor is raised. A true sufficiency for all is unachievable without a change in these values.

Part of the answer lies in shifting the social basis of value from income as such to the contribution to which it is owed. Where poverty stems from unemployment, to seek to tackle it by redistributing income would, for this and many other reasons, be a shallow approach, addressing at best only the first level of exclusion. Ignoring the ultimate causes of poverty, it offers no lasting solution even for this. A deeper approach takes full account of the value of personal responsibility, the role of work as an outlet for human creativity and a means towards the greater fulfilment of potential, and its capacity to enhance most people's idea of a meaningful and worthwhile life. The deeper approach must be generally preferable on a proper cost-benefit analysis as well as on moral grounds, but the moral case extends it even to those hardest to place in the labour market.

Poverty acquires its clearest shape and urgency when seen as a lack of power as well as money. Along with material hardship, it produces dependency, an inability to act and a greater vulnerability to being pushed around by the powerful. This systematic deficit of power helps to distinguish the clear-cut issue of poverty from the more shaded

questions of economic inequality. In terms purely of income and wealth, the top may seem further from the middle than the middle from the bottom, but in terms of their control over the character of life, the bottom and middle are much more radically divided. The social gulf between the poor and other people is often described as a gulf of exclusion. This may be an adequate description for how they are socially placed in relation to others, but lack of power is a better explanation. What stops the poor crossing the gulf is not the mere fact of the gulf itself, it is their lack of power to cross it.

If a deficit of power is the essential cause of social exclusion, any strategy for sufficiency must be directed to empowerment. Whereas a benefits-based approach is itself excluding, reinforcing a social image of the poor as dependents within society, a power-based approach is integrating, for it acknowledges in those now excluded the same right to control their own lives and fortunes that others take for granted. But a social process of empowerment must go beyond a purely personal route to economic betterment, to counter the disempowering effects of deprivation on whole communities as well as individuals. This entails building power from the ground up, not imposing external solutions to community problems but supporting the 'social entrepreneurs' within them whose energy, talents and commitment can lead the way to self-regeneration, given the right injection of outside help. Such help has to range widely, from the organisational skills needed for self-help networks through new avenues of financial credit and support for local enterprise to the horizontal spread of knowledge and innovation between different communities.

The Equal Worth of those who do not Work

A strategy for economic sufficiency must clearly offer security to those of working age who cannot work, and to those retired from work. To extend economic opportunity during the working years will eventually help to meet the second goal, given a secure social bridge between work and retirement income and improved pensions for those whose employment history leaves them poor in retirement. But people whose pensions are a clear entitlement from a lifetime of work are at little risk of being seen as dependent, or of lesser worth. For others, a greater stress on work could produce its own kind of exclusion.

To counter this danger, the values associated with work must be seen as one important element, but not the sole element, in a broader integrating framework of values extending to all. An inclusive sufficiency means the sufficient chance of a productive and creative human life for every person, whether or not their creativity is expressed in work. I suggest that seven different principles are needed here. 'Primacy of work' identifies an economically productive life as the central road to a decent standard of living. 'Security for the non-working' protects those with a legitimate claim to direct social support. 'An open door to work' extends the option of work to the margins of the labour market. 'Diverse contribution' affirms the equal human value of many unpaid forms of activity. 'Individual option' calls for social sensitivity to individual circumstances and individual choice, not least for those who care for others. The 'whole life' principle establishes social bridges between the different economic phases of a person's life. 'Consistency of values' requires a uniform respect for equal worth in the tone, character and working assumptions of all social institutions,

irrespective of the economic status of their clientele.

When the source of income could imply dependency, two considerations are especially important in averting the suggestion of a lesser human value. The first is to recognise the many forms of human exchange and social contribution not reckoned in money, the second to relate certain bases of payment to an opportunity framework by seeing them as compensation, a compensation for economic opportunity denied or forgone. A barrier to opportunity attracts compensation when disability or illness inhibits work. In the same way, an earlier denial of opportunity attracts compensation when working life offered an insufficient basis for a decent pension, and a forgoing of economic opportunity in favour of unpaid activities of equal human value when someone stays at home to care for young children or the adult infirm. In this compensatory perspective, direct financial support by the state is not a charitable hand-out, but a rightful social response to those same ingredients in human worth that in other circumstances would be the subject of enablement. Those who do work and those who do not work are socially recognised as of equal worth, each owing an equal respect to the other but neither owing gratitude.

The reduced capacity that comes from disability is not a loss of individuality, but a claim to the special social treatment needed to allow individuality an equal chance of expression. Empowerment here requires a sensitivity to the particular nature of a disability, as well as to individual choice. Insofar as disability affects active powers of consumption as well as production, a basis for economic sufficiency may need to range widely in its scope, extending access to economic

goods such as transport and recreation that are not the subject of special enablement for everyone. Social arrangements to assure economic sufficiency should neither rule work out nor relegate those who cannot work to any kind of secondary status. In this context, as in others, equal worth demands a social approach that matches a continuum of capacity to a range of intermediate possibilities, not the rigid division of people into mutually exclusive groups of the able and unable.

Because work is the source of multiple values, not just of income, those with disabilities retain their rights in respect of work, entitled like others to fulfil their potential and find the meaning it brings, even when the extent of their disability is so great as to free them from the corresponding employment obligations. With the right social support, new technology can open the way to work formerly closed, or offer the chance to work at home. Where no form of paid work is a realistic option, this need be no bar to a life that extends just as creatively across four dimensions. It requires redirecting social enablement into alternative ways of developing, sustaining and expressing an equal sense of worth. It is not an adequate social response to exclusion from the labour market simply to supply some form of replacement income, however essential this may be. On its own, it addresses neither the wider exclusion that often results from lack of employment nor its inner effects on the person concerned. The same general principles apply of course to everyone excluded from the labour market, whether the reason is their own disability or the need to stay at home to care for another person.

Consumer Empowerment and the Environment

Economic sufficiency requires government to act as the champion of consumers, not just of producers, for it calls for public intervention to support effective economic agency when individuals alone, or in voluntary association with others, are unable to achieve reasonable ends. An appearance of choice is illusory if it fails to include the very thing that consumers happen to want. It may take an exercise of public power to establish a sufficient range of options in the face of potential monopoly, or a sufficient guarantee of safety in the face of potential hazard, or a sufficient disclosure of information when the character and quality of economic goods and services are not self-evident. The effect of government intervention is then to extend the power of individual action and choice, not to restrict it. This aspect of sufficiency links up with earlier aspects when government offers support for food cooperatives, shoppers' buses and other ways of extending retail choice for poorer communities and households.

Even with a good income, unaided individuals can often do little to influence the range of economic goods on offer, or may lack the basis for a reasoned comparison of cost, safety and value. Advancing technology and the globalisation of economic life have reduced their control in some ways even while extending choice in others. No individual could determine the risks associated with mobile phones or genetically modified foods, or guarantee the probity of a pension scheme. Where the unregulated market fails to produce the full range of economic goods needed for a decent life, or to assure sufficient quantity, safe quality, secure outcome and affordable price, government must underwrite the individual's power of choice. This brings such

diverse matters as housing policy, airline safety, food standards and labelling, regulation of financial products, and consumer empowerment in general under the broad head of economic sufficiency. Clearly this does not mean that government itself must supply all the goods in question, but only that it should impose effective regulation on the sources of supply.

Human worth gives a general precedence to the individual interest over that of corporate bodies. The empowerment of consumers may sometimes require a direct assertion of government power over the large corporations, as well as smaller ones. But human worth means empowering individuals to choose according to their own values, not those of government. This gives them a right to the information needed to avoid foods or products that induce suspicion or moral disquiet, even if they carry a government certificate of safety. It also means that the individual interest is often best protected through the emergence of a partnership between government and an independent and diverse structure of consumer groups and watchdogs. These are more trustworthy representatives of consumer values than a government that inevitably owes some duty to producers as well.

Similar principles extend beyond our economic purposes as individual consumers to our social values and concerns for the world and society we live in. If a sufficient social floor is one that sustains all the essential social conditions for a good human life, it must include, for instance, conservation of our shared environment and many other social goods only attainable through public action. Environmental issues may seem remote from those of equality, but many different debates take a

common start from a rich view of human worth. If it means social structures for the poor that empower their meeting of need, it means social structures for all of us that empower our pursuit of meaning and value in the world we live in.

5. Equal Opportunity

Equal opportunity is an end in itself as well as an important means for achieving other ends. Our equal worth implies an equal chance to advance beyond mere sufficiency. For a basic sufficiency, moreover, a household might be treated as a single economic unit. A strategy for equal opportunity owes separate attention to each person within that household. The analysis of human worth extends a strategy to three different dimensions: to the active opportunity to pursue one's current aims, the developmental opportunity to grow to one's full potential, and the reflective and expressive opportunity to form, communicate and live by one's own system of values.

To bring about a truly equal opportunity in each of these respects means taking some account of the inner factors that hold people back, as well as the outer. It depends on changing culturally transmitted low expectations, not just removing more visible barriers to progress. In practice, government constructs its policies around groups, categories and local areas, not single individuals, and has greater power to influence outer than inner factors. Yet a public culture of equality gives the best hope of raising the private expectations of individuals for themselves and their children. If government's own words and

actions themselves proclaim the consistent message that people of every sort, background and community are equal in worth, that message will in the end get through.

The State as An Active Counterweight to Growing Inequality

Government has a regulatory responsibility to ensure fair access to the whole field of opportunity and to combat overt or hidden bias, prejudice and victimisation of any kind. But modern economic processes tend to entrench patterns of advantage and disadvantage and to widen opportunity gaps in ways that do not stem from a deliberate favouring of one group over another. Equal opportunity needs an active state, a state that is not simply a neutral holder of the ring but an initiator of its own effective counter-measures against a growing inequality. These interventions should seek to support rather than replace the active individual, aiming to bring individuals into the types of active partnership with public and private agencies that will best further the action, potential and point of view of those at a disadvantage.

The equal value of individuals calls for some weighting of government support in favour of the social groups and categories and the local communities furthest now from an equal opportunity. To be an effective force for equality, however, it must add the intelligent use of social research to its basic social commitment. Without a well-informed understanding of how and why different factors exert the influence they do over the life chances of individuals, and of how they interact, there is little hope that policy measures will home in effectively on the specific mechanisms that convert many human differences into sources

of advantage or disadvantage.

A weighted strategy for extending opportunity must also seek to balance 'top-down' extensions, such as increasing access to higher education, against 'bottom-up' extensions, such as ensuring that no-one lacks the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. It must balance policies designed to help the most deprived local areas against those that redress disadvantage on a national scale. To know that limited resources are being deployed in the fairest and most effective way, it is not enough to show that every policy promotes someone's opportunity. A tilt towards equality is only confirmed by auditing the overall impact on opportunity when government policies are taken in the round.

Within the economic sphere, the active state must seek ways of counteracting the growing inequality that is often a by-product of economic growth without slowing the growth itself. The factors causing an economy to grow are ill understood, often unpredictable and liable to adverse effects when government attempts to meddle in a heavy-handed way. Yet measures that redress disadvantage by extending skills and improving opportunities for those who lack them can hardly damage growth. Bringing more people's potential into economic play, they are much more likely to promote it. A difficult issue remains, of course, when some kinds of potential command a vastly greater market price than others. A rigorous promotion of equal opportunity is the most important counter to growing inequality, but perhaps not the whole story.

The right to equal opportunity applies at every economic level, giving

government the general task of dismantling those vested interests, restrictive practices and forms of economic privilege that limit scope for the enterprise of others. This means curbing monopoly, ensuring fair competition, extending access to investment capital and to the benefits of new technology and providing the advice and other types of assistance that will help small firms and new entrants into different fields of business. Here too an active focus on groups and communities hitherto excluded will identify the specific obstacles they face, tailor access to training and other sorts of help into the forms and outlets most likely to surmount those obstacles and look to ways of extending ambition to match latent potential.

A strong concept of equal opportunity must however be comprehensive in its interpretation of opportunity, extending it beyond work into all spheres of valuable human activity. Opportunity includes the opportunity to be a good parent as well as to work, so a comprehensive strategy must encompass family-friendly conditions of employment. Without interfering in the family, it must consider how the private settlement of family roles often hinges on broader social arrangements. It must widen access to education, not merely to improve employment prospects but for its great human value in itself. It must open doors to a richer cultural life, for those who would like to perform as well as enjoy the performance of others. And it must enrich the scope for participating in community life by strengthening the fabric of community organisation in areas where it is thin.

Such a strategy for equal opportunity will not reflect equal worth unless it reflects the enormous diversity of human potential and preference.

Equality requires a broad spectrum of opportunity, not just equal access to some narrow range of choice. That would suit the lucky minority, while wholly ignoring the potential and preferences of everyone else. Opportunities are only equal, whether for action, personal growth or the pursuit of personal view, if the social structure supports choices, talents and interests across the whole population. In an equal worth perspective, the measure is each person's own individuality, not the individuality of some favoured few.

Lifetime Opportunity

A strategy for equal opportunity must be grounded in the lifetime character of human existence itself. Government will only prove an effective counterweight to entrenched disadvantage if it combats the patterns of entrenchment in a single life, not just in groups and communities. This means understanding equal opportunity in a lifetime way. But lifetime opportunity itself comprises two rather different things: recurring opportunities, not simply a one-off chance in childhood, and an understanding of opportunity that reflects the changing patterns, phases and needs of a whole human life, sustaining connections between them.

A lifetime view of human worth calls for systems of social enablement that help to integrate the four dimensions of need, action, potential and meaning over the full span of a human life. In assigning equal value to each person, they must assign it to an enduring person who exists as the same individual across a long stretch of time, an individual who pursues long term plans as well as short, who has the potential to carry on growing as a person even in adulthood and who desires a life that

has shape and meaning as a whole. But personal structures of meaning very often link a judgment on one's own life to the future of one's children and their children after them. An enabling society must therefore offer its members not just the social and cultural basis for their own lifetime ventures but also for the important continuities of family life.

An equal lifetime opportunity must begin in childhood, so that no child arrives at the responsibilities of adulthood without the real prospect of a good and happy life. If every child deserves the best possible start, it takes a partnership of family and government to bring this about. Government can never produce an exactly equal situation, for families will always differ, but it can provide sufficient social help to ensure that no child lacks a genuine chance to realise his or her true potential. This means addressing the many aspects of childhood inequality that social action can help reduce, through such varied means as good schools in every area, good health services for mother and child, early help for the most deprived children and those with special needs, school meals to a high nutritional standard for those ill-nourished at home, efforts to reduce truancy and school exclusion, help and protection for children affected by family breakdown or difficulty, remedial help for those who fall behind in school, and a continuing search for effective counters to the increasing exposure of young people to hard drugs.

But perhaps government's most central and far-reaching contribution to an equal start is the action it can take to end child poverty. Poverty exacerbates all the other sources of childhood disadvantage and adds its own. Besides its direct effects on the welfare of children themselves, it

induces many family stresses that hinder parents from giving children as much care and attention as most would like to give. Successive reports have reiterated that a childhood in poverty greatly increases the chances of low birthweight, later ill-health, failing at school, adult unemployment, becoming caught up in delinquency or crime, an earlier death and a life of wasted potential. No child brought up in poverty has an equal start, yet this has been the start of one British child in three. In a society where a great number of the poorest children now depend on the income of their mothers, a large part of the answer must lie in focusing benefit increases on women and improving women's pay.

An equal childhood start would never be enough. Equal opportunity carries forward into later chances to start again in adulthood. Social structures should allow for their own inevitable imperfections, and for those of individuals. Essential human worth is in no way reduced by initial failure, folly or misfortune. If there is no cut-off point for the human capacities relating to need, action, potential and meaning, there can be no cut-off point for an equal opportunity. These moral reasons would always be good ones, but the modern conditions of economic turbulence add a more practical case. Jobs are now vulnerable to the effects of technological change and the global flows of capital and trade, where government influence is marginal at best. The chances of being employed depend increasingly on marketable skills, which may themselves only have temporary value. It follows that the focus of social enablement must switch from the old security of continued employment to the new security of continued employability. If this depends in turn on ready access to retraining, the conditions for lifetime learning have as firm roots in the fourth dimension of

meaning. Even when a present job is quite secure, lifetime learning helps to give equal value to every person's changing interests, ambitions and perspectives.

On a lifetime view, inequalities of retirement income are neither more nor less justified than inequalities of immediate earnings, when both are the product of employment. But future income should have the same security, whatever its size. No individual can sensibly provide for the future except through a safe social framework, underwritten by guarantees that only the state can give. As in other cases, the state need not provide the pension itself, so long as it takes the necessary steps to ensure universal availability, reasonable terms of choice and certainty of outcome. As far as human worth is concerned, the bridge between work and retirement could as well be a purely private pension scheme, an occupational scheme, a state scheme, or any combination of the three. The choice between public sector schemes and the effective public regulation of private sector schemes is one of practicality, not principle. But human worth means assessing practicality from the future pensioner's point of view, not just the provider's. In a context of shifting employment, it requires both clear and trustworthy information and a freedom to change jobs without unduly sacrificing pension expectations.

An equal opportunity strategy should offer comprehensive opportunity as well as a pension even during the years of retirement. Indeed it should make retirement itself more optional by adding age to the unfair bases for discrimination within employment. When people reach retiral age they do not diminish in worth, nor when they finish paid work do

they lose their active capacity, varied potential or point of view worth listening to. Retired people have as much right as anyone to a four-dimensional life while many would be glad to express this in a socially useful way. As the retired increase both in numbers and health, an enabling approach that offers them continuing outlets of active, developmental and expressive opportunity will also serve the best interests of the larger society.

Equality within the Family

A strategy for a full equality for women must not ignore the persistent effects of old-fashioned prejudice, but the greater focus is now on reducing economic and social disadvantages that are rooted less directly in gender. So long as certain family roles fall disproportionately on women, restrictions of opportunity that stem from these will remain issues of equal opportunity as between the sexes. The provision of childcare that is good and affordable is central to an equal opportunity strategy for women, just as it is central to a sufficiency strategy for those who are single parents. The same principle clearly extends to a general programme to reconcile employment with the reality of childhood illnesses and school holidays, implying such varied ingredients as after-school and holiday schemes, parental leave, job-sharing and part-time work, and family-tolerant employers.

A wider view applies the same social concern to other caring roles that tend still to fall to women, to inequalities of pay, to the longer-term effects on career and pension of employment interruption or home responsibilities that stand in the way of promotion, and to the impact of tax and benefit arrangements on economic fairness between husband

and wife. But a four-dimensional perspective takes the issue of equality beyond better access to work, raising deeper questions of meaning and value. Equality will be incomplete so long as the typical concerns of men are granted more social importance than those of women. Essential though it is to establish equal rights to a full career, social arrangements must give due acknowledgement to the other elements in a rich and rewarding life.

More generally, equal worth leads to several different principles that a family-friendly approach must seek to reconcile. It endorses the special connection, rooted in personal value, between parents and their own children. A child's worth is equal to that of an adult, implying that children's own needs should always be given equal stress with those of their parents in any social arrangements. The bringing up of children, and caring activities generally, should be socially valued as no less creative than the work that is paid. Yet for neither sex should the responsibilities of family prevent the realisation of those aspects of a person's potential that lie quite outside it. Equal worth implies an equal choice - a genuine and equal freedom of choice for men and women - and thus a social context that offers not only a notional equality of opportunity but the practical flexibility that makes it real. Employment and other arrangements should give equal support, regardless of which parent takes on a caring role. A distinction should always be drawn between the existence of a parental responsibility and the practical execution of parental tasks. Both parents retain a responsibility for their children however they opt to split the tasks between them.

No individual can make opportunities more equal; only government

can do this. Just as it falls to government to promote the economic and social structures that help dissolve the conflict between work and family, so it must act to ease other conflicts. Parents may pursue their natural desire to do the best for their own children even at the expense of equal opportunity for other children, a tension most apparent when poor public provision leads the better-off to opt for private education that few can afford. They may well accept the unfairness of a two-tier system. It does not follow that they are guilty of hypocrisy, but rather that government must establish a good enough public system to end the dilemma. In an equal worth perspective, however, the first test of a good enough system must always remain the needs and interests of children themselves.

The family itself is rooted in the value of worth as well as personal value, for a child needs the consistent attachments of family to develop a firm inner sense of worth, while parenthood offers both a central outlet for human potential and a central source of human meaning. It follows that the equal worth approach to the family must be the compensatory one of levelling up, not one of levelling down, with a clear limit to intrusion by the state. A social structure of equal opportunity should always seek to build upon the caring potential of those who assume the role of parents and their desire to give their children the best possible chance in life. In doing so, it should see the essence of the family in mutual relationships that exist in varying family models, not in some single hallowed model. But the child's equal worth gives it a right to the state's protection in the last resort, even against its family. When there is no option but substitute care, equal opportunity means making this as family-like as possible.

Where Equal Opportunity Ends

A strategy for equal opportunity must understand opportunity in a way that gives it a substantive and not just a formal meaning. When a background of poverty or family difficulty brings a drastic reduction in a child's capacity to benefit in the classroom, the child cannot be said to enjoy an equal educational opportunity, no matter how good its school may be. For adults too, the practical impediments of disability, family responsibility or problems of travel to work can place an opportunity beyond the effective reach of one person, even though it is well within the reach of others whose intrinsic talents may be less. A genuine equality of opportunity will only attach equal value to every person's agency, potential and point of view if it extends some way beyond an absence of formal discrimination into the background setting against which opportunities are made available.

Yet equality of opportunity clearly cannot mean equality in every respect that might have some bearing on opportunity. It would be a self-subverting strategy that abolished all distinction between equal opportunity and equal outcome, there being little point to an opportunity if a person cannot use it to alter outcome for the better. Equal opportunity does undoubtedly require that opportunities are generally available to all on the same objective terms, free from any form of bias or prejudice. More than this, it requires general bridges to opportunity when background factors such as poverty, disability, caring responsibilities, geographical remoteness, poor public transport or lack of basic skills interpose a clear and significant barrier to a person's overall freedom of option. But it does not imply that all opportunities are available to all individuals with identical ease, at every stage in

their lives, and at precisely the same subjective cost. The point at which opportunities are close enough to equal can hardly be defined in an abstract way. It is a matter for practical judgment, in a context of open and informed debate about continuing sources of disadvantage, whether social arrangements offer a sufficiently equal initial chance within each successive generation and a sufficiently good chance of recovering lost ground in the course of each human life.

Finally, an equal opportunity strategy can only be consistent with equal worth if it is bolted firmly to the other five strategies. The right understanding of equal opportunity and the right strategy to achieve it offer the most powerful engine of social advance towards all the six ideals; a wrong understanding or mistaken strategy could pose a considerable threat. Under a false banner of equal opportunity, a society might emerge that had shed older forms of privilege, but remained unfair, hierarchical and far from truly democratic, with many people still entrapped in conditions of economic insufficiency or effective subservience to others, and a great deal of inequality still passed on to the next generation.

6. Social Equality

As the third economic feature of an equal social setting, fairness of outcome might seem the natural topic to consider next. A good reason against this is the frequent tendency to explain a fair inequality in terms of merit and desert. The dangers in this meritocratic view are seen most clearly by taking the ideal of social equality before that of fairness.

Social equality also has its own more positive implications for economic policy, and for the future shape of the welfare state.

A government that begins from the premise of equal worth must look beyond the distribution of economic goods to the character of society as a whole, and the patterns of social relationship within it. There is a good case for saying that if no-one were poor and all basic needs were met, the most pressing social issues that remained would be issues of relative status, not relative wealth. 'Social equality' is a term that can be used in different ways, but it is used here to mean an equality of social status and regard. It has to do with the way that people of different sorts and descriptions tend to relate to one another in all their various social encounters, and with the underlying view they hold of themselves and other people. Equal worth creates a clear and separate requirement for a society that is socially equal in this sense, whatever it means for income and wealth.

In conditions of social equality, no-one is seen or sees themselves as the social better of anyone else. This means the absence of systematic expressions of social hierarchy, social antagonism and social privilege, not of the more personal likes and dislikes we all have for others as individuals. It rules out the assumption of one's own innate superiority, or negative attitudes towards those of a different background or group, whether these stem from an inherited system of castes or classes, from differences of religion, race, ethnic origin, gender, region or ability, from differences of income, wealth or occupation, from structures of authority, or from any other source of a social nature. An equal society may contain all these dimensions of

difference, but it will prevent them being seen as a matter of better and worse. No-one will expect deference from others, or look down on others, or seek preferential treatment on the basis of their own social position, nor will they cast themselves in the opposite role of inferior. People of all backgrounds and descriptions will interact easily, mixing together freely and amicably in their everyday lives.

In principle, people who differ greatly in income, wealth or economic role might still treat each other as social equals, just as there are many possible causes of social friction between those in the same economic bracket. In practice, economic differences and the processes that produce them are among the most important sources of wider social distinctions. Whatever line it takes on those differences and processes themselves, a government that believes in equal worth should seek to reduce their divisive social effects. A strategy for social equality will give its own distinctive cast to economic policy, as well as pursuing the social policies most likely to produce what is sometimes called an 'open' or 'classless' society.

At the same time, this strategy must take due note of a further requirement of equal worth, for it calls for a plural society as well as an equal one. A plural society enables very varied individuals to lead their own chosen lives in surroundings of social peace. Similar material conditions of life are no guarantee of social harmony. Flattish societies such as peasant societies are often rife with mutual animosity. They are certainly not renowned for easy acceptance of difference. A strategy for social equality must seek to bind people together in a way that does not threaten individuality, but rather promotes the social

conditions that give each person's different individuality the equal chance to flourish.

Each dimension of human worth is reflected in an aspect of social plurality. Social tolerance is clearly an essential, along with an equality of basic respect for people of every kind, to end the suffering produced by prejudice and social discrimination. Social cohesion introduces a more positive requirement, for it implies an ease and abundance of mutual relationship, giving maximum scope for the sort of agency that lies in social interaction. Social diversity offers the best chance for every kind of potential to flourish. Social dialogue allows the creative interplay of different viewpoints, not a destructive confrontation. Without dialogue, diversity and cohesion are likely to prove incompatible, diversity leading to social conflict, or a mistaken view of cohesion to the suppression of individual difference. Taken together, however, the four elements of plurality are the basis for a society that is at once diverse, united, and in constant creative movement, allowing individuality to thrive with minimal harm.

The Case for Social Equality

There are many reasons for saying that social equality is a necessary consequence of equal worth. Some are worth exploring for their own sake as well as for what they imply for government strategy. The simplest reason is that it is better, by and large, to hold beliefs that are true rather than false. So if people are truly of equal worth, it follows that all should share that belief. They should believe in their own worth, as equal to that of anyone else, and in the worth of all other people, as equal to their own. But beliefs like these are social products.

The views that individual people hold are subject to the causal influence of the social conditions under which they live, and of the value systems prevalent within their society. As a matter of empirical fact, an equal worth belief system is only likely to arise in conditions that combine social equality with social plurality, making an equal and plural society the inescapable implication of equal worth itself.

This argument extends across the four dimensions of human worth. A belief in one's own essential human value, and in that of others, must embrace all the kinds of capacity in regard to which people possess an equal value. It is a belief about the equality of oneself and others as subjects of experience and need, as agents, as possessors of potential, and as constructors and exchangers of human meaning. The last of these brings with it more than the recognition that others have their own distinctive point of view, it brings the hope that the reciprocal power to see and respond to other points of view can allow a sense of equal worth and a fellow human sympathy to bridge even the widest spans of human difference. All these aspects of belief about oneself and other people are sensitive to social conditions and to the government policies that affect these conditions.

A concern for equal worth and for integrating social values should go beyond government's choice of actions to its choice of words. Among other things this means the absolute avoidance of scapegoating or of any way of presenting policy that suggests a more limited value for some people than for others. It creates a general preference for persuasion over compulsion, for involving people in decisions rather than imposing solutions upon them, for seeking out the basis for a

common understanding where conflict sets people apart, and for retaining a faith in the potential of every person, however great the temptation to despair. It also demands a social respect for individuals as moral beings who sometimes fail, who when they break the law deserve punishment, but who should never be denied the chance to make reparation. No-one deserves the deeper inferiority that comes when a person is reduced in status to a social problem. All this should be reflected in government's language, and in its firm defence of these values when others take a different line.

Equal worth implies social equality for a second important reason. Any form of social barrier constitutes a direct and unnecessary hindrance to individuals in their own meeting of need, freedom of action, development of potential, and free pursuit of a life of personal meaning. Because each dimension of human worth has a social aspect, individuality must be most enhanced by the open social possibilities of an equal society of differing people. Where social barriers exist, they limit the true range of options for excluders and excluded alike. Our common nature as social beings is most fulfilled when everyone mixes and mingles on a basis of equality, and social relationships and social movements are entirely unrestricted.

Social equality goes beyond the absence of social obstacles, for this must rest on a social framework that promotes social cohesion without denying difference. An equal society arises when people of different kinds and origins are connected from childhood on by multiple and personal ties. Relationships free of stereotype offer the greatest prospect of mutual cooperation and concern, and the best antidote to stereotype

is rich informal contact across possible lines of fracture. Set in a broader context of fairness and democracy, this can extend a sense of common interest across the most varied society, producing a greater readiness to pursue inevitable conflicts of interest and view in non-antagonistic ways.

The social recognition that all share an essential and equal human value is a basic tie that unites people beneath the surface of conflict. Contained conflict and its four preconditions of tolerance, cohesion, diversity and dialogue are all enabling factors towards a better economic life. Even from an economic point of view, this must lead government to give its strategy for social equality the same serious attention as its more direct measures to improve economic performance. Its economic approach should never threaten to introduce new causes of social distinction in place of the old. But a strategy for social equality is not simply a series of footnotes to economic strategies. Its own positive character emerges through the sorts of social policies that actively foster more equal ways of relating.

Meritocracy and Social Hierarchy

An economic system could lead to social hierarchy through the values and meanings associated with economic success or failure, through the conversion of legitimate forms of functional or work-related authority into broader claims to social superiority, or through the practical separation of lives that might be produced by great economic difference. All these can be turned on their heads, however, so that social equality becomes a cement that enables an entrepreneurial economy to thrive and expand, functionally necessary hierarchies to

operate, and great individual and cultural differences to coexist within the same society, without any of these calling into question the equal worth of every person. In policy terms, this suggests a need to integrate across difference in three main domains: the moral domain, the domain of work and authority and the domain of practical life.

A first basis for social equality is the moral integration of those in different economic situations. Equal worth allows for differences in economic reward, but it restricts these to material rewards alone. In a system of material reward, no-one has to fail for others to succeed. To improve one's own material position, or that of one's family, is a legitimate form of motivation. But equal worth rules out any sort of reward that rests in a position of superiority over others. If a reward's value depends essentially on the subordination or inferiority of another person, it is inconsistent with the equal worth of that other person. This means that social hierarchy can never be defended as a framework for reward.

Moral integration further requires that the monetary rewards of work are never translated into any sort of superior moral value or extra social claim. This danger is inherent in a meritocratic view. When merit and desert are presented as the central concepts for understanding economic fairness, the effect is to undermine social equality. Merit is therefore a dangerous measure of fairness. It derives from and in turn reinforces an illicit confusion of two different sorts of merit: moral and economic. A knowledge-based economy encourages a further muddle with the sorts of innate abilities for which no-one can fairly claim the personal credit. The resulting mix is a most potent basis for a new elite.

A desert-based view of fairness threatens equal worth by fostering a perception of the economically successful as intrinsically better people than others are. It is at its most dangerous when set against a background of equal opportunity, for this increases the likelihood that success in economic life will be taken to signify a greater desert across the board, and stronger social claims. The competing claims of those who are less successful will be further discounted if their relative failure is taken to reflect a form of moral inferiority. The result may be just as socially damaging, and just as much a hindrance to acknowledging one another's equal worth, as more traditional forms of social hierarchy. The answer is certainly not to abandon equal opportunity, but rather to reject the meritocratic account of fairness. Merit clearly has some part to play in a total picture, but it would serve social equality better to ascribe an even greater part in economic success to the workings of chance.

A new social divide is far less likely if economic and social policies maintain a clear distinction between economic utility and moral desert. It helps also if they are seen to attach as much importance to non-materialistic concerns, including those that rest in achieving one's full potential, as to acquiring material riches. They should always stress the equal human values that lie, not just in work, but in social contribution of any kind. Economic role may betoken a form of expertise, a relevant reason for selecting to certain public positions. But wealth as such should never be regarded as a valid reason for preferment, nor should it be the entry ticket to any goods that lie within the public gift.

Social Policies for Social Equality

A modern society needs many divisions of role and authority, but social policy should seek to integrate across them. Social equality is quite consistent with functional hierarchy, not only in the workplace but in other contexts as well. Many important social roles give certain people a clearly defined authority over others for a limited purpose, such as the authority vested in the police, judges, civil servants, medical staff and parents. But social equality requires that authority should never be inflated beyond its strict functional purpose into a wider view of social relationship, nor be interpreted as a form of reward.

Systems of promotion may of course double as frameworks of reward and avenues for recruitment to functional offices that happen to confer managerial authority. These separate purposes should not be conflated. Promotion to a higher grade simply kills two birds at once. Management of others is a specialised function which does not itself reward previous performance, even when previous performance establishes the qualification to act as a manager. It is a confusion on this point that has led to the traditional perquisites of British management - separate canteens, washrooms and the like. Similar confusions can invest other holders of authority with a spurious social status.

To reconcile social equality with functional hierarchy implies more integrated conditions of employment for those who perform different economic roles, as well as stripping all other forms of authority of the sorts of associated privileges that lack a proper functional basis. In the economic context, a strategy for social equality will seek a convergence of rights in matters such as pensions, job security and leave, an end to

archaic distinctions that separate managers from those they manage, and an industrial culture of mutual respect and trust. In this regard as in others, a greater social equality is likely to lead to a better economic performance. The professions and officialdom may also find life easier if they free themselves from all their affectations.

The third main source of social hierarchy is the tendency of economic differences to produce a practical separation of lives outside the sphere of work. Social equality is furthered by policies that promote a greater integration. Good common services, mixed housing, and shops and recreational facilities with a wide clientele can all contribute to this purpose. In this respect at least, the critical question is not whether the public or private sector provides a service, but whether the system of delivery brings people together or sets them apart. To the extent that people go to the same doctor and their children to the same school, other differences such as those of income will seem less relevant. Because social views and assumptions are so largely laid down in childhood, a comprehensive education system is as essential to social equality as to equal opportunity. To serve either purpose, it must be good enough to retain the loyalty of those who could afford a different option.

Some services are obviously more critical than others in their power to unite or divide. A single system of delivery for financial services or even pensions is of far less importance than a system that educates children from different backgrounds side by side. One central area of provision, namely housing, constitutes a special case, both in its complex connection with social equality and in the approach to policy that will

best serve this objective. The geographical area in which people live has a greater relevance to social equality and social cohesion than the size of house in which they live, influencing both the pattern of casual encounters with others and the real extent of social mixing in schools and other services delivered on a local basis. A policy that aimed to mix expensive and cheap housing within the same neighbourhood would serve social equality better than a policy aimed to equalise the properties themselves.

It follows necessarily that a strategy for social equality must address all those social factors that tend to inhibit residential mixing. Effective measures to reduce crime, delinquency and vandalism in the areas where they occur will serve the cause of social equality as well as benefiting poorer people who lack the option to move to a less crime-ridden neighbourhood. An approach based in equal worth will never lose sight of the fact that crime is a wilful misuse of other people and thus a moral wrong, but it will also aim to understand the causes, motives and systems of meaning that lead people into so misusing others, and retain a sense of such people's continuing potential for leading a better life.

Similar principles of integration apply to many other areas of policy. One perhaps merits a special mention. Inherited wealth is more at odds with equal opportunity, fairness, social equality and the very idea of equal worth itself than wealth owed to one's own personal endeavours. It is not easy to reconcile great inherited fortunes with an equal start. Any attempt to justify them is likely to appeal to some idea of a superior standing, some underlying value that is itself heritable.

Inherited fortunes are thus the natural source of systems of belief that rank people in order of inherent worth, with the inheritors of fortune in the leading place. Unlike acquired fortunes, they entrench polarisation over many generations. All this creates a strong case for a redistributive inheritance tax, regardless of whether a case exists for redistributive taxation in general.

Policies for social equality must of course promote all those aspects of tolerance, cohesion, diversity and dialogue that make a plural society. On a four-dimensional view of human worth, human variety is celebrated as a good in itself. An enabling government can do much to encourage human individuality and the sort of moral imagination that will see this in others across divides of creed, class, culture or even country. The development of human sympathy and the search for meaning and self-expression are not processes that occur in a vacuum, they require external stimulation. Leaving education, culture and broadcasting entirely to the market would not provide the social conditions most conducive to personal exploration and growth, nor will this happen if government itself opts for a 'lowest common denominator' approach. If individuals are to have the best chance to extend their horizons, to contribute to the advance of a general human understanding and to form their own view of a rich human life, there must be excellence in the arts and sciences, a free flow of information and lively public debate.

7. Political Equality

Questions of power go far beyond the political structures through which society is formally governed, yet these are crucial to an equal social setting. It is in the political arena that the basic ground rules are laid down for social life, or at least are open to principled challenge. The public power that rests in the state is the main resource to which individuals must look when their own power is overshadowed by more powerful individuals, or by the vastly greater power of corporate organisations. This public power should itself meet conditions of legitimacy that stem from the equal worth of every citizen.

In regard to power, equal worth calls for two separate ideals and two separate strategies: the first to promote political equality, the second to ensure a more general freedom from domination throughout all the spheres of human life. The first leads to a concept of the democratic state, the second to a concept of the protective state. But power is most massively concentrated within the state itself, giving government a greater potential for domination than any private force. Both the scope and terms of government intervention must be clearly defined and circumscribed to preserve the individual's integrity and freedom. This adds a third concept of the limited state, a state that observes proper constraints on its own power of action. These must be rooted in law, for good will is not in itself a sufficient curb on the wrongful exercise of power. Misuse of power can arise as much from mistaken ideas of the good as from the pursuit of self-interest. Some of the greatest tyrannies have arisen in the former way. Yet a curbed state must retain its power to promote an equal basis for freedom.

The Case for Political Equality

Political equality is realised when a democratic constitution is combined with a democratic culture. The basic rights and institutions of democracy are hardly now in dispute. It may nevertheless be helpful to begin with some of the reasons for linking equal worth to political equality, for these suggest the ways that democracy might yet be strengthened. The first three are straightforward. An equal political system offers the best guarantee that government action will weigh people equally in respect of need, action and the development of potential. Even more directly and importantly, it is the only sort of system to acknowledge the equal intrinsic value of every person as the possessor of a unique and sense-giving point of view. To share in the control of social life helps moreover to affirm each citizen's proper sense of worth, while a non-democratic exclusion can only challenge that sense. For each of these reasons, inclusion in social decision-making must be part of an equal inclusion.

Further reasons can be added. As social beings, individuals have the potential to exercise a civic responsibility in relation to common affairs, not simply a personal responsibility in relation to their own affairs. Most people have views as to social goods as well as individual goods, and as to the right balance between them. Only democracy gives sufficient outlet for each individual's civic potential and social values. A person's sense of identity is usually bound up with the various groupings to which he or she belongs. Democracy encourages an identification with the whole society as well as with smaller groups within it, providing a political basis for social cohesion. But conflict too has its proper place in a vital human society. Conflict can be negotiated

in an equal way so long as all are included as equal parties to the negotiation. The best political condition for human individuality and the best protection for minorities is a democratic pluralism, for it offers the best mix of conflict and cohesion. Through this form of democracy, the idea of a contained conflict of equals can find expression at the highest social level.

In addition to these arguments of principle, there are arguments of a more pragmatic kind. Government must be effective as well as democratic; but there is ample evidence to show that democracy is more effective than other forms of government. Critical evaluation is the secret of good policy-making. Outcomes are simply better when all relevant interests contribute to open discussion at a national level and when local communities play a role in designing services to suit their own local needs. If all power tends to corrupt, an equal basis to public power is less prone to corruption than any other basis. Effective government rests on trust: people's trust of their government and government's trust of its people. Democracy, openness and fairness are the main sources of this trust.

If each of these reasons amplifies the idea of political equality, each also points to different lines of development for a government's democratic strategy. Trust, for example, will only be forthcoming if government is seen generally to stand on the side of individuals when their interests run counter to corporate interests. If political institutions are to serve the cause of national cohesion, their design must accommodate complex identities such as those of the Scots and the Welsh. Other considerations help to shape the picture further. A 'Rawlsian' view of

fairness calls for a special effort to open up the processes of government to the poorest and most disadvantaged. Yet political power is not simply shown in the answer given when a question is posed, it is shown in the ability to determine which questions are posed and which never reach the agenda. Political equality must therefore extend to the poor and powerless the same right that others have to introduce questions to public debate.

In an equal worth perspective, a strategy for greater democracy will see people not simply as equal holders of views, but as rational beings who can listen to other views and modify their own in the light of what they hear. This must take democracy beyond a majoritarian formula for counting heads, even a formula that allows a perfectly equal weight to each existing view. The most democratic institutions and culture of decision-making are those that encourage a continuing development and reevaluation of individual and social view, through the general engagement of citizens in processes of creative dialogue. It might be tempting to conclude from this that equal worth must favour a participatory model of democracy over a representative model. This would be a mistake, for it fails to distinguish between the stage of discussion before a decision is reached, the stage of accountability that follows it, and the point of decision itself.

Any realistic view of people's active involvement in politics must ground the point of decision in representative principles. Many people do not want a participatory role, having better things to do with their time. Their views need to be given an equal weight in the actual taking of decisions, and this can only be done through a system of

representative government. But the processes that precede and shape decision should be open processes, inviting contribution on the widest possible basis. Executive power should be held to open account for its actions. An equal worth political system will foster a lively public debate which all who wish can join, while preserving the equal rights and communicating the equal voice of those who prefer to devote their main energies to their own private pursuits.

Open Government

A strategy for political equality must guard against five tendencies from which no government is ever wholly immune: the tendencies to secrecy, to dogmatism, to side-stepping accountability, to paternalism, and to centralised control. Each is part of the impulse to shut out other voices from the process of decision-making, perhaps stemming less from a latent authoritarianism than from a desire to get things done when pressures on time, energy and resources are enormous. A dialogue-minded government will create institutional precautions against succumbing to any of these dangers. Just as importantly, it will school itself to the habits of openness. The result will almost invariably be better decisions as well as greater equality.

Democracy and trust in government are both fuelled by the free flow of information. A trustworthy government shows awareness of the ways it cannot be trusted. No government, for instance, can be relied on to distinguish its own embarrassment from a genuine reason for thinking that disclosure of information would harm the public interest. Freedom of information must therefore be based on a public right to know, subject to legitimate considerations of national security,

commercial confidentiality and individual privacy. The existence of a right puts the burden of proof on those who wish to conceal, not those who seek disclosure. But a right is not a right unless it is enforceable. This requires some form of independent arbiter, with the power to make government departments release information when they fail to prove the case for withholding it.

A public right to know is a necessary condition for outsiders to engage in a genuine debate with the government agencies charged with decision. Without knowing why decisions are made, it is very difficult to present an alternative case. Freedom of information must therefore extend to the factual information that leads government to adopt one policy view rather than another, and to the main considerations that enter into its thinking. But its importance does not rest simply with policy-making. Assured access to their own personal files would enhance freedom and fairness for individuals and the trust they place in government. Release of information on such matters as the causes of accidents, drug safety or the health records of restaurants is likewise part of the basis that individuals need to make their own reasonable decisions, or to come to terms with personal loss.

In a genuine debate, both sides listen as well as speak, so government must resist the impulse to dogmatism as well as that to secrecy. Open government requires open-mindedness from those in political authority, together with a readiness to admit to mistakes. In addition, institutional processes need to be designed for inward transmission of information and view as well as for outward. It is important, furthermore, that these processes draw widely from public opinion and

do not become channels of special influence for the best-heeled, the most articulate or those in positions of privilege. This means the opening out of quangos and other semi-public bodies on a wider basis than before, as well as measures to ensure the fair representation of different sexes, races, social backgrounds, occupations and points of view at every level of public life.

At a local level, the aim of dialogue can be advanced by experiments such as those with Citizens' Juries. A small group of people, whose profile mirrors that of the local community, is asked to meet together for three or four days to consider some question of policy. Witnesses are heard and cross-examined. After intensive discussion, the process concludes with mutually agreed recommendations. The innovative suggestions produced by many of these Juries give evidence of the creative potential of democratic dialogue as a means to better government. The proceedings have no binding power, but statutory authorities have often been sufficiently impressed by the findings to change their own approach.

Open government requires the critical review of particular actions as well as a wide-ranging democratic influence over matters of general policy. Most executive agencies, like many individuals, are disinclined to account for their actions. In a healthy democracy, elected bodies do not leave it to television interviewers to ask the difficult questions, they take the lead themselves. A democratic strategy must improve the processes of parliamentary scrutiny, and replicate these at a local level. A condition for this is open and visible lines of accountability, not just for national and local government but also in the difficult and growing

area where public and private meet. Public-private partnerships may be an effective mechanism for achieving many common purposes, but the decisions they make are public not private decisions. They deploy public resources and place individuals in positions of public power. It must always be clear on whom responsibility rests, how it is divided, and where is the means of democratic control.

Those in authority are always liable to justify the arrogation of decisions to themselves through the paternalistic belief that they are good judges, if not indeed the best judges, of other people's interests. Equal worth implies the opposite, that individuals should be encouraged to acquire faith in their own power of judgment and in the value of their own point of view. A democratic government will guard against paternalism, remaining aware of its own fallibility and adopting a systematic approach to consultation with all those at the receiving end of policy.

Conditions of Legitimacy in a Diverse State

A democratic government will counter the tendency to centralised control by dispersing decision-making processes themselves, not simply by extending influence over decisions that are still taken at the centre. The more decentralised the system of government, the greater the chance that varying interests and views can all find practical satisfaction. The principle of decentralisation is not simply geographical; it calls more generally for power to be passed downwards and outwards. But equal worth implies an equal value in the dimension of meaning. In a multi-national state, this creates a special case for devolving power to the state's constituent territories. The reasons for this are, however, of broader application.

Any system of government must be acceptable to those it governs from a standpoint of meaning - of fundamental beliefs and values - as well as a standpoint of economic interest and need. In an equal worth society, political legitimacy cannot be rooted in social deference. Structures of government must secure allegiance on an equal basis. This will only happen if they reflect the basic sense of identity of all those who are governed, their sense of who and what they are. If the system of government fails to offer symbolic as well as practical inclusion to every section of society, a feeling of disempowerment will arise that operates more at a collective than an individual level. When this feeling coincides with a distinctive national or regional identity, other sources of discontent may inflame it to a point where it threatens the integrity of the larger state. An appropriate political response is not then a matter of economic action or even the extension of individual rights, it must itself be pitched at the same level of identity.

A critical aspect of empowerment is the belief that one is governed by political institutions in which one can trust, even if, as a single individual, one exercises little actual control within them. At the level of basic identity, trust will only arise if the great majority of people are able to feel that the institutions are in some sense 'their' institutions. To produce this feeling of ownership, the 'hallmark of trust' must be of a highly visible kind, visible to the many people who have little interest or practical involvement in day-to-day politics. People must be able to identify with political institutions in a way that gives them a sufficient sense of shared power and control, even if their actual participation is limited to voting at elections. Given this sense, they are less likely to feel dominated by the vastly superior power of the state but will see it rather

as an adjunct to their personal power.

If conditions of political legitimacy are satisfied, people will maintain a basic loyalty to their system of government even when they grumble about the government currently in power and even when their own personal preference might have been for rather different political structures. The new Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly clearly meet the requirement of visibility, but visibility alone will not sustain the necessary basis of trust. A true political legitimacy only arises if the hallmark of trust is itself consistent with equal human worth. The conditions of political legitimacy must be such as to elicit an equal trust, whatever a person's sex, race, religion, class or personal sense of nationhood. People of every sort must feel included in the structures at a level of basic belief and identity - even those whose own sense of nationhood is a minority one in the area in which they live.

There are always different ways in which a distinctive identity might be handled politically, whether it derives from a different sense of nationhood or from some other source. In the 'centralist' approach, the whole issue is ignored, or an attempt is made to subordinate or even suppress the distinctive identity. In the 'separatist' approach, a political party seeks to capitalise on it as a source for its own support. When the identity is a national one, it may aim for total divorce. But equal worth points to a third 'structural' approach, in which variant identities are all properly recognised and incorporated within the political structure as a whole.

This approach integrates where the other two divide. In the national

case, it best reflects the feelings of identity that most people in Britain actually possess, for three related reasons. First, most people in Scotland and Wales tend to think of themselves in terms of nested or overlapping identities, e.g. as simultaneously Glaswegians, Scots, British and, increasingly, Europeans (and of course many other things besides). Unlike either a unitary structure or a separatist structure, a devolved political structure ensures that none of these elements has to be sacrificed. Secondly, many people who live in Scotland and Wales would find their own sense of identity completely denied in an independent country. The structural approach offers a better prospect of trust on the part of these people as well as others. Thirdly, many English people have a broader sense of British identity that encompasses the Scots and the Welsh as well. For all these reasons, the new devolved institutions are more firmly rooted than any alternatives in the complex identity of all the people who live in the countries they serve.

In more general terms, the third approach is also the least likely to divide a society in a dangerous way. In Scotland at least, centralism became so divisive as to be unsustainable. And because the separatist approach makes for a 'politics of identity', it always risks the emergence of the darker face of national or sectarian prejudice, even when (as in Scotland and Wales) the separatist party is actively concerned to prevent this. It is a route to be followed only if other routes are blocked. The third approach transfers the handling of identity to the overarching structure itself, thus allowing room for a non-sectarian 'politics of interest' to operate within it, in which identity is not itself a political issue. This is likely to be a better way of containing potential conflict than a politics that makes identity itself the central issue.

Devolved institutions do not stand alone as a source of trust, but must be coupled with other visible expressions of legitimacy and commitment to equal worth. The greatest political trust arises when all distinctive bases of identity are clearly and fairly reflected at a political level, not only those of a national sort but also, for example, the distinctive identity that many women feel as women. An equal opportunity approach to the choice of candidates may be of no immediate practical relevance to the great majority of women who, like the great majority of men, have no desire to stand for elective office, but it is of enormous symbolic relevance. If people cannot see a reflection of their own identity in the structures of power, they are always likely to feel alienated or excluded from the political system. A true political legitimacy only arises when people of every race, sex, religion, national identity and social background can see their mirror image in all the main instruments of the state, including not just parliament and the executive, but the judiciary, the police, the armed forces and the civil service. It is also of course the best antidote to low expectations.

Similar arguments point to the revival of local government, so that a healthy civic life exists at the geographical level at which people actually live and work. The more local the structures of democratic decision, and the more they match informal communities, the more likely it is that those affected by the decisions will feel a sense of ownership. This creates a general presumption in favour of transferring responsibility for services to the most local level consistent with effectiveness. Local authorities would be strengthened further by a power of general competence, allowing them to take any action on behalf of the communities they serve that is not expressly forbidden,

by changes in financial procedures to allow a longer-term approach to the needs of those communities, and by some general loosening of centralised control.

Difference mediated by dialogue is among the most potent sources of social progress and human enrichment. A democratic strategy must always recognise that the creative workings of democracy, like a pearl, need their grit. Conflicts and tensions are not simply an unfortunate part of the democratic process but essential to its health. Decision may ultimately rest with the majority, but truth does not. To seek a premature consensus, ignoring or neutralising the dissenting view, would misunderstand the principles of dialogue itself. A system that encourages dissonant voices to be heard, in a context of reason and respect for others, is more likely to yield truth, and thus to combine good with democratic government, than one that stifles debate or restricts it to a few. The contentiousness of democracy is inseparable from its being a living process of exchange and interactive growth.

8. Freedom from Domination

Power is a factor in many human relationships, not just the ones we think of as political. We readily talk of economic power, recognising that differences of resources produce differences of power. Outside the economic sphere as well, many social institutions can be viewed as structures of power, not least those literal institutions such as residential homes, mental hospitals and prisons in which individuals are liable to more than ordinary control by others. A power perspective

applies even to the most private areas of personal life. The issue between men and women over the centuries has concerned their relative power, as well as their legal rights and their income and wealth.

To overlook these more general ramifications of power would be to ignore a very important way in which individuals can be more or less equal. For many people, equality is as much as anything to do with an equal freedom from being pushed around. Economic distribution is certainly relevant to attaining this freedom, but is in many ways secondary. Money is not the only nor even perhaps the most widespread subject of human aspiration or human conflict, nor is it the only measure that people use when comparing their own situation with that of others. Above the level of sufficiency, income may be less important to many people's choice of occupation than the degree of autonomy it allows them within their working lives. To think in terms of power is to bring into view a far more extensive range of the things that really matter to human beings, whether as subjects of need, as agents, as possessors of potential or as deployers of meaning, while keeping money also in view as both a source and object of power.

The most momentous questions of power are not those that arise between free-floating individuals, but those that arise in the relationships of individuals to corporate bodies of various kinds. Power is in play when individuals engage with employers, retailers, local authorities, banks, property developers, hospitals, trade unions, multinational companies, residents' associations and organisations of every sort. When comparing income, wealth or opportunity across a whole society, it may seem sensible to restrict this to a comparison of

individual people. As soon as the spotlight turns to power, we can see that an adequate framework for discussing equality must include other sorts of agents besides individuals and the state. Corporate bodies are no less likely than they are to push people around or to cut across their purposes.

Equal worth must certainly imply a broad equality of power across the social divides of sex, race, class and geography. But in many areas of relationship, it seems inescapable that particular individuals will engage with one another, and with organisations, from positions of unequal power. It is absurd to suppose that an individual's power could ever match that of a giant corporation or bureaucracy, or even that the power of a person lowly placed within such an organisation could compare to that of its head. Outside the sphere of politics, equality of power is surely the wrong objective to pursue. The essential task is to establish social structures that will contain and moderate the effects of unequal power, so as to secure for each individual, however personally weak, a life free from domination.

Because power itself ranges so widely, a strategy to prevent domination must be just as wide-ranging. Some of the worst abuses of power take place outside the economic sphere. Particular risk arises in the more hidden crevices of social life, such as those of residential care. The people at risk are usually less well placed than others to defend or extricate themselves, or even perhaps to protest, by reason of their age, frailty or other kind of vulnerability. They tend to be politically weak as well. Freedom from domination can thus be seen, not just as the proper and necessary subject of a separate strategy, but as ranking

beside an end to poverty as a touchstone of government's true commitment to the equal worth of all.

The protective concerns of government are bound to increase in importance with the expected growth in the number of dependent old people. The process of becoming more or less dependent, in such contexts as age, sickness or unemployment, is better understood as a shift in a person's power situation than in terms of an economic shift alone, even when the latter contributes to the former. A gain or loss in personal power is likely to carry similar implications across all four dimensions of human worth, whether it arises from an economic cause or from a different sort of cause. Because the fourfold value of human worth does not decline with age, social policy based upon the premise of human worth must look to maintaining the power of the old as much as their economic status.

But freedom from domination is a theme that links the concerns of social policy to those of economics. In the economic sphere, power relates closely to fairness. Unfair inequalities of income and wealth often arise through the unfair deployment of power, whether people bend in their favour the general rules that govern economic life, or exploit a position of superior power in a particular transaction, or make unfair use of inside information, or form cartels and compacts against the public interest. In the 'fat cat' cases, where directors award themselves large bonuses while raising prices to the public or refusing workers a rise, our sense of unfairness clearly focuses on the directors' use of the power their position gives them to their own disproportionate benefit. A strategy for containing economic power

will therefore serve the cause of fairness too.

Aspects of Power

Power can be a source of money and money a source of power, but an equal worth perspective places more emphasis on how power is distributed and deployed within society (power being understood in a very general way) than it does on how money is distributed and deployed. Equal worth calls for the exercise of government's public power in favour of social arrangements that allow each person an equal chance to flourish as a person. For people to flourish, they need a sufficient basis of personal power to express their distinctive human individuality across all its four dimensions of need, action, potential and meaning. Sufficient power clearly requires economic sufficiency, but in a four-dimensional perspective other factors may be just as crucial. One of these factors is the power that lies with others, and here a case for redistribution may exist even where it does not exist for money.

Sufficient personal power needs both a negative and a positive measure. The negative pole is a sufficient freedom from domination and oppression, including the oppressive effects of material hardship. The positive pole is a sufficient richness of possibility. To have sufficiency in both respects is to enjoy effective control over one's own life. Both poles are four-dimensional. Domination and oppression can inflict suffering, subjugate the will, stifle potential, or curb freedom of thought and expression. A life rich in possibility is likewise gauged through plentiful and diverse options for meeting need, for action, for continued growth as a person and for the lifelong pursuit of human meaning. An equal

worth society should give all its members the maximum control over their own lives, in both the negative and the positive senses, that is consistent with an equal control for others.

If we set aside the problems of exact definition, the two poles of power seem wholly in line with an everyday understanding of personal empowerment. What better goal could an empowering parent envisage, for a child growing to maturity, than a life free from domination and rich in possibility? What more could one want for oneself? In this perspective, the main purpose of an educational system is to give children the inner resources they need to assume control of their adult lives, in a context of great uncertainty as to what the future will bring. By the same token, social progress is better measured through a general increase in freedom from domination and a fuller, more widely distributed richness of human possibility than it is through purely economic indices.

To move from a personal to a social view is to be forced, however, to recognise a tension between the two poles of power, for the obvious reason that one person might achieve a richer possibility at the expense of another's domination. Equality of worth is the key to resolving this, for it rules out extensions of personal possibility that depend on a lording over or misuse of other people. While both are important, freedom from domination must take precedence over rich possibility as a first principle of social arrangements. Given freedom from domination, human beings can largely be left to pursue their own individual happiness in their own creative way; without it, their chances of happiness are slim.

Power depends partly on the resources that different agents have at their general disposal, whether individuals, corporate bodies or the state. Many sorts of resources all contribute to power: economic resources, legal rights, membership of organisations, social connections, physical attributes, abilities and skills, information and knowledge, qualities of character, recognised qualifications, standing in the community. On this view, individuals can be thought of as having power without it being power over someone else. But power is also channelled and configured by institutional settings that relate individuals to other individuals and to corporate bodies. Structures of functional, legal or family authority, the legal and practical terms of economic life, settings of custody, treatment or care, and many other rule-governed social settings give some people a sort of power that is more specifically power over other people. To secure for each person a position of sufficient personal power must depend therefore on the right encompassing social structures as well as the resources each person commands.

Preventing the Abuse of Power

An unequal distribution of power does not lead inevitably to the abuse of power, nor even to the temptation to abuse it. To suppose that it does is to assume that we are all latently at war with one another. This is simply not the human situation. The more powerful may have their own good reasons for restraint in their dealings with the less powerful. They may believe that this is right, or in their own longer-term self-interest. They may genuinely care for those who are weaker. They may simply have no cause to exploit their superior power. Even if they might gain from doing so, the setting for their power may be safely

embedded in a system of rules and constraints, laid down and enforced by the power of the state, or by the less visible power of social custom. An enforced system of rules not only creates an external deterrent to the dominating use of power, it may come to be internalised as well.

If our nature does not impel us to misuse power over others, no more does it guarantee that we will not misuse it. Whenever power is unequal, it is therefore essential to guard against its improper use. To use superior power to dominate, oppress or obtain unfair advantage over others is always to use it wrongly, even if there is room for argument over what constitutes domination or unfairness. Misuse of power may take the obvious forms of exploitation, coercion, cruelty, wrongful pursuit of lust or greed, imposition of unfair terms of exchange, improper exercise of authority, or a simple overriding of the interests or views of the less powerful. It may stem from paternalistic intentions that seem initially much more benign. Yet it would be a mistake to place too much stress on individual motivation, for the roots of domination may lie in the pressures of a given role or position within an established structure. The logic of office can make a despot out of an office-holder who has no personal urge to oppress; the logic of an economic system can lead to unfairness that no-one personally wills. Government strategy must seek to minimise the chances of domination, whether its sources are personal or rest in social structure.

In general terms, the risk of domination must depend on at least three different factors: the balance of resources, encompassing social arrangements, and systems of belief. Any system of moral belief may discountenance the deployment of power for the cruder purposes of

exploitation, abuse or selfish oppression. But moral beliefs, as history too often shows, can engender their own more idealised misuses of power. A widely shared belief in the equal worth of every human being, spelt out in a four-dimensional way, is surely less likely than most to lead to domination. If genuinely held, it should help to prevent the assertion of identity at the expense of those with a different and despised identity, the dressing up of interests as values, the riding roughshod over opponents, and the imposition of ideal visions on people who do not share them. It is also a necessary antidote to the tendencies to paternalism to which government may itself be prone. But the vulnerable need a more robust system of defence than values alone can provide.

Government strategy might therefore be made up of three strands of policy. The first would seek to empower the disempowered across the board, by increasing the resources at their general disposal. The second would regulate the particular relationships and contexts in which misuses of power are most likely to occur. This shades into the third, restraining the powerful. To the extent that power derives from position, changing the rules that govern the use of position will modify the power it gives. To prevent domination, it might however be necessary to impose more general curbs on the powerful, if not by reducing their non-positional resources (their wealth, for example), then perhaps by restricting the uses to which these resources can be put, or through other measures that temper their power.

There are as many approaches to increasing the resources of the disempowered as there are different types of resource. Government

empowers them when it offers them educational and economic opportunities, improves their access to relevant information, extends and enforces their legal rights, promotes supportive and self-help organisations, counters prejudice and discrimination, or seeks to lessen the effects of specific hindrances such as disabilities. It empowers in a different way when its own serious attention encourages self-belief in individuals who have hitherto lacked confidence in their own potential and powers of action. Many of these options can be brought together at a community level through support for credit unions, networks of practical cooperation and other ways of boosting the collective resources and self-esteem of the most deprived communities.

To borrow Albert Hirschman's distinction, government can empower in more particular contexts by increasing the individual's 'exit' options or by helping to amplify the individual's 'voice'. It can do so in ways external to any given individual. A duty on others to consult and listen empowers the individual's voice. The more competing providers there are for goods and services, the less the individual's dependence on any particular provider, so the better the chances of exit. Yet quality of choice is also important to power. For some sorts of provision, to replace public values by market values could so depress quality as to produce a net loss of power, despite a greater number of exit routes. These general concerns are relevant to government strategy whenever power is at issue, but especially in contexts of social provision or care for individuals whose circumstances place them at the greatest risk. For the most vulnerable individuals, both the exit and the voice option may be limited by causes such as childhood, infirmity or mental illness. Government is then under a special onus to find effective ways of

compensating for this deficiency.

To jump from the first to the third strand of policy, government can impose general curbs on the powerful through measures to reduce every form of privilege. It is wrong, however, to equate resources with privilege. Privilege relates to the use to which a resource can be put, not to the resource in itself. This applies to wealth as to other types of resource. Other things being equal, wealth enriches possibility and protects its owner from domination. If fairly obtained wealth produces exceptional power, a case exists to limit the wealth itself only if no alternative way can be found to prevent its use to dominate others.

A context of political equality should allow the containment of wealth without resort to confiscation. A thoroughgoing drive for political equality must insulate the political system itself from the distorting effects of economic difference, insofar as the distortion stems from a direct leakage of money into the processes of social decision-making. Money can of course bring more hidden forms of influence to bear on public opinion. When power controls meaning and meaning justifies power, the greatest danger arises for a true equality. The best general defence against money's overweening power is an informed and contentious populace. This calls for the greatest possible freedom, quality and diversity not only within the press and other media, but in all the other instruments and institutions that exercise a formative influence on people's thoughts.

Corporate Responsibility and the Public Interest

To turn to the middle strand of policy is to turn finally to government's

relationship to corporate structures of power. In the modern world, these structures are critical to individual power. It is organised bodies that characteristically employ people, represent their interests, provide them with goods and services, improve or damage their environment, purvey information, grant qualifications, advance causes, propagate systems of belief, organise recreational occasions and pursue many other activities that impinge, directly or indirectly, on individual lives. Companies, trade unions, voluntary bodies, football clubs, newspapers, hospitals, churches and political parties are all genuine agents in their own right. They make decisions, wield power and own property in much the same way that individuals make decisions, wield power and own property. They can be held corporately liable for the way they behave and the choices they make, just as individuals can be held personally liable. Unlike individuals, however, they are creatures of law or agreement, not of nature, and have no intrinsic value in themselves.

This is not to deny the enormous human importance of corporate bodies, but rather to assert that their value is wholly rooted in individual value. Their value arises through their instrumental role in meeting human need, or in enhancing human action, or in developing human potential, or in channelling information and meaning, as well as through the attachments, loyalties and identifications of individual members or adherents. The performance of British business and industry is, for example, of profound practical relevance to the well-being of British citizens. At the level of meaning, it may also be a matter in which many British citizens take a certain kind of pride - even if there are others for whom football clubs are an even greater focus for pride. Whether human significance becomes attached to corporate

bodies for reasons of instrumentality or for reasons of adherence, it is always a secondary reflection of individual value, not an intrinsic value in itself. Commercial and industrial enterprises, and all corporate bodies, even football clubs, exist for the sake of individuals and only for their sake. They are not ends in themselves, nor should government treat them as such.

At the level of value, individuals are all-important, but at the level of power and resources, this is very far from true. Corporate structures offer a great enrichment of individual possibility, but can also dominate individuals and frustrate their purposes. Government strategy must therefore be aimed at regulating the use of corporate power and resources in such a way as to promote the greatest general benefit to individuals while minimising the dangers of domination. This requires a double look at corporate bodies, for they have to be seen both as corporate agents, taking corporate decisions and wielding power externally, and as internal structures of power. For individuals positioned within an organisation, their position and role can add greatly to their individual power or expose them to oppression; for those in the organisation's environment, inner structure matters less than outer behaviour. An overall regime is needed that harnesses both the internal and the external workings of corporate power to the true interest of individuals.

The nature of a regime consistent with equal worth is bound to vary greatly with the sort of corporate body in question and the human purpose it serves. Social service organisations can hardly be equated with multinational companies, yet in both cases the ultimate concerns

for government are concerns of individual power. In this perspective, it may matter little whether formal ownership rests in public or private hands. In any given instance, freedom from domination depends far more on constructing two robust and appropriate concepts from the raw material afforded by a four-dimensional view of individual human worth, and on governing corporate bodies accordingly. The concepts are those of corporate responsibility and of the public interest; 'appropriate' means appropriate to the particular human concern that gives its essential purpose to the sort of corporate body in question. With their help, government can establish a regime of law and corporate practice consistent with equal worth, leaving the balance of public and private to practical judgment.

This can be illustrated by taking the example of a residential home. Homes may be located in the local authority, commercial or voluntary sectors. Viewed externally, the economic differences between the sectors may seem significant. Yet any sort of home exists for the sake of the residents within it. They provide its purpose. A human worth discussion must therefore focus on the inner, not the outer view. On the inner view, the important issues are seen to be issues of power, not money. Homes in different sectors are very likely to exhibit the same internal structure of power, more affected by their common purpose than by their differing financial arrangements. Residents, in entering any home, place themselves to some degree and unavoidably in the power of others. How this power is used, and how much power it leaves in their own hands, will be the main determinants of their subsequent lives, whether the home is a public or a private home.

In whatever sector a residential home belongs, the fundamental human questions are the same. A four-dimensional analysis directs our attention not just to how well the home meets the basic needs of those living within it, but to how active a role it allows them, to whether it tends to foster and encourage their remaining potential or rather to let it wither, and to the beliefs and values making up its characteristic ethos. What picture do these present of the home's clientele? How central a place do they give to the residents' own points of view? These are not economic questions, but concern the way that power is distributed and deployed within the institution. A full view leads us to consider the images the home's ethos and practice tend to produce in the eyes of residents themselves, of staff, and of those outside. It leads us to ask whether they are truly consistent with the equal human worth of the residents, and whether they maintain the greatest possible sense of a continuing and equal inclusion in the larger society to which the residents still belong. To pose such questions is a step towards giving a richer content to the underlying notion of 'care' itself, not simply towards installing a more caring regime for its intended beneficiaries.

Human worth can thus engender a correspondingly four-dimensional concept of the corporate responsibility of a residential home towards its residents. This is the basis for setting in place the laws, the systems of inspection, training and certification, and all the other measures needed to promote good practice and internalised subscription to the concept among those who manage and work in such homes. The same starting-point will also yield an idea of a public interest in a system of residential care designed and run to four-dimensional specifications, extending beyond current residents to all who might in future look to

such homes for themselves or those close to them, and to the inclusion of residents and non-residents as equal participants in a single human society.

Other sorts of corporate bodies are very different in purpose and character from residential homes. Many make their greatest impact on individuals through the external exercise of corporate power, not through the power relationships that exist within them. Corporate actions and decisions are the main determinants of the environment in which individuals live, the food they can buy, the news reaching them on television, the job opportunities open to them, and the general framework within which they make their own personal choices. Whatever the corporate context, equal human worth gives a basis for developing a concept of corporate responsibility going beyond the interest of shareholders or employees to all those whose lives are in some way affected by the wielding of corporate power. It adds to this a concept of a broader public interest in subordinating that power to the equal worth of individuals. These together yield the guidelines for a corporate order that would allow each individual the best and equal prospect of a full and flourishing life.

9. Fairness

The last ideal to be considered is that of economic fairness. Sufficiency and equal opportunity must be part of a general understanding of economic fairness, but the idea of a fair inequality stretches some way beyond them. Issues of fairness clearly arise above the threshold of

sufficiency. Equal opportunity could exist in the context of different social arrangements, all assuring a basic minimum to all, but the ratio between the average income (or wealth) of the best off and the worst off 1 per cent under one set of arrangements might be many times greater than under another. In other ways too, economic rewards might seem fairer in one case than in another, despite a similar equality of opportunity. For these reasons, an enabling government must adopt fairness as a separate goal of egalitarian strategy. The problem lies in defining a fair inequality. One cannot begin to marshal policies into a strategy for fairness without a stab at deriving an outline view of fairness from equal worth.

To start with, equal worth is morally consistent with inequalities of income and wealth, but insists that these should be fair. Inequalities arise through social arrangements. Because social arrangements could be different, those that produce inequality are open to moral challenge. It follows from equal worth that an answer to this challenge must relate the inequality to some underlying principle of equal social weighting. Within all of the four dimensions of need, action, potential and meaning, people who possess more income and wealth seem better placed than those with less to exercise their equally valuable human capacities. An acceptable defence of this unequal situation must trace it back to equal worth, showing how it is grounded in the attachment of a deeper equal value to all. The greater the inequality, the greater the suspicion of an unequal social weighting, so the more robust the argument required to prove the inequality's fairness.

When A gains more than B from social arrangements, either of two

things might be true. The greater gain might unfairly reflect a greater underlying social weight for A than for B, or fairly arise through a proper recognition of their equal worth. At least five defences could be offered for the latter claim. (1) The 'merit' defence: A's merit is greater than B's, and social arrangements should give regard to this varying kind of value as well as equal worth. A proper view of worth itself requires some social place for merit. (2) The 'Rawlsian' defence: although B gains less than A from these arrangements, the gain to B still outweighs what B would gain from alternatives that yield more equal outcomes. Those at the bottom are better off because of the arrangements, though not as well off as those at the top. (3) The 'democratic' defence: the arrangements are freely consented to by both A and B, or at least emerge from a process in which both enjoy an equal say. (4) The 'empowerment of choice' defence: the arrangements reflect equal worth by offering an equal empowerment to A and B. It is not possible to empower people to choose and act without making differing outcomes the subject of choice and action, thus necessarily implying inequality of outcome. (5) The 'spheres of responsibility' defence: actual outcomes are a matter of A's and B's own personal responsibility, the social responsibility for outcome stopping at a basic sufficiency and the enabling conditions for personal action.

These all seem persuasive general arguments against a 'leveller' view that sees economic inequality as intrinsically wrong. They all share certain other features as well. None of them gives free licence to inequality. Each suggests that inequalities of wealth and income, while permissible, are subject to certain conditions, though they differ as to what those conditions are. Each argument might also carry some force

with B as well as with A, a feature that helps to make it a moral argument. While all the arguments serve to reconcile equal worth with differences in the income and wealth of individuals, they all give rise to the same moral expectation that social and racial groups will display a similar overall pattern and spread of income and wealth, however great the internal variations within them. Systematic differences between such groups most strongly suggest an unequal social weighting.

A Non-Meritocratic Principle of Fairness

A specific principle of fairness has to go beyond a general justification for inequality of outcome. A general justification would not in itself settle the upper limit of fair inequality (if there is one), nor which particular individuals should in fairness emerge with more income and wealth than others (and how much more), nor the particular conditions of fairness under which fair inequalities could be said to arise. It would not tell us the degree of fairness in our current economic system, nor give much guidance as to how government might set about making the system fairer. Any of the earlier arguments, except perhaps the last, might seem a potential starting-point for the fuller account of fairness that could help with all these questions. Yet each seems to point towards a rather different account, perhaps with different implications for policy.

True levellers are rarely found today. The interesting debate about fairness pits meritocrats against anti-meritocrats. At first glance, the 'merit' argument, which identifies fair inequality with deserved inequality, might seem to yield the clearest and briskest picture of a fair overall distribution of income and wealth. It would put the

most meritorious at the top and the least meritorious at the bottom, interspersing others at intervals appropriate to their merit. I have already drawn attention to some of the dangers in the meritocratic position. It has further problems as well. Desert is a quite impracticable measure of fair reward, given the lack of consensus as to who deserves how much. Everyone could subscribe to the principle, while seeing themselves as among those who merit the most. This does not mean that merit is irrelevant, but that it lacks appeal as a general answer to where fairness lies. Yet if it is not the right answer, some other answer is needed in its place.

The remaining arguments all avoid resort to an invidious moral ranking. Each says that fair inequalities are inequalities stemming from fair procedures. The criteria for fair procedure determine who should get how much and whether rewards should have any ceiling. Yet the different arguments offer different and somewhat conflicting criteria for when a procedure is fair. None comes into immediate conflict with equal worth. It seems equally consistent with social equality to say that one economic arrangement is fairer than another if it affords greater or more equal empowerment to the actions and choices of all, or if it gives greater benefit to the least advantaged (the 'Rawlsian' defence), or if it comes closer to meeting the demands of democratic legitimacy. Each of these is a possible way of interpreting what an equal social weighting would require.

In principle, a procedure-based view of economic fairness is a sounder and safer starting-point for government strategy than a merit-based view. The three approaches just outlined may not always point in quite

the same direction, but an overall strategy can perhaps be designed around some mixture of the three answers to when procedures are fair. The tensions between the rival views of fairness could themselves be seen as producing the sort of creative openness that is itself a condition for individuals to thrive.

Fairness as equal empowerment seems the best central core for the strategy, for it places just as great an emphasis as a desert-based approach on the active nature of the individual, while laying even greater stress on the diversity of human potential and on a respect for each individual's own distinctive point of view. It goes beyond equal opportunity in requiring social arrangements that offer each person the equal prospect of *effective* choice. Social institutions must provide more than opportunity to satisfy certain key demands of equal worth: first, that people should be well able - not just equally able - to promote the welfare of themselves and their families through their own responsible actions; secondly, that every person should have a high chance - not just an equal chance - of developing to the full the unique potential with which they are born; and thirdly, that each person should be in a strong position - not just an equal position - to act upon his or her own concept of a worthwhile end. Fair arrangements, by this criterion, are arrangements that give a maximum value as well as an equal value to each individual as a free, active and self-developing producer of outcomes, who acts in accordance with his or her own unique point of view.

On this basis we might set up a third camp alongside the levellers and the meritocrats, dubbing its champions the 'adventurers' or (to include

those disinclined to embark on a life of too much adventure) the 'navigators of personal choice'. They give a literal gloss to the idea of an equal chance in economic life, modelling its conditions more on some mixture of a fair game of chance and fair rules of the sea than on a fair exam. Unlike a real game of chance, however, the chances of economic life must leave each person with a basic minimum. For this camp, as for the meritocrats, some conception of equal opportunity is a necessary requirement, but given this condition, the distribution of economic outcome then has more to do with good or bad fortune, along with how willing you are to chance your arm, than with merit or desert. Those who end up with greater income or wealth may be luckier or bolder, but are not in any sense better, than others. A fair turn of the wheel will preclude the intervention of the sorts of irrelevant difference to which the meritocrat is also opposed, but the most relevant difference, apart from personal choice, is that of luck itself.

Networks of Fairness

Government can give effect to the idea of a fair chance through enabling social conditions, strengthening the different kinds of network that link the members of society so that they give more equal support to the choices and actions of all. The main links are found in the networks of opportunity, of safety, of moral recognition, of practical co-operation, of information and of power. If government does not act as a counterweight, all these networks may display the same tendency towards greater inequality and general inadequacy, and thus towards unfairness of procedure. Government serves the cause of fairness to the extent that it succeeds in enhancing and equalising the impact of all the networks on individuals' powers of action.

To promote fairness it should pursue, along with equal opportunity, a stable and secure framework for economic activity which is also a moral framework rooted in personal and corporate integrity. This should encourage co-operation, present a rich and open information base for action, and contain excessive economic power. The presence of any of these features in an economic system tends to empower individual action and choice, their absence to inhibit them. Fairness is promoted through positive measures to extend their enabling benefits on an equal basis to all economic agents. This implies insulating each network from the dis-equalising effects of differences in income and wealth, while leaving people still free to attain a better economic position through their own personal action. That freedom is one of the objects of enablement.

In each network, success rests on establishing a virtuous cycle of reinforcement between supportive external structures and the inner states of individuals: between external opportunity and an inner awareness of potential, external stability and an inner security, external reliability and an inner moral integrity, external solidarity and an inner sociability, external sources of information and an inner quest for knowledge, external empowerment and an inner belief in personal power. Policies for fairness nourish and equalise the inner basis for effective action as much as they do its outer conditions. Their external affirmation of equal worth itself echoes and strengthens an inner self-belief. Fair social structures both build upon and enhance individuals' active capacities, diverse potential and powers of understanding. When they operate in an equal way, such structures create the bricks for their own construction, for they nurture

individuals who are more likely themselves to be fair.

Like equal opportunity, the other subordinate goals of fairness should be given a broad interpretation. A stable and secure framework for economic action needs to provide macroeconomic stability, consumer security and a set of economic rules that support predictability of outcome without destroying initiative. It also needs to offer a secure framework of benefits and care for old age and infirmity, a secure environment for children to grow up in, the security of employability, security against crime, security within the wider world, and the inner security that comes from a sense of social fairness and a basic trust in the institutions through which one is governed. True security offers a stable platform from which to reach out to the opportunity that is risk's other face. It cannot and should not seek to get rid of risk completely. The future is bound to remain largely unforeseeable. The best social structures are those that help people make their own creative adaptations to whatever it brings.

In a moral framework for economic life, individuals - and corporate bodies - abide by moral values such as honesty, integrity and fair dealing. This rules out two different sorts of opposite state. In one, corruption, dishonesty and mistrust are generally rife throughout economic and social life. In the other, trust exists and moral obligations are recognised within a limited group, but outsiders are denied the same moral concern. An enabling government will take steps to remove cheating, exploitation, corruption, misrepresentation, fraud and other forms of moral transgression from the whole of economic life and to substitute instead the universal system of ethics on which equal worth

insists. It will seek to do this not just through external controls but through the social reinforcement of internalised values. This means an education system that attends to moral development as well as marketable skill, fewer incentives to dishonesty within the tax and benefits systems, and a tone of honesty and fairness throughout the whole of social life. Government must of course practise what it preaches by enforcing the highest standards within the public sector.

A strategy for fairness will seek to promote an ethos of free co-operation, both among individuals and among collective agents in the private sphere such as companies, trade unions and voluntary bodies. The kind of practical co-operation that gains the free and autonomous consent of those participating is the most consistent with their equal worth. A willing combination of resources is also the most effective way to extend and enlarge each individual's active powers. Co-operation, however, is not always a force for equality. There are many forms of self-serving conspiracy or collusion that operate to the detriment of others. Less heinously, schemes for mutual benefit may be effectively restricted to those above a certain income level, while voluntary bodies may be far thicker on the ground in some communities than in others. In all these respects, an enabling government will promote greater fairness both through steps to prevent conspiracy against the public interest and by seeking to extend a co-operative network of mutual support to those individuals and communities who would otherwise be overlooked.

Of the many factors relevant to human choice and action, the most certain to grow in importance, whatever the economic future, are

information and knowledge. Easy access to these is a further ingredient in an enabling strategy for fairness. It implies a drive to improve the information basis for economic life as well as a general commitment to transparency, both on the part of government itself and of those corporate agents in the private sphere whose decisions have major implications for the fate of individuals. It charges government to nurture the forms of research that advance social knowledge at a fundamental as well as a practical level, while not overlooking the creative insight that often begins by challenging existing orthodoxy. It is not enough, however, that information should be freely accessible to those with advanced information-seeking equipment and skills, for modern systems of information retrieval could well exacerbate inequality rather than reduce it. On an equal worth approach, information and knowledge are not private assets but public goods for all to call on when they have legitimate reason to do so. This must imply positive social action to bring information and knowledge to those who are least well equipped to seek out what might be helpful for their purposes.

A government that vigorously promotes equal opportunity, equal economic security, an economic culture firmly grounded in universalistic moral principles, and equal access to the resources that lie in co-operative action and in the growing social stock of information and knowledge, will be laying down the most favourable conditions for lasting prosperity as well as its fair distribution. These are all among the conditions for a more equal empowerment. But the network of interconnected power, extending beyond the economic domain, must be the subject of its own separate strategy.

The Rawlsian and Democratic Views of Fair Procedure

Within a general strategy to empower individual action and choice, questions of priority will arise. Alternative courses of action or ways of organising economic life might all be defended as tending to empower. A 'Rawlsian' view of fairness would decide the issue by attaching a special weight to the interests of the least advantaged. This view can itself be interpreted in a four-dimensional way, so that the fairer social arrangements are the ones that pay greater regard to the equal worth of those at the bottom. Once the requirements of sufficiency are met, fairness requires no unconditional improvement of their material position through social action. A four-dimensional 'Rawlsian' strategy would find the greatest fairness in the social arrangements that most enhanced the capacities and responsibilities of the least advantaged as active beings who could meet their needs themselves, offering them the fullest scope for realising their own potential and the greatest nourishment and emancipation of their own distinctive point of view.

Equal worth offers an alternative way to decide the issue of fairness which seems potentially at odds with the 'Rawlsian' perspective. If equal value adheres to each person as the holder of a point of view, fair social arrangements could be spelt out in terms of the greatest democratic legitimacy. If economic arrangements are freely agreed between the interested parties, or at least emerge from democratic processes, this in itself seems to provide good moral grounds for calling them fair, whether or not their effect proves best for the least advantaged.

An attempt could be made to reconcile the 'Rawlsian' and democratic perspectives at various different levels. A moral approach might say that

because the claim to a democratic voice acquires its moral force from human worth, consistency should bind every person who wishes to insist on their own right to a voice to recognising the equal human worth of the disadvantaged, with all that goes along with it. A more prudential approach would argue the case for a general economic interest in equipping the least advantaged for economic agency and a general social interest in their equal engagement in social life. But in the context of a strategy for fairness, these moral and prudential arguments are best seen as resources for what is basically a political approach to reconciling conflicting views as to where fairness lies.

If the current democratic view is at odds with other views, the option always exists to seek to influence the democratic mind. An enabling government has powers of advocacy and persuasion as well as powers of practical action. A government committed to principles of equal worth need not accept public opinion as given, as if it were a fixed element within the complex political equation it is called upon to solve, but can take an active lead in shifting opinion towards a more generous view of fairness. Democracy lies in rational dialogue between government and governed, not in some mechanical effort by government to put into effect the lowest common denominator of pre-existing views.

However fair procedure is interpreted, a drift towards greater disparities of income and wealth is a clear sign of underlying unfairness when the economic system is viewed as an interactive whole. If fair procedures are those that offer an equal empowerment to all, a fairer overall system should cause the floor of real income and wealth to rise over the course of time, and differences above the floor to become

gradually less extreme. The same is even truer if we add a 'Rawlsian' tilt towards the least advantaged. Even though neither view may impose a ceiling on absolute wealth and both may look to place a great range of outcome within the potential grasp of any single person, the empirical measure of fairness remains tied to the extent of inequality in the overall pattern. While the democratic perspective is more ambiguous than the other two, it is also the least fixed in its judgment of fairness, for it is an essential feature of democratic opinion that it is open to persuasion. The evidence suggests that few people believe that the distribution of income and wealth is currently fair, and that most would endorse the same index of movement towards or away from fairness, even if there is little agreement as to the ultimate location of fairness itself. Any strategy needs an empirical benchmark for its own success. The best benchmark for the success of a fairness strategy is a gradual shift towards a greater equality of income and wealth, even if the measures that produce it are not in any direct sense redistributive measures.

Notes on Sources

My discussion draws heavily on the work of others. The books and articles cited below are just a few of the most important sources. Like many in my generation, I learnt the basics of democratic socialism from the works of Anthony Crosland, reinforced by Michael Young's classic warning against meritocracy. At a more philosophical level, my central conception of human worth owes most to the great Plato scholar, Gregory Vlastos. While Plato himself could hardly be called an egalitarian, Martha Nussbaum shows us that Aristotle is still the best guide to understanding sufficiency. The idea of lifetime opportunity is only one among many obvious debts owed to Gordon Brown; I have borrowed also from the discussion of British identity in his pamphlet with Douglas Alexander. From either side of the Atlantic, David Miller and Mickey Kaus have argued a strong case for social equality. I echo their shared acknowledgement to Michael Walzer, for whom freedom from domination depends on ensuring that inequalities in one 'sphere of justice' are prevented from crossing over into others. Anyone writing on equality is bound to have learnt a great deal from Ronald Dworkin and John Rawls, while those who have not already read Albert Hirschman's short book have a wonderful treat in store.

I have imbibed ideas from many other sources as well, including a series of seminars on Equality and the Modern Economy organised by the Smith Institute in 11 Downing St. during 1998. When my family complain about the time I spend reading newspapers, I assure them that it is really work. In view of this, it is only right to say how much I have also learnt from columnists of the calibre of Polly Toynbee, Joyce

McMillan, Hugo Young and Andrew Marr.

I am very grateful to Gordon Brown, Russell Keat, Wilf Stevenson and, not least, my wife Sylvia Wilson for different sorts of help and encouragement, and to Hugo Foxwood for assistance in purging some of the worst excesses from my prose.

Brown, G., '*New Labour and Equality*', John Smith Memorial Lecture, 19 April 1996.

Brown, G. and Alexander, D., *New Scotland New Britain* (London: The Smith Institute, 1999).

Crosland, C.A.R., *The Future of Socialism*, 2nd ed. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964).

Dworkin, R., '*What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources*', Philosophy & Public Affairs, 1981, vol. 10, no. 4.

Dworkin, R., '*Foundations of Liberal Equality*', in Darwall S. (ed.), *Equal Freedom* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995).

Hirschman, A. O., *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970).

Kaus, M., *The End of Equality*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

Miller, D., '*What Kind of Equality should the Left Pursue?*', in Franklin, J. (ed.), *Equality* (London: IPPR, 1997).

Nussbaum, M., '*Aristotelian Social Democracy*', in Douglass, R.B., Mara, G.M. and Richardson, H.S. (eds.), *Liberalism and the Good* (London: Routledge, 1992).

Rawls, J., *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971).

Vlastos, G., '*Justice and Equality*', in Brandt, R.B. (ed.), *Social Justice* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962).

Walzer, M., *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

Young, M., *The Rise of the Meritocracy*
(London: Thames and Hudson, 1958).