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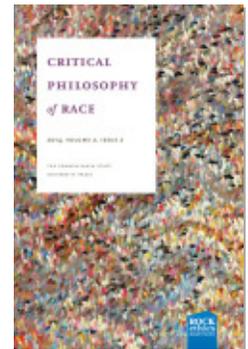
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## Equality from a Human Point of View

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**EQUALITY  
FROM A HUMAN  
POINT OF VIEW**

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**Abstract**

Racial inequality remains a persistent feature of American life. Despite the prominent place the idea of equality holds in the tradition of political philosophy, we remain without an effective conception appropriate for the experience of racial inequality. In this paper, I re-frame debates around equality and egalitarianism by reflecting on some of James Baldwin's more strident arguments in his 1965 debate with William Buckley. I suggest he presses two complaints that are fundamental to racial inequality: the complaints of democratic distance and of disaffection. I then argue that while contemporary egalitarian theorists such as G. A. Cohen, Ronald Dworkin, Richard Arneson, and Elizabeth Anderson all claim to have isolated in their work a preferred conception of equality, they are unable to respond to Baldwin's complaints, thus unable to effectively address the experience of racial inequality. I then leverage Bernard Williams's distinction between a technological view of equality and a human view alongside his writing on imagination to offer a framework for meeting the moral demands that arise from taking the experience of racial inequality as fundamental to considerations over social and political equality.

**Keywords:** equality; egalitarianism; liberalism; James Baldwin; race; Bernard Williams

Egalitarianism has been central to liberal theory since the latter's resurgence as a prominent political philosophy after the middle of the twentieth century. Egalitarian theorists have sought, as a part of the theory of justice, to articulate what the idea of equality demands of major political, economic, and social institutions. While the idea of equality is clearly central to matters of racial justice, normative race theorists have offered a number of critical reflections on liberal theory's shortcomings. These reflections have been wide-ranging. Some challenge the epistemic and phenomenological underpinnings of liberal social contract theory, thus seeking to critically undermine the very conceptual foundations of modern liberal theory.<sup>1</sup> Others more or less have taken liberal theory where it stands and instead seek to use its apparatus in the service of racial justice by exploring arguments for reparations<sup>2</sup> and the nature of reciprocity.<sup>3</sup> Though the approach and tone of these reflections varies, none deny the basic tenets of liberal theory, with the injunction to treat persons as equals primary among them.

In this paper, I neither seek to destabilize the conceptual foundations of liberal theory nor do I straightforwardly accept its ethical vocabulary for the purpose of racial justice. Rather, more modestly, I focus squarely on the ethical question that underlies a critical engagement with liberal theory: what does it mean to treat blacks as equal persons in a liberal democracy? I present a first step toward rethinking the conceptual boundaries of racial egalitarianism in a liberal society. I argue that racial egalitarianism depends first on identifying key aspects of blacks' experiential discontent in a racially unjust liberal democracy. Subsequently, the proper philosophical response to this discontent is to conceive of equality as attending to aspects of shared humanity that can enliven our ethical sensibilities, and to imaginatively ask ourselves: what is it like to be a person who experiences racial inequality as a pervasive social, political, and economic problem? I employ a two-pronged strategy.

I recommend a philosophical alliance between James Baldwin and Bernard Williams. Though he has attracted more attention in recent years, Baldwin remains an underutilized ally in political philosophy. Here, Baldwin is used as an analyst of democratic ethics. Drawing on his 1965 debate with social conservative William F. Buckley, I distill two complaints raised by Baldwin: the complaints of democratic distance and of democratic

disaffection. In my view, Baldwin's project is centrally concerned with the prerequisites of a democracy marked by moral integrity that in America's case crucially depends on a reconstructed ethical disposition toward blacks rather than a demand for a redistribution of goods or for specific legal reform.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Bernard Williams's essay "The Idea of Equality" has played a minimal role in contemporary philosophical debates over the idea of equality. Williams's approach to equality concerns itself with attending to the humanity of persons over and above a conception of them as bearers of goods or executors of life plans. He presses us to be attentive to the moral salience of persons' shared capacity for pain, love, longing for respect, for experiencing destabilizing disappointment, and a wide range of other fundamentally human responses to the world. When we are attentive in this manner, the idea of equality takes on an especially urgent valence as we tilt the apparatus of our moral cognition toward the worth of persons' pursuits and responses to success and failure, gain and loss from the perspective of shared humanity. That is to say, our own human capacities are deployed to perceive the grounds for moral claims. My use of Williams alongside Baldwin further stipulates that we are best poised to successfully take the human point of view when we use our imaginations to try and understand what it is like to be the person who is making a claim on us. Taken together, I suggest that Baldwin and Williams offer an approach to racial egalitarianism that is transformative of American character in just the way Baldwin hoped, as well as more deeply humanistic in just the way Williams demands. Between the encounter with Baldwin and Williams sits a critical engagement with a number of liberal egalitarians, the aim of which is to sharpen our view of the poor fit between contemporary egalitarian theory and racial inequality.

A preliminary is in order before I proceed. Regarding the scope of this paper, my aim here is basic, and that is to philosophically explore the implications of allying two views that express strong ethical affinities but which have not been considered together for the purposes of racial equality. But more than merely presenting an unlikely alliance, I think Baldwin and Williams taken together allow us to reclaim a mode of ethical inquiry that has been displaced in recent decades by analytic liberalism—a mode that is motivated by the moral urgency of experienced injustice. Thus, the paper eschews being prescriptively programmatic in favor of being philosophically exploratory, and I will be content if readers perceive a refreshed approach to egalitarian theory that is appropriate for racial inequality.

### 1. Democratic Distance and Disaffection

What are some main considerations regarding the experience of racial inequality? While it would be too strong to say that the matter of goods holding is insignificant, I will suggest it is not most fundamental with respect to racial inequality in a democratic system. I am concerned to elucidate some foundational claims in this regard and turn to Baldwin as an ally. Specifically, I draw out two complaints that strike me as central to our concerns: the complaints of democratic distance and of disaffection. Moving in this manner will provide conceptual metrics against which to test the mettle of contemporary egalitarians.

Facing a room dominantly populated by white Europeans, Baldwin opens his arguments on the relationship between the American Dream and the status of blacks by admitting to a certain kind of awkwardness “that has to do with one’s point of view—I have to put it that way; with one’s sense, one’s system of reality. . . . The answer to [the proposition before the gathering] has to do with the effect of where you find yourself in the world, what your sense of reality is. . . . That is, it depends on assumptions we hold so deeply that we are scarcely aware of them.” Baldwin’s main aim before the gathering at Cambridge is not to rehearse the facts of American racial inequality but to make clear what it means to *be* a black American under those circumstances. It is crucial for Baldwin that the audience understands that the very system of power that produces racial inequality did not merely produce a social system of segregation, for example, but had produced distinct sets of social and political experience. On his view two people—one white and one black—might see, observe, or interpret the same event or idea and come to very distinct conclusions. How distinct? So distinct that “the Mississippi or Alabama sheriff . . . really does believe, when facing this negro boy or girl—this woman, this man, this child—must be insane to attack the system to which he owes his entire identity.” The implication here is significant.

American race relations up until and slightly beyond the time of Baldwin’s arguments were marked by the unilateral wielding by whites of every sort of power necessary to dominate blacks. Indeed, the depth and supposed legitimacy of that power greatly defined the nature of white citizenship. White citizens were inherently more morally worthy than blacks, and that worthiness conveyed a blanket justification for whites’ actions toward and attitudes about blacks. However, the diminishment of blacks embodied by whites’ power within the polity produced a significant

outcome: American democracy necessarily could not provide the same political experience for blacks, and this had severe ramifications for blacks' chances of being favorably positioned as effective citizens when the day came to take their place alongside whites. As Baldwin says: "It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and your identity, had not in its whole system of reality evolved any place for you." I want to suggest, then, that the first complaint Baldwin offers with respect to the problem of racial inequality is that *of democratic distance*. I mean something fairly precise here. The signal relationship I have marked out involves white supremacist democracy and experiences that shaped Americans so deep down as countrymen that sharing the space of America did not entail sharing the idea or reality of America. For whites that idea represented the rightness of their ascendancy. For blacks the idea of American democracy meant the principled conviction that they too ought to enjoy the full benefits of inclusion as well as the esteem of their co-participants alongside the blatant fact that whites held them in no such regard. They effectively stood at a distance within America such that their well-being was out of bounds for white Americans.

Democratic distance is sure to produce a commensurate effect. Baldwin continues: "The disaffection, the demoralization and the gap between one person and another only on the basis of the color of their skin, begins there—and accelerates throughout a whole life-time, until you are thirty and realize you are having a terrible time managing to trust your countrymen." Here Baldwin laments an essential tension: the partnership between American democracy and white supremacy had introduced a rift between persons that the mere category of "countrymen" would be unable to bridge. Here Baldwin indicts the arbitrary diminishment of a person by virtue of their skin color in the problem of democratic distance. The outcome is blacks' reasonable and rational hesitation in coming to terms with the idea of sharing in the American project with whites. This is important. The very idea of democracy, recently framed by some theorists, as a scheme of ongoing cooperation, in part presupposes that while you and I may disagree about which policies are optimal for fulfilling some common need, at the end of the day it is important that we deliberate and offer reasons for our differing views, since the political structure is one that must basically remain intact so that it might serve as the framework for future initiatives, disagreements, resolutions, and so on. But any democratic system founded on the ideas of respect and fairness that oppresses a distinct group in the name of democracy is sure to earn distrust toward those that claim

the American dream with such hypocrisy. This complaint represents the problem of *democratic disaffection*.

I want to pause here, for you might have come to regard the predicate *democratic* with a bit of suspicion, maybe as my way of smuggling in exactly what is to be argued for, the moral significance of democracy. I don't mean to do that, at least not primarily. The first reason I deploy *democratic* is to, alongside Baldwin, keep in view for us the very tension embodied by historical American racism and present-day systemic racial inequality. So far we have noted two such tensions—first, that between occupying the same politically determined space and being placed out of the ethical and affective bounds that define that space; second, that between a baseline mutual trust that defines the very terms of that space and the absence of good reasons for blacks to extend that trust to whites.

The second reason has to do with my attributing to Baldwin a pragmatic stance that importantly *must* deny arguing for the values that underwrite democracy, precisely because it is the very thing that holds the key to whites' racial redemption and blacks' full and complete emancipation from white power on terms they can genuinely call their own or at least conceive as properly shared. Baldwin conveys that when he observes Americans in Europe, he notes the corruption of their moral sense by, as he puts it, the plague called Color as it follows them abroad. *Yet, and this is important, Baldwin proclaims that nonetheless "these are my countrymen, and I do care about them, and even if I didn't there is something between us, we have the same shorthand."* What might Baldwin mean in referring to a "shorthand" that is shared among people who appear to stand in an antagonistic relationship? Baldwin denies that America's future problem from his historical standpoint is racial integration. Indeed, he claims, "The problem with Americans is that we have been integrated for a very long time. Put me next to any African, and you will see what I mean." The claim though bold, is not intended to be profound. Baldwin and American blacks have been so deeply embedded in America's founding, democratic construction, and tradition that, despite many hypocritical practices, blacks have nonetheless been educated by and bore witness to the ethical force and potential of democratic governance and the possibilities of full inclusion as equal American citizens. This is by no means to say Baldwin thought we were on our way in 1965, *but that the political education provided by being in America makes the idea of not being an American, thus* having to actively re-affirm subscribing to the ideals that underlie America's most potent promise, a moot point—American democracy is the practice we've

got and the practice we've been fighting to continuously define; we are past the point of specifying some other system. Democracy, thus, *democratic* is what is always presupposed—it is what is troubled, and it is the possible solution to our troubles.

I understand the problems of democratic distance and democratic disaffection to be the main complaints Baldwin means to articulate with respect to racial inequality. But we need to make one final move. I am going to suggest that these complaints obtain their quality and texture because of the emphasis they place on the *experience* of being black rather than on the *transactional* qualities of being black. Consider the following from Baldwin: “I am stating very seriously—and this is not an overstatement: that *I* picked the cotton, and *I* carried to market, and *I* built the railroads under someone else’s whip for *nothing*. For *nothing*. The southern oligarchy, which has some power in Washington, and therefore some power in the world, was created by my labor and my sweat, and the violation of my women and the murder of my children. This, in the land of the free and the home of the brave.” I will return in a moment to Baldwin’s use of the pronoun *I*. First, I want to linger on this emphasis on doing something for nothing.<sup>5</sup> Baldwin implies that America’s prosperity accrued on the backs of blacks, quite literally, as they provided the hard labor for some of America’s most prosperous industries. One might be lured into thinking that this leads to a distributive view of equality—if someone claims that you are rich because of some form of exploitation, it seems to follow that the solution is remuneration. But it is telling that Baldwin ultimately says very little about blacks’ economic circumstances during the debate. Each complaint points to the deeper problem of the disvalue of blacks’ humanity and indicates the *reason* blacks have gone uncompensated: because they are *unrecognized* and *unaccepted* as whites’ moral equals in the scheme of ongoing cooperation. Baldwin’s “for nothing” amounts to the indictment of white Americans’ refusal to extend to them a basic level of consideration and respect that is at the foundation of any remotely just democracy.<sup>6</sup>

Now we turn to the question of Baldwin’s use of *I* in his above claim. What is puzzling about Baldwin claiming that he did these things is that he in fact did not do these things. I want to suggest that Baldwin, as nearly the only black man in the room during the debate, is using his own presence as the embodiment of *continued and continuous* racial inequality. By doing so, he means to draw attention to a basic yet important fact: racial inequality is a temporally extended and persistent phenomenon. Moreover, despite his own not inconsiderable success as a public figure, he nonetheless continues

to experience and become deeply troubled by the unchanging quality black disvaluation. You might think at this point that I've run into a problem—Baldwin's claims may have had force in 1965, but not in the twenty-first century, that the passage of time in a post-Civil Rights America has rendered Baldwin's complaints moot. At this point I could fall back on the various indicators that establish racial inequality as persistent today. But that would then compel you to adapt another stance—to prefer a distributive conception of equality, which I would like to dissuade you from doing. The following section offers a more systematic disavowal of such conceptions, but here it is to the point to introduce another narrative from our time that displays remarkable consistency with Baldwin's own testimony.

In a 1999 comedy special, Chris Rock says the following: "There's a white, one-legged bus-boy in here who won't trade places with me—and I'm rich. 'Nah, I'm going to ride this white thing out and see where it takes me.' Because when you're white the sky's the limit, when you're black, the limit's the sky."<sup>7</sup> Two features attend this claim. First, that Rock is in fact a rich black man while the disabled white man is not. Second, that the white person is willing to bear the disability because the possibilities for whites are limitless while they are bound for blacks. This is significant.

To grasp its significance we ought to recall Baldwin's own observations on this phenomenon in 1965. He provides an example of a woman with whom he must deal with at a Western Union and says, "What is going on in the poor woman's mind, or the poor man's is this: they've been raised to believe, and helplessly believe, that no matter how terrible their lives may be . . . and no matter how far they fall, no matter what disaster overtakes them, they have one enormous knowledge and consolation which is like a heavenly revelation—at least they are not black." The shared observations between Baldwin and Rock point distinctly away from any conception of equality wherein one might think a more fair distribution of goods would alleviate racial inequality. Clearly no amount of money would allow Chris Rock to feel his position in the social scheme is genuinely valued. This makes Rock's claim important. Notice, Rock has accumulated a level of *wealth* few blacks could have aspired to in Baldwin's time, yet his complaint about his *standing* among his white counterparts is identical to Baldwin's.

Our reflections on Baldwin (and Rock) convey a central point important for both a conception of equality and egalitarianism (understood as a politically informed theory meant to bridge the conception of equality with practicing it). Namely, while there may be many kinds of unequal treatment indexed to wealth, opportunity, resources, what is fundamental to

(racial) equality is the social and public ethic of the polity in which the marginalized find themselves. That is, the complex of civic virtues necessary to extend morally appropriate regard and concern with respect to black lives. And I mean to note *black lives* with specific normative purpose. No view of equality is adequate that does not understand that equality is a significant part of lives going well, and lives can go well for many reasons of which material considerations will only be one, but not the most fundamental in the case of race.

A number of contemporary theorists have written important works suggesting that their theory is best for securing equality. It's worth noting that these are all liberal theorists, so they share a *prima facie* commitment to, first, the idea of moral equality, and, second, the notion that moral equality grounds duties of various sorts to be met by those who share in the democratic scheme. I will take these commitments as appropriate and settled and will not dispense with objections to them. With respect to racial equality, we now want to pose to these liberal egalitarians a straightforward question: can their theories and conceptions meet the challenges presented by Baldwin's two complaints?

## 2. Shades of (Contemporary) Liberal Egalitarianism

The engagement with Baldwin strongly suggests that when blacks complain about equality they are primarily concerned with the substance of their standing in the polity. That is to say, from a philosophical point of view, they are concerned with the presence or absence of moral motivation to extend to them appropriate regard and consideration as persons who stand in a particular sociopolitical relationship: that of citizens within a liberal democracy. A proper conception of egalitarianism ought to be effective for beginning to make sense of and respond to the nature of the complaint.

To preview, I will argue in section 3 that Bernard Williams's injunction to view equality from a human point of view is a good conceptual and political fit for the nature of the two complaints as voiced by Baldwin, thus a good starting point for working toward genuine racial egalitarianism. I will flesh out the substance of Williams's injunction, but for now let it stand that a human point of view of equality is meant to distinguish equality by being fully appreciative of the substance of one's life projects *for that person* rather than with respect to an empirical description of those projects and

what would count as marking those a success or failure. I have conceived of egalitarianism as a politically informed theory meant to bridge a preferred conception of equality with practicing it. What would count toward its being such? Here we will use Baldwin's two complaints as the litmus test. I'll say, then, that a politically informed theory meant to bridge a conception of equality with its practice will be attentive to issues regarding obstacles to the social bond (the problem of democratic distance) and the possibility of alienation and distrust (the problem of democratic disaffection). Thus a properly political egalitarianism must present a vision of equality wherein political life makes manifest blacks' moral value alongside that of their white counterparts.

It might be objected that my forthcoming indictment of liberal egalitarians is bound to be unfair, since they are not themselves primarily concerned to address the problem of race. That is both a true representation of these theorists' aims and one that is quite beside the point. Our primary concern is whether egalitarian theorists have articulated resources that *can* be put to work on behalf of those facing extant social inequality in an appropriate manner. While I would say they should indeed have race somewhere on their analytic horizon given that it is such a significant source of inequality, my arguments below need not depend on whether egalitarian theorists conceive of themselves as concerned with race. Rather, I merely need to leverage the notion that they take themselves, as political thinkers, to offer optimal theories of equality (that feed into theories of social justice), yet when the relevant theories are made to confront a case of deep sociopolitical inequality, they come under intense pressure rather quickly—pressure they are invariably unable to bear.

I perceive generally three conceptions of equality at work in contemporary egalitarian theories: equality as resource allocation, equality as welfare facilitation, and democratic equality. Proceeding in this manner will allow us to make some pertinent distinctions as to what matters to each view, and thereby to better identify how the conceptions hold up to Baldwin's two complaints.

The equality as resources view is quite familiar. Articulated most strongly by Ronald Dworkin in response to John Rawls's justice as fairness,<sup>8</sup> the view argues that what is most important with respect to equality is that each person have an appropriate bundle of resources with which to pursue a good life. The questions important for us are twofold: why resources, and how are resources conceived as fundamental to equality? It is worth noting three propositions that seem to frame Dworkin's resources view.

1. “No government is legitimate that does not show *equal concern* for the fate of all those citizens over whom it claims dominion and from whom it claims allegiance.”<sup>9</sup>
2. “When a nation’s wealth is very unequally distributed . . . then its equal concern is suspect.”<sup>10</sup>
3. “I shall assume . . . that equality of resources is a matter of equality in whatever resources are owned privately by individuals. Equality of political power . . . is therefore treated as a different issue.”<sup>11</sup>

It is reasonable to infer that one’s resource holdings is a sufficient measure of the state’s concern and, further, is sufficient for securing what is morally important about equality, given that concerns of power seem to not bear directly or relevantly on either resource distribution or the effective value of those resources.

Proposition 2 gives us an answer to the question, why resources? An equal distribution of resources signifies the state’s concern. Why might that be? Liberals are primarily concerned with persons being able to pursue good lives of their own choosing. The state’s role, then, is to secure the conditions for realizing that ideal. On Dworkin’s view the role of resources in realizing this ideal seems to be that each person’s bundle of resources is *instrumental* for planning a good life as well as actually pursuing it. Resources are the currency of egalitarian justice, since a view of equality is bridged by a view toward a particular strategy for practicing it—give each person her appropriate resource bundle. If each person in fact gets the appropriate bundle, then that person has gotten what she needs to live a good life and the demands of equality have been met.

Let us say we agree with Dworkin that resource distribution is a good instrument of living the good life. We would still want to know what *that* role for resources has to do with equality as a moral ideal as suggested by proposition 1. The answer here is represented by Dworkin’s considerations regarding a certain kind of autonomy in addition to a view of responsibility versus luck. To begin, we note that simply identifying resources as a desirable currency for realizing equality as a moral ideal does not yet provide the *means* of both identifying appropriate bundles of resources and how they are to be secured. Rather than going Rawls’s route and placing persons bargaining for principles of justice under radical epistemic constraints (in the original position behind the veil of ignorance), Dworkin sets up an (hypothetical) auction market wherein people are enjoined to bid for a bundle of goods such that they will not envy any other person’s bundle when all is said and done, since “no division of resources is an equal division if, once

the division is complete, any [person] would prefer someone else's bundle to his own bundle."<sup>12</sup> The intuition behind this reasoning for Dworkin's preferred method is important. State neutrality is a pivotal contemporary liberal ideal as one way of preempting state intrusion in our lives. An auction embodies the value of neutrality, since a person's participation in the market ostensibly secures a free choice with respect to what she thinks is necessary for living a good life. Thus I won't want a parcel of land for farming if I find astronomy to reflect the pursuit I really value.

Further, beyond mere neutrality, the state's decision to give a person a certain bundle just represents the state's response to that person's own preferences and conception of the good life, granting to the state by way of the market a topically attractive responsive quality. The moral value this is thought to embrace is significantly tied to notions of responsibility and luck. On the first cut, individual responsibility plays a role, since one chooses for oneself. Dworkin holds that so long as the state responds to your free choices, it has both acknowledged your standing as an equal and respects that standing by holding you responsible for the choices you make. He writes: "For the effect of redistribution from winners to losers in gambles would be to deprive both of lives they prefer."<sup>13</sup> Thus, in Dworkin's view, an equal distribution of resources does not refer to the idea that everyone gets the same and/or the same amount of resources. Rather, it becomes somewhat relative as regulated by the operation of the market: people's resources are equal so long as they each have what they need to effectively pursue a good life freely chosen by them.

So, when we ask what role resources play with respect to proposition 1, the answer seems to be that the state's implementation of a reflexive mechanism whereby it remains neutral while providing for genuinely free choice in the instruments necessary to lead a good life as conceived by that person just is a reflection of its equal concern. Dworkin's conception of equality as resource holdings seeks to obtain its egalitarian credentials by mandating that the state provide support for free choice of those instruments as it holds persons responsible for those choices on account that the choices are ostensibly free. Is this conception of equality and its position within this view of egalitarianism sufficient to hold off Baldwin's two complaints? We should be immediately wary of Dworkin's proposal from two angles. The first is internal to his proposals, the second external.

First, is it the case that resources or a market scheme can adequately respond to either the complaint of democratic distance or disaffection?

Recall that the complaint of democratic distance refers to blacks' sense of being located within the geographic bounds of American democracy but falling outside the bounds of their white counterparts' range of concern and consideration. For the resources view of equality to do the work stipulated by its own stated ideal (that the state show equal concern for all its citizens), it would have to be the case that resources count as currency in more than the sense in which it allows me to pursue my own conception of the good life—it would have to buy my satisfaction of being a kind of citizen outsider, thus serve as a kind of existential palliative. The only way to forestall what I take to be a disagreeable conclusion would be to suppose that resources serve as a kind of secondary currency: they allow me to earn my white counterparts' concern and consideration. But this is no better than the previous proposition—I know of no moral principles subscribed to by contemporary liberals, Kantian as their bent typically is, wherein moral regard is not a *prima facie* duty of those who share in a scheme of ongoing cooperation, thus such regard cannot properly be “for sale.” The same will hold true for the problem of democratic disaffection—it is hard to see what bundle of resources could appropriately forestall a sense of distrust or alienation with respect to one's counterparts, especially if one comes to the conclusion that such resources must be used as a kind of secondary currency as just described. Indeed, as we have noted, no amount of money seems able to ground Chris Rock's sense of a certain kind of racial unfairness that is freestanding from his material holdings.

One might object that my view fails to embarrass Dworkin's own preferred conception of equality and egalitarianism, since he stipulates that *the state* show equal concern, not persons toward each other. I have a two-part response to this, one part of which I will presently and briefly state, the other part of which will be subsumed into a larger point about egalitarianism's proper subject that will apply to all the liberal thinkers I discuss below. For now I want to say that any such division between persons and institutions is somewhat artificial, for ultimately, persons populate the machinery of the state. While it is true that institutions can and often do seem to wield a level of agency that is not reducible to the collective will of its agents, it is also true that within any institution—such as in a welfare or unemployment office—persons have a fair bit of leeway to bring their own biases and prejudices, explicit or not, to bear in deciding which citizens get what goods.

The second, external problem with Dworkin's proposal regards proposition 3, which has so far gone unremarked. It stipulates a distinction

between equality of resources and equality of political power, which at first seem susceptible to independent treatment. However, that distinction suggests the adequacy of resource holding in the state's effort to express equal concern. To my mind this is an artifact of Dworkin's method: while Dworkin does not employ a device of radical epistemic withholding such as Rawls's veil of ignorance, Dworkin places his hypothetical bargainers in a situation where it would only be rational to be concerned primarily with resources: an island that itself has no political history. Further, the survivors of Dworkin's "reasonably simple exercise in equality of resources"<sup>14</sup> also abide by a fairly demanding characterological feature—"that no one is antecedently entitled to any of [the island's] resources." And I say this is demanding not because on moral grounds it asks a lot of people. Rather, my complaint is that while Dworkin allows his islanders a mostly full palette of information, his theory is no more political than Rawls's.<sup>15</sup> What allows him to treat equality of resources as distinct from political power is exactly the fact that people are already disposed to consider each other legitimate and equally legitimate players in the social, political, and economic game. What makes this nonpolitical? Consider, for example, the practice of deploying racialized language that surrounds welfare and the attendant claims of the undeserving poor alongside fairly wide support for other forms of government subsidies such as Social Security or Medicare. Battles over (racialized) welfare are at base importantly about whether blacks are in fact entitled to a government subsidy.

Equality as resource holdings cannot stand up to Baldwin's two complaints. Internal to Dworkin's view is the problem as to whether resources is an appropriate form of currency to pursuing a good life in a society wherein one is cast out from the democratic concerns of co-citizens. Further, there is also reason to be worried that there is an implication that resource holdings as a means to achieving what one wants acts as a kind of secondary currency to secure the concern in question. External to Dworkin's account are questions of whether the path taken to making the case for a resources view is adequately attentive or at least possibly attentive to the vicissitudes of political life. I just above showed it to not be appropriately attentive. To be clear, my claim is not that a resources view ought not play a role in some conception of equality (and that will be my claim for the remaining two views as well); rather, it is that no such view of equality can be the grounds upon which a proper racial egalitarianism can be founded—there will be significant slippage between both the equalisandum and the assumptions

necessary to justify that equalisandum and the kind of inequality we want to address: systemic racial inequality. Can equality as welfare satisfaction do any better?

Here, we will consider proposals put forth by Richard Arneson and G. A. Cohen.<sup>16</sup> Arneson says, “According to equality of welfare, goods are distributed equally among a group of persons to the degree that the distribution brings it about that each person enjoys the same welfare,” wherein he takes “welfare to be preference satisfaction.”<sup>17</sup> Preference satisfaction is important for Arneson as it is a measure of a person’s life going well. Arneson further specifies that these preferences are “ideally considered preferences,” which “are those I would have if I were to engage in thoroughgoing deliberation about my preferences with full pertinent information, in a calm mood, while thinking clearly and making no reasoning errors.”<sup>18</sup>

The immediately notable feature of a welfarist view vis-à-vis contemporary liberalism is that it introduces a consequentialist consideration into a mode of theorizing that aims to be and is usually described as deontic. By relying on a fairly subjective standard such as preference satisfaction, liberals would be left to provide for a person’s well-being grounded in a subjective account as to what would make that person feel his or her preferences were indeed satisfied. Though he might have preempted the possibility of catering to repugnant tastes, for example, by imposing the condition that preferences be ideally considered, Arneson quickly notes another problem. It remains the case that pursuing equality of welfare might impose upon people a standard of well-being they don’t endorse (i.e., I am a genuine altruist, and not particularly self-interested, thus my own welfare is not important or urgent), nor would it do much to hold me responsible for my own choices (i.e., I gamble, lose, and nevertheless demand that the state satisfy my welfare). The solution suggested by him and taken up by Cohen consists of a compromise between consequentialism and deontological moral theory: an opportunity/access approach to welfare or advantage.

What does this look like? Arneson suggests, “We construct a decision tree that gives an individual’s possible complete life-histories. We then add up the preference satisfaction expectation for each possible life history. . . . Equal opportunity for welfare obtains among persons when all of them face equivalent decision trees. . . . The opportunities persons encounter are ranked by the prospects for welfare they afford.”<sup>19</sup> Arneson’s schematic is meant to produce a model of equality wherein, rather than

everyone having an equal level of welfare compared to each other (ordinal rankings), people can equally claim—whatever their actual holdings might be—that their welfare needs are met, thus they have equally good lives (cardinal rankings). The picture looks the same in principle if not in form for Cohen, with the main difference consisting in translating opportunity as access, and more substantively, welfare as advantage. Cohen’s reasoning for the move is straightforward, since he holds that “advantage is a broader notion than welfare. Anything which enhances my welfare *pro tanto* is to my advantage, but the converse is not true.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, Cohen’s amendment does not challenge a concern with welfare. Rather it seeks to offer a more comprehensive welfarist metric such that his account would respond to conditions under which it would not merely be difficult for a person to achieve his or her preferred level of welfare but wherein it would also be costly. Following his own example, on account of opportunity for welfare we are compelled to supply a disabled person with a wheelchair, since it will be difficult for him to get around. If we imagine that despite the fact that his arms work very well, he nevertheless suffers pain, the egalitarian concerned with welfare ought to also be compelled to provide pain medicine, since movement is also costly, though not difficult since he has a wheelchair and is especially adept at using his arms.<sup>21</sup> Cohen is concerned that a strictly welfarist view would not provide a reason to alleviate the disabled person’s arm pains.

The equality as welfare facilitation view offers some possible benefits for racial inequality. First, a welfarist view, broadly construed, ostensibly takes how lives actually go to be morally significant, thus in a society wherein goods held by blacks buy them fewer material advantages than those held by whites, the state would be compelled to offer supplementary compensation. Also, for example, the state would be compelled to act if wealth disparities between employed blacks and whites who hold comparable professional and education credentials became systematic. This benefit is somewhat suppressed by Arneson’s and Cohen’s respective fall back to an opportunity and access view, however, since it is concerned to facilitate welfare attainment rather than to secure welfare straightaway. But for now, we may yet concede that a welfarist approach that is attached to a concern for free choice has its advantages. For example, some blacks who pursue high levels of education in our society often do so because they rationally suppose their welfare in a capitalist and racially disadvantaged society might best be indexed to earnings power, all things considered (meaning,

they don't perceive that they will change background power relations by pursuing some other life plan). Under the Arneson/Cohen approach, those same blacks would in theory be able to pursue other interests under the assumption that those pursuits would genuinely result in promoting their welfare. But that's only in theory. To see why, let us note a further condition of the equality as welfare facilitation view.

The supposedly "right reading of egalitarianism [holds] that its purpose is to eliminate *involuntary disadvantage*, by which I (stipulatively) mean disadvantage for which the sufferer cannot be held responsible, since it does not appropriately reflect choices that he has made or is making or would make."<sup>22</sup> If this doesn't strike one as *all* that should concern egalitarians, it at least seems a good start—surely, social marginalization of the kind motivating Baldwin's complaints can be appropriately categorized as a form of disadvantage for which blacks cannot be held responsible, since they surely did not choose to live or instate a regime of racism or systemic racial inequality. But neither racism nor systemic racial inequality are discrete states of American life. Indeed, they exist on a long historical continuum that transcends political or social transactions; they reside within the character of the nation. Moreover, they produce effects on sufferers that seem distinct in kind from other forms of unchosen disadvantage. For example, the experience of asymmetrical power between the young black girl and Mississippi sheriff is not morally comparable to familiar examples in the literature such as the disabled man, mentioned above, who suffers from arm pains or persons who involuntarily possess expensive tastes for goods, thus whose welfare might come at a high cost to society. The young black girl experiences a sociopolitical wrong made manifest by her place in the social scheme marked by historically determined power relations given shape by irrational racial beliefs—thus the wrong here is a comment on who she is, where she stands in the social scheme, and thus what she is worth. The people in the other cases face a kind of misfortune but suffer genuinely *chance* disadvantages that are not in the first instance a commentary on those persons. Is there any chance an egalitarian theory concerned with unchosen circumstances fueled by equality as welfare facilitation might successfully hold off my criticisms by way of Baldwin's complaints?

There is a possible response to the complaint of democratic distance from within the opportunity/access framework. It might say something like the following: to the extent that being concerned with securing your co-citizens' moral consideration and concern contribute to your welfare,

then the state should provide you with an opportunity to do so. But notice that such a response places the burden for securing this kind of welfare on the sufferer rather than on the state or other citizens. Additionally, it is quite unclear what goods the state could distribute to citizens (and we consider distribution because distributive justice is considered by both Cohen and Arneson to be fundamental in achieving equality and being proper egalitarian) such that they could secure their counterparts' moral considerations. What could I trade you such that you morally value me as a co-participant in the social scheme? But let's say for the sake of argument there really is some good the state could provide me to secure other citizens' appropriate moral consideration. We would be left with another worry—any attempt to do so would threaten to reduce an issue that seems importantly to do with persons' ethical commitments into something resembling a market transaction, and this seems distinctly contrary to the liberal preoccupation with the Kantian injunction to treat persons as ends in themselves.

Turning to the complaint from democratic disaffection, matters become more problematic. If we continue to follow the opportunity/access view, we are pressed to ask, what would giving someone an opportunity to achieve welfare entail—itself predicated in this instance as a sense of being able to trust one's counterparts? Just as above, this seems to introduce the perverse conclusion that it would be up to the sufferer to get others to act such that the sufferer could form that trust. But this begs the question, what is reasonable about me doing your work for you in overcoming an inappropriate ethical stance that offends against my well-being in the first instance? (Here, we see again the shortcomings of liberal theory's institutional focus—above, neither Arneson nor Cohen are attentive to questions of relations among citizens with respect to welfare.)

Arneson or Cohen may yet say that they would not suggest that it is either appropriate or possible for me to work on behalf of someone else, but this seems to leave the maybe more troubling possibility that the state would provide the sufferer an opportunity to achieve her welfare by coming to terms, within herself, with the experience of racial inequality. That is to say, it would be up to the sufferer to either (1) provide rationalizations for her counterparts' bad behavior (forgive them for they know not what they do . . . though they benefit from what they do), or (2) turn the other cheek. But surely it ought to be repugnant to an egalitarian to place sufferers in a position to overcome shortcomings not only located outside of their natural

abilities, or due to bad brute luck despite making prudent choices, but also an ethical state of affairs the causes of which are not *mere chance*, but rather historical, characterological, and sociological, with all of these undergirded by the vicissitudes of the political. Put more sharply, as it currently stands, the view threatens to impose upon blacks the work of overcoming or correcting for the absence of a democratic virtue within their white counterparts that is a function of bad social and political habits, as well as within institutions that is a function of a long history of institutional development mostly under an explicit regime of white domination. The egalitarian concern to be attentive to involuntary, nonculpable disadvantage seems to be railroaded by a view of equality wherein persons are simply given a path to achieving welfare—a path for which they are responsible for articulating and walking, leaving those who have laid a poor road untouched and unaffected. This suggests that being concerned with unchosen circumstances is at least one appropriate consideration, but a more politically astute egalitarianism would be sufficiently flexible to accommodate instances of socially produced (thus involuntary) disadvantage.

This leave us with Elizabeth Anderson's democratic equality, a view that comes importantly closer to offering resources for responding to Baldwin. One reason this view is closer than the others is because Anderson herself takes exception with the quality of egalitarian concern on display in the work of Dworkin, Arneson, and Cohen among others. Her criticisms are forceful and manifold, but they can be succinctly represented by the notion that these theorists have made egalitarianism morally trifling, if not unstable, by focusing on concerns like envy-free material distribution and compensating people for tastes and pursuits for which they ultimately are not fully responsible. As she says, "Consider those whom recent egalitarians have singled for special attention: beach bums, the lazy and irresponsible, people who can't manage to entertain themselves with simple pleasures, religious fanatics."<sup>23</sup> Further, these "agendas . . . are too narrowly focused on the distribution of divisible, privately appropriated goods . . . or privately enjoyed goods."<sup>24</sup> Who or what, then, should inform the substance of egalitarian inquiry? The criticized approaches "neglect the much broader agenda of actual egalitarian movements" such as gays' and lesbians' freedom to live their lives publicly without shame or the disabled's ability to move about society without free from stereotypes portraying them as somehow inferior.<sup>25</sup>

Considering for the moment just Anderson's critical concerns, we immediately see the possibility for an alliance, for at the center of my above

analyses lies the argument that Dworkin et al. have neglected to map and respond to the contours of the experience of social and political inequality in their accounts of egalitarianism. Their conceptions of equality are centered on equalisanda that from the point of view of marginalization might be instrumental to living good lives, but are not sufficiently morally substantive in their own right with respect to marginalization. Further, their egalitarianism is also politically inept, since, among the missteps, the marginalized bear the responsibility for making their way in a world that does not value them in the first instance. All this resonates with Anderson's own complaint, and thus suggests that any view she puts forth, if consistent with the nature of her complaint, would be a worthy contender in taking on the substance of Baldwin's complaints. So we ask, what is Anderson's own positive response to the problem she sets forth, and does it express the consistency necessary to respond to extant political concerns as expressed by marginalized political subjects?

To begin, Anderson terms her view democratic equality. The ambition for her view is that it "conceives of equality as a relationship among people rather than merely as a pattern in the distribution of divisible goods."<sup>26</sup> Further, "It lets us see how injustices may be better remedied by changing social norms and the structure of public goods than by redistributing resources."<sup>27</sup> Thus, Anderson aims to put forth a view of justice that assesses the right and the good with respect to whether the regnant social norms allow persons to stand in a relationship of equality appropriate for effective democratic citizenship. I want to suggest right away that for Anderson's democratic equality to sufficiently address Baldwin's complaints, her view must in fact address issues of social value as I've articulated them; and here my standards are more demanding. Whereas with the above conceptions of equality and egalitarianism I was willing to offer a pass if it seemed those views at least had the resources, Anderson's complaints as well her positive aims suggest that she herself wants to meet exactly that kind of standard.

Effective citizenship plays an important role for Anderson because it is the basis for our ability to have voice in the political practices to which we are subject. But it is also important because it implies shared responsibility for creating what she refers to as the "*social conditions for [everyone's] freedom*."<sup>28</sup> So, for example, her view of equality means to preempt creating subclasses of persons or outcasts "because most of the things people want to do require participation in social activities, and hence communication and interaction with others."<sup>29</sup> On Anderson's account the engine

for the relational quality of freedom necessary for democratic equality is a capabilities approach. Following Amartya Sen, who articulated the capabilities view<sup>30</sup> in a series of Tanner Lectures, she says, “A person’s *capabilities* consist of the set of functionings she can achieve, given the personal, material, and social materials available to her. . . . [They] measure . . . a person’s freedom to achieve valued functionings.”<sup>31</sup> So democratic equality presents a vision of equality wherein people are enabled to not merely have goods or have their preferences met, but are enabled to form, articulate, and be part author of their society’s political will.

Anderson recognizes that there are a lot of things people can be and might want to be capable of, but not all of these are urgent, at least not from the point of view of democratic equality. So, which capabilities are important? It is helpful for our engagement with Baldwin that Anderson herself depends upon the example of the Civil Rights Movement. One of the important achievements of the movement was to vindicate an understanding of citizenship that includes the right to participate as an equal in civil society as well as in government affairs. A group that is segregated within the institutions of civil society, or subject to discrimination on the basis of ascribed social identities by institutions in civil society has been relegated to second-class citizenship, even if its members enjoy all of its political rights.<sup>32</sup>

The above suggests that the capabilities relevant for democratic equality depend upon ideas like freedom of movement among all segments of society, freedom of expression, freedom to form part of the political will, and freedom from arbitrary but substantive socially determined biases. Is this a fair characterization? Anderson writes, “To be capable of functioning as a citizen requires rights to political participation, such as freedom of speech. . . . This entails freedom of association, access to public spaces such as roads, parks, and public accommodations. . . . This also entails the social conditions of being accepted by others, such as the ability to appear in public without shame, and not being ascribed an outcast status.”<sup>33</sup>

Given that my characterization is fair, we face some problems that indicate an inconsistency internal to Anderson’s aims and concerns vis-à-vis Dworkin et al. At base Anderson is concerned to respond to oppression and marginalization, but it seems clear she has a particular conception of how oppression and marginalization may be practiced—as explicit regimes of exclusion and suppression. I want to say that there are cases where that concern is right, such as in openly despotic regimes as well as in America

during Jim Crow, for example. But now we recall that Baldwin offers the complaints of democratic distance and disaffection in 1965, during the very years where the Civil Rights Movement brought to pass exactly what Anderson's capabilities approach demands. That is to say, Baldwin is concerned about how he is considered, about how his fellow citizens comport themselves to his blackness at the very basic level of human interaction alongside the institutional fact that these rights are now within his reach.

Anderson or a defender is likely to say that the conceptual action relevant for Baldwin's complaints takes place in the final sentence of the passage cited just above, wherein the capabilities approach applies to social acceptance and the preemption of casting persons out of society. I think that is right, but it is a disappointing feature of Anderson's work, the spirit of which is genuinely sympathetic to the concerns I have laid out via Baldwin, that she neglects to articulate the criteria for what would count as providing capabilities *in those regards*—and that, indeed, *is* where the action is. It is hard to know how Anderson could respond to this, for whenever she herself presses forward with examples of the capabilities necessary for standing as a democratic equal, they ultimately are presented as discrete rights or resources, such as the right to vote<sup>34</sup> or literacy.<sup>35</sup> So far as I can tell whenever Anderson means to refer to something like a norm or public ethic, she presents what amount to blanket negative injunctions, that is, to not discriminate or to not arbitrarily ascribe identities to persons or groups. My view is not that these negative injunctions are trivial; rather, they are insufficiently specified so as to properly steer moral and practical reasoning. If you doubt that claim, simply observe our strong public norm against racism, and the persistence of, among many examples, job discrimination.

There is a second concern that can be appreciated by observing a certain looseness in language that betrays Anderson's cause. While Anderson rightly calls into question the primacy of divisible goods as the basis for justice in liberal theory, she in fact does not express skepticism about another pillar of contemporary liberalism: that justice requires focusing squarely on the sufferer or disadvantaged as the agent either (1) to whom goods are given, or (2) who will be enabled by goods. But this is odd. Following Baldwin's own complaints regarding the texture of American democracy, the important question is not only (and, given the disparity in power, maybe not even primarily) how we could make the young black girl capable of being an effective citizen. Rather, her effective citizenship is in significant part preempted by the various practices of those with social and political power who themselves inconsistently recognize and act upon appropriate

moral and civic virtues. The question we really want to be asking is how do we make *those* people capable of accepting blacks rather than treating them as marginal persons? Democratic equality is certainly the right kind of idea, but her egalitarianism is hamstrung by being committed to a view that seems resistant to arguing for the inculcation of the appropriate civic virtues *within* and *among* citizens who benefit from others' marginalization. Anderson's political approach is right to begin with the subject of the complaints of social movements, but she does not go far enough to factor the causal narratives suggested by the social nature of the substance of those complaints.

Though it seems above as if the main tension that attends reflecting on racial egalitarianism is between distributive justice and political ethics, this isn't the pertinent dividing line. That tension is a manifestation of a different philosophical disparity that, as Samuel Scheffler points out, most egalitarians seemed to have lost sight of—the difference between equality as a moral ideal and as a political ideal. He writes: "An egalitarianism that begins from the question of how best to administer or operationalize an abstract principle of equal concern contrasts sharply with [one] that begins from the question of what relationships among equals are like and goes on from there to consider what kinds of social and political institutions are appropriate to a society of equals."<sup>36</sup> As I've indicated, I believe Anderson's preoccupation with a person's standing among others in the face of oppression puts her on the right side of the substantive divide. But it is crucial that the modes of implication that are essential to Baldwin seem to really have no place in a theory wherein the disadvantaged are positioned as recipients while leaving the beneficiaries of injustice un-redeemed, untouched by critical ethical reflection (outside whatever reflection may be incidental to giving up the relevant goods in question).<sup>37</sup>

I want to say, then, that so far as we think Anderson is certainly preoccupied with the right kinds of moral-political questions, and so far as we might and should concede that her view is a significant improvement over Dworkin et al. with respect to its preoccupations over marginalization, our viewpoint needs to shift more decisively. What do I mean here? When I above noted that the Mississippi sheriff also needs to be made capable alongside the black girl (albeit, in different ways), my argument was fueled by the consideration that whatever excellences she might possess, she will have to move in the world facing the sheriff and a dozen other power holders and institutions that will remind her of her diminished social and political standing. To my mind, to respond to her complaint is not to ask

what I could provide her. Indeed the question must be more capacious. It must refer to a standpoint that bears witness to injustice, and it must consider a generally self-referential standpoint as a subject of injustice. The viewpoint of equality that must be taken up is one from a human point of view.

### 3. Equality and Imagination—The Human Point of View

I have been pressing the case that a conception of equality must be responsive to Baldwin's complaints of democratic distance and disaffection. Why? Baldwin considered the reaches of material compensation in his locution "for nothing," and powerfully illustrated that any interpretation of that locution with strict reference to material matters would leave untouched the fact that blacks share a political space with whites but can with warrant claim to feel beyond their reach with respect to basic consideration and concern. Further, this reasonably underwrites a sense of alienation and distrust that puts significant pressure on being able to collectively pursue the democratic project. I have also proposed that an appropriately specified egalitarian theory would be a good first step in at least specifying how to address Baldwin, so long as it was sufficiently politically informed and motivated so as to bridge a conception of equality with its practice. Recognizing that there have been important statements of equality and egalitarianism I moved to consider their efficacy by way of testing their political readiness, which is to say, I wanted to assess whether they offered a conception of equality and a theory of egalitarianism that could meet Baldwin's complaints straightaway. I showed that none of them could.

This leaves us with the task of specifying a conception of equality appropriate for Baldwin's concerns and then a proper theory of egalitarianism—that is, identifying a view of equality as a moral ideal to support critical political and social inquiry. The remainder of this paper offers that conception of equality but must pass on articulating a theory of egalitarianism. The required theory of egalitarianism requires a separate space.

Bernard Williams notes what seems to be a fundamental problem with the idea of equality. If one takes the statement "all people are equal" to purport an empirical fact about people, then it is surely false. People hold

widely divergent skill sets both in kind and in degree. If one takes that statement to suggest a normative principle, it looks like all we mean to say is that all people are equal qua being persons, and this seems grossly underspecified, thus uninteresting. What would it mean to structure normative demands on a principle the grounds of which appear merely tautological? On my reading of Williams's work there are three steps involved.

It will be useful to begin by quoting Williams at some length:

That all men are humans is, if a tautology, a useful one, serving as a reminder that those who belong anatomically to the species *homo sapiens*, and can speak a language, use tools . . . are also alike in certain other respects more likely to be forgotten. These respects are notably the capacity to feel [physical and emotional] pain . . . ; and the capacity to feel affection for others, and the consequences of this, connected with the frustration of this affection, loss of its object, etc. The assertion that men are alike in possession of these characteristics is . . . not trivial. For it is certain that there are political and social arrangements that systematically neglect these characteristics in the case of some groups of men, while being fully aware of them in the case of others; that is to say, they treat certain men as though they did not possess these characteristics, and neglect moral claims that arise from these characteristics and which would be admitted to arise from them.<sup>38</sup>

A number of important claims populate this passage that strike me as true and essential for our project. Rather than presenting persons as possessors of goods, rational choosers, or utility maximizers, Williams reminds us of a broader, yet fundamental, set of human capacities that speak to how we experience the world. Importantly, the tautological claim that all men are humans is significant precisely because a common ground of human experience is established. What follows is the suggestion that we do and are entitled to make moral claims based on these particular human characteristics. Think how peculiar our lives would be if we were to deprive locutions such as "It hurts my feelings when you take me for granted, so please apologize," of their justificatory force. When we've been taken for granted, for example, we perceive the grounds for a good-making gesture to consist in the structure of both our position as socially situated persons but also as private persons with the capacity to be hurt. Similarly think how we tend to feel when the good-making gesture comes in the form of

a material gift that fails to convey that the offender “gets it”— has properly perceived the source of your own pain.

It is significant that Williams realizes that social and political arrangements do not merely, then, distribute goods unequally. Rather, a source of inequality is located within those arrangements that fail to recognize that people equally possess these capacities which importantly define how well one’s life may be going. How might we think of this? I want to hold off on further reflection of this point for a bit, but one thing should be clear: this kind of recognition made possible by Williams’s statement is an immediate match for Baldwin’s two complaints. When Baldwin says that blacks have done so much for American for nothing, he means to convey that *this* is the kind of inequality he takes to be fundamental for the purposes of racial equality—one that refers to a kind of human suffering. But for now, let it stand that the first step to a human point of view of equality is settled by the facts of common humanity with respect to the capacity for sentiment, affection, and the ability to feel physical, psychic, and emotional pain, and as Williams adds, a desire for self-respect.<sup>39</sup>

One might be uncomfortable settling for merely these features. It might be thought that someone’s merely feeling pain, for example, is thin grounds for moral claims in the political space because such considerations threaten to hold society hostage at the expense of a highly subjective state of being. We could respond to that claim by calling into question why ideas like resources should be considered more legitimate than ideas like socially imposed pain, but I prefer to take another route. Let us instead consider the sort of ideas that might make such a person comfortable. Maybe the objector suggests that claims derive their force from a person’s status as a moral equal, and we might know something has gone wrong if that person is unable to form, pursue, or perceive support for her plan of life. I think this is a reasonable response. And I also think it is one made richer by Williams’s suggestion, rather than more problematic.

Consider, then, step two: Williams’s distinctions in how one can perceive of another’s life project. Imagine you endeavor to achieve something fundamental to the good of your life; let us say you wish to begin your own grassroots-focused nonprofit to assist small businesses. What would count as assessing its success or failure? One might, as Williams suggests, compile a catalog of empirical markers that define the goal in question—raising money, acquiring an office and employees, getting governmental clearance for the relevant activities—and then, insofar as you fail to achieve

these things, you fail, so one must “write you off.”<sup>40</sup> Why must this be so? Because taking this technological point of view, as Williams puts the phrase, introduces a distinction between what counts as success for that project and what counts as success *for you* in pursuing that project. One source of this claim can be understood by Williams’s concerns with Kantianism, a pillar of liberal theory. He complains that Kant’s transcendentalism comes with a significant cost: “The detachment of moral worth from all contingencies is achieved only by making man’s characteristic as a moral agent a transcendental characteristic; man’s capacity to will freely as a rational agent is not dependent on any empirical capacities he may have,” and this is important for we began by noting that the essential consideration of equality was exactly the empirical capacities that derive from common humanity.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the reason why the technological point of view of one’s life plan is deficient might be summed up as follows: “Accordingly, the respect owed equally to each man as a member of the Kingdom of Ends is not owed to him in respect of any empirical characteristics that he may possess, but solely in respect of the transcendental characteristic of being a free and rational will.”<sup>42</sup> The technological point of view (Kantian in nature) is not fully attractive because it ignores the (only) empirical features that seem to ground a view of equality that can be rescued as morally interesting rather than merely tautologically motivated. Left to its own devices, the technological point of view is likely to respond to failed projects rather than failed persons, but it is precisely the empirical features of personhood that ground moral claims pertaining to equality. Thus, from the technological point of view, “the fact that he devoted himself to this useless task with constant effort and so on, is merely irrelevant.”<sup>43</sup>

Things work out differently though, if one takes a human point of view. Williams’s own stance is that the technological point of view treats persons under a title, while the human point of view regards the person *as a person* with that title. Now it will seem very mysterious how one goes about taking on the human point of view. Our initial intuition might be to think doing so merely means trying to take on *that* person’s point of view. Williams, however, thinks this would be insufficient. One reason to think this is to consider, as he does, the case of persons under severe exploitation—“For it is precisely a mark of extreme exploitation . . . that those who suffer it *do not* see themselves differently from the way they are seen by their exploiters.”<sup>44</sup> Williams goes on to consider that this suggests political equality might have something to do with creating fair conditions for persons to develop an appropriate consciousness. Of course, I think this is right, but

I want to press harder on what a human point of view does for us because, as I have suggested in engaging Anderson, we have to think closely about what it would mean for the non-disadvantaged to be effective participants in such an endeavor if we did ultimately think this was what was required by social and political equality. Let's turn, then, to the third and final step in articulating a human point of view of equality.

Williams says that we must take seriously what it means for a person to act or pursue a plan under a title rather than assess the performance by way of the title. But he also says this can't be represented merely in the effort to take that person's point of view, because that point of view might or might not reflect an appropriate understanding of social inequality. I want to say, before we move further, that I do not think this is the case with racial inequality, as Baldwin and many blacks have a quite adequate understanding of the problem of racial inequality. Nevertheless, I find something valuable in Williams rejecting the proposition that merely taking someone else's point of view is insufficient. In his concern about exploitation, Williams seems to suggest that it is important that the person who does not suffer exploitation retains a subjective perspective that might be important in responding to the plight of another. What is important here is that a person who takes a human point of view while retaining a certain subjective perspective occupies two important places in considerations for equality: the place of the person treated unequally and the place of someone who is not, but can be moved to feel concerned. And we have taken some pains to acknowledge that those who are better positioned require some motivational mechanisms by way of treating the disadvantaged in the ways equality might demand. My proposition then is that what is important here is an act of imagination, which is to say, a way of extending one's perceptual capacities on behalf of someone else while being one's own person.

In a series of separate reflections, Williams responds to a puzzle about the relationship between the material world, perception, and visualization introduced by the idealist George Berkeley. The particulars of the encounter need not delay us for they are not especially relevant. What is relevant is that Williams thinks there is something odd about a claim entailed by Berkeley's idealism: that one cannot visualize something that is unseen. Williams offers the counter-thesis that "we can in fact even visualise the unseen, because the fact that in visualisation I am as it were seeing is not itself necessarily an element of what is visualised."<sup>45</sup> What might this thesis have to do with a human point of view of equality? Recall that in taking up

such a point of view, we do not merely try to adopt that person's viewpoint. Rather we have to also retain our own perspective. To see how this might work, consider an excellent example provided by Williams on watching a performance of *Othello*:

We as spectators are not in the world of the play itself; we—in a sense—see what is happening in that world, but not in the same sense as that in which we see the actors, nor even as that in which the characters see one another or events in the play. For if I see Othello and Desdemona, then I see Othello strangle Desdemona, but that will not entail that I, as part of my biography, have ever seen anyone strangle anyone.<sup>46</sup>

Williams's example suggests something deeply important. For the scene to come off as a scene portraying an event such as a strangling, it is crucial that (1) no one needs to actually be strangled, and that (2) you the viewer can recognize the strangling without having ever been witness to strangling. If any of these conditions fail, the scene must fail for the very idea of the character coming to a tragic crossroads loses all drama. All we would visually perceive is someone with a costume placing his hands around the throat of some other person wearing a costume and that person pretending to expire. But equally important in this example is that we can understand the substance of the drama as outsiders to it, as nonparticipants in that drama.<sup>47</sup> It seems that our ability to "fill in the blanks" surrounding the falsehood of the strangling depends on us, though we are outsiders, to in some sense internalize not merely the narrative but its form (for example, if we do not accept the idea of a drama we might perceive the tragic act as actual attempted murder). But how does this work? Consider yet another example to move us closer to our conclusion.

What is involved in the following statement: "I imagined I was Napoleon"? Williams considers there to be a number of complications with this statement, primary among them the bare fact that in that statement a person who is the subject of the "I" claims some ability to take on another subjectivity. How can this be possible without completely letting go of the subjective I? After all, "one's sense of identity involves one's identifications,"<sup>48</sup> and one surely cannot identify with being the general who emerged defeated from the Battle of Waterloo, since it was only the real Napoleon who is appropriately positioned to claim that identification. It seems the main way this is possible is to adopt a point of view whereby you

take into deep consideration the facts of who Napoleon was and act as if those facts pertained to you, thus in some senses taking on the personage of Napoleon while not abandoning your self. Williams suggests first that what is really involved here is participation imagery wherein you see yourself as Napoleon doing the things Napoleon did. Second, and importantly, is narration: in seeing yourself as the participant you rehearse the relevant facts of Napoleon's life—the victories, losses, romances, political intrigues, etc.<sup>49</sup> This leads Williams to conclude that “although I can certainly imagine *being* Napoleon—or if I cannot, this is a limitation of mine—I still do not understand, and could not possibly understand, what it would be for me to *have been* Napoleon.”<sup>50</sup> And here we come to understand what imagination might have to do with a human point of view of equality, and we also now are able to articulate the troubling omission in Anderson's account.

First, Williams's distinction between the ability to imagine being Napoleon from having actually been Napoleon is crucial for it refers to the difference between internalizing the historical facts that comprise Napoleon's life from the obvious impossibility of having had first-personal experience of those facts, that is to say, the impossibility of having Napoleon's memories, thus having been Napoleon. It is a necessary condition that the facts be historical or predetermined in some way (as when actors play a fictional character in a play), for they provide the information necessary to adopt that viewpoint. But notice, this does not entail merely rational understanding of those facts. Indeed, adopting that viewpoint and being Napoleon can entail a creeping smile upon one's lips as one imagines and visualizes the decisive cannon shot fired across the battlefield followed by the charge of the cavalry. That is to say, one can also adopt the attendant affective states. It is however also significant that being Napoleon is a project undertaken by you; that is, you remain in possession of you just as you imagine being Napoleon—this will center the facts that fill in the imagining as well as make sure the benefit of undertaking this project can in the final sense be appreciated by you. Similarly, when we take a human point of view of equality, we try to take the standpoint of the failed grassroots organizer not merely from her viewpoint, as Williams cautions us against, but we take into deep consideration the facts of her project as she understood them, the facts of her efforts, the facts of her near victory and the facts of her ultimate failure—all of these will likely invite a range of internal experiences from hope, to joy, to despair, to indecisiveness about the future. Should the organizer now seek to make some claim of equality (i.e., the funding for inner-city organizations seems paltry compared to those funded in a

nearby suburb), the conversation from a human point of view will take into account not merely the quantitative fact that an imbalanced distribution of public funds is unfair but that it is a source of civic hurt and resentment, that it introduces into the citizen's deliberative capacities a sense of despair and causes her to question the nature of her co-participants' character as they seem to be hoarding resources without good reason.

I suspect that the call to turn toward bringing imaginative projects to bear on ethical comportment will meet resistance from some quarters for varying reasons. In particular, the critical race tradition is likely to harbor a marked degree of cynicism. That tradition has made racial ideology and the trouble it makes for social and moral cognition a point of concern. In this view, beneficiaries of white supremacy—a preferred term of some in the tradition—not only benefit from material or power inequalities but also begin to form a distorted picture of the world such that the very grounds of their advantaged standing falls from view, in a manner of speaking. And this has implications for how those beneficiaries reason about what they ought to do, for whom, and why. This has led Charles Mills, for example to extend certain themes from his seminal *The Racial Contract* in an effort to move past this concern. In “Alternative Epistemologies” he states that his is, in part, “not an investigation of the conditions under which individual memory is reliable but an investigation of the social conditions under which systematic historical amnesia about the achievements of African civilizations became possible.”<sup>51</sup> Mills thinks there is a way forward with an alternative epistemology that depends on differential group experience. However, his concern is that despite our common humanity “some areas of experience lie outside the normal trajectory through the world of hegemonic groups.”<sup>52</sup>

Mills does not go on to theorize how this problem can be overcome. One reason might have to do with the positing of ideology as the main problem. If ideology is the culprit, then empirical facts of inequality, for example, will have little effect on ethical reasoning precisely because those facts are processed through a cognitive-belief filter that itself distorts the content of those facts and what those facts should be taken to signify. But this is where I think imagination can be helpful. Though I can only make the case in a very basic way here, the reasoning I believe will hold—the role of imagination is to package facts about the world in ways that don't depend on a thick set of beliefs about those things. For example, one can believe that horses exist and yet imagine that if they grew wings they could fly as easily as birds. Less fancifully, Baldwin can either simply replay the

various offenses blacks have suffered for his Cambridge audience or he can depend on the basic notion that whites do believe that blacks have suffered various deprivations and abuses for hundreds of years and further get them to imagine him as having picked the cotton and lost children to murderous bigots. Similarly, Americans can either be presented with reams of statistics on blacks' material inequality, even capaciously understood, or, they can be prompted to engage the work of black novels, music, and film to imagine what it is like to live under the great weight of racial inequality.

When the little black girl is confronted by the sheriff in Baldwin's narrative, the first question to ask is not, what must we give her or provide her with respect to her social marginalization? The first-order question to begin making sense of what the right course of action is, what is it like to *be* her? What are the historical facts of a black person's life that one can imaginatively adopt so as to substantively appreciate the experience of marginalization? We should strongly suspect that that viewpoint would support my claim that social justice should take seriously not what we provide to the marginalized but instead stipulate what we expect from those who benefit from others' marginalization. Williams's account gets us far enough to appreciate and justify that injunction. As I too briefly suggested above, resources such as black film, music, and literature are prime candidates for pairing with a philosophy of equality that aims to take seriously a human point of view; how we theorize the use of such resources is part of a supplemental conversation. I shall hope that the argument of this paper can act as (just one) conceptual component in constructing a more full philosophical framework. The view I have argued for here—the human point of view—should on its own be compelling if for no other reason than it speaks directly to what you and I are: people trying to live good lives among others who desire to try to do the same, and that's where appropriate ethical thinking about equality ought to begin.

#### NOTES

1. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
2. Bernard Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice*, rev. ed. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992).
3. Tommie Shelby, "Justice, Deviance and the Dark Ghetto," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2007): 126–60.

4. Though, of course, Baldwin would certainly welcome these, but he would see these as incomplete if not vacuous without the character of Americans and their institutions being radically amended.
5. Lawrie Balfour "Reparations After Identity Politics," *Political Theory* 33 no. 6 (2005): 786–811; 802 (emphasis in original). Because Balfour is focused on reparations, she rightly points out that Baldwin is making a qualitative empirical claim, rather than a quantitative one. But there is a related third claim Baldwin is pressing and which is my focus: the American Negro has done the nation a service without proper acknowledgment of the meaning of the ongoing sacrifice that arises from being perpetually marginalized, thus imposing an existential and experiential problem. For Baldwin, blacks' contributions stand in the face of continuing oppression, disrespect, marginalization, and devaluation.
6. A key concept here seems to be that of implication—trying to alert others to their responsibility, direct or indirect, for racial inequality. Further, Baldwin seems to have often conceived of himself as a useful stand-in for the historical and persistent plight of blacks when addressing whites. The following was stated to a group of white acquaintances at a dinner party by Baldwin: "I toted your barge, baby, I picked your cotton, I nursed your babies, you killed my children, where were you the day Martin was shot?" David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1994), 48.
7. Chris Rock, *Bigger and Blacker* (HBO Home Video, DVD), 1999. The importance of turning to someone like Rock and to his comedy as a source material is to capture the morally relevant expressive nature embodied in modes of performance such as the one in which Baldwin and Rock are involved. Each has an opportunity to offer an explicit argument, but both instead choose to rely upon representing themselves (to their audiences) in a situation where material and existential security are not very tightly related. Additionally, both invite their audiences to think about the trouble racial devaluation makes for social equality.
8. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
9. Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1 (emphasis mine).
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 65.
12. *Ibid.*, 67.
13. *Ibid.*, 75.
14. *Ibid.*, 66.
15. See my discussion of this point regarding Rawls in *The Color of Our Shame: Race and Justice in Our Time* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2013).
16. As a procedural note, Arneson promotes a view he terms opportunity for welfare while Cohen terms his view opportunity for advantage. There are some important distinctions between the two views, but they are mostly irrelevant for our purposes.
17. Richard Arneson, "Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare," *Philosophical Studies* 56, no. 1 (1989): 77–93; 82.
18. *Ibid.*, 83.

19. Ibid., 85–86.
20. G. A. Cohen, “On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice,” *Ethics* 99, no. 4 (1989): 906–44; 916.
21. Ibid., 917–19.
22. Ibid., 916.
23. Elizabeth S. Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?” *Ethics* 109 no. 2 (1999): 287–337; 288.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 336.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 314 (emphasis in original).
29. Ibid.
30. See Amartya Sen, “Equality of What?” Tanner Lectures, <http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/sen80.pdf>.
31. Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?,” 316.
32. Ibid., 317.
33. Ibid., 318.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 319.
36. Samuel Scheffler, “What Is Egalitarianism?” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 31, no. 1 (2003): 5–39; 37.
37. Some might respond in support of Anderson that her most recent work on integration seeks to make good on the arguments presented in the essay I cite here. I, of course, think that is right and that the issue of integration is worth thinking about since segregation is indeed a barrier for a relational theory of democratic equality. Anderson herself thinks democratic culture consists in the following consideration: “Citizens can adjust their sense of the common purpose to others’ interest only through discussion and operative engagement with other citizens from all walks of life on terms of equal regard.” *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 94. This is an unobjectionable position, in my view, but notice how much is required—a deliberative stance steeped in diversity wherein persons have equal regard for others. This last condition is demanding insofar as this is what I argue equality itself consists in—being able to accept the humanity of those around you. It seems an open question whether integration achieves what we are after precisely because it depends on modes of practical reasoning that have shown themselves resistant to racial egalitarianism. Put another way, integration seems to carry with it the kind of liberal logic I have above expressed concern over. I do, however, acknowledge that integration could play an important role insofar as iterative exposure to the lives of others can help us better understand what it is like to be someone who is less advantaged, discriminated against, etc.
38. Bernard Williams, “The Idea of Equality,” in *Problems of the Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 232.

39. Ibid., 233.
40. Ibid., 236.
41. Ibid., 235.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 236.
44. Ibid., 237.
45. Bernard Williams, "Imagination and the Self," in *Problems of the Self*, 35.
46. Ibid., 36.
47. One concern here might be that imagination plays the role of putting someone in a position to resolve their relationship to racial inequality. On this view, one uses one's imagination to come to understand the plight of inequality only in the end to be able to wash their hands of being implicated in racial inequality, and the dimension of freeing oneself from implication would ostensibly have to do with emancipating one's own affective discomforts from confronting tragic aspects of racial inequality. This in effect would re-introduce a certain relationship among persons typical to liberal theory wherein it often seems persons pursue lives in parallel to others rather than alongside others. That is not my aim in calling for the use of imagination. Indeed, I want to hold open the possibility for the opposite result—that imaginatively engaging racial inequality can leave one's affective and ethical composure disturbed, distressed, undone, etc. This is not to say that the problem of suffering should be redistributed, but rather that its effects should be widely appreciated and acknowledged in a substantive sense.
48. Ibid., 41.
49. Ibid., 43.
50. Ibid., 45 (emphasis mine).
51. Charles W. Mills, "Alternative Epistemologies," in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 21–40; 23.
52. Ibid., 28.