1

Introduction: Equality as a Multifaceted Concept

François Levrau and Noel Clycq

1.1 Introduction

At least since the Enlightenment the idea(l) of equality had a deep influence on the Western world. Despite individual differences, at a deeper level, it was thought that all people are morally equal and therefore should be treated as equals and thus with equal respect and concern. While a political and moral consensus on the importance of this idea(l) gradually emerged, explaining what it conceptually, discursively, and politically entails has turned out to be very difficult. In the nine chapters of this book, it will become clear that equality, despite its function as a leading (moral and political) ideal, remains what Gaillie (1956) coined an ‘essentially contested concept’, both in terms of theory and practice.
In this introductory chapter we outline some of the main issues in the study of equality, many of which will be picked up in more detail by the contributing authors of this book. We start with the Enlightenment as this was the period where ‘equality’ was forcefully put on the political and philosophical (albeit mostly European and North-American) agenda. While the ideal was put forward, history shows that in many cases the equal treatment of all people was still often distorted. In the next two sections, we deal with contemporary challenges on the socioeconomic and sociocultural level. After characterizing these ‘two faces of inequality’ we explain why and when inequality is a moral wrong and which types of policies can be implemented to make societies more egalitarian. We then consider the question why some forms of equality are so persistent and why skeptic voices remain. In the last section, the nine chapters of the book are presented.

1.2 Moral Equality: An Enlightened and Spiritual Ideal

The ‘enlightened’ eighteenth century was a remarkable period as it was the century wherein European and North American philosophy reached a highpoint. Philosophers in France (e.g. D’Alembert, Diderot, Montesquieu, Voltaire), but also in Scotland (e.g. Hutcheson, Hume, Reid, Smith), Germany (e.g. Kant, Lessing, Mendelssohn) and America (e.g. Franklin, Jefferson, Paine)—to mention just some countries and famous intellectuals—were convinced that one should rely on ‘reason’ to shape societies’ economy, politics, education, and culture. ‘Reason’ provided an instrument that would solve all problems. Moreover, as all people were thought to be gifted with reason, they were, from a moral point of view, considered to be each other’s equals. A just government, therefore, needs to treat all people with equal respect and concern. While this reasoning seems straightforward, we discuss below the many tensions that came with it. Moreover, this ‘Age of Reason’ did not appear ex nihilo. The bold statements that the use of ‘reason’ and the idea of ‘moral equality’ would improve human society and the living conditions of all people originated in the successes that came along with the scientific
revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The belief in reason-
able and scientific progress also matched with ideas of earlier thinkers
such as Bayle, Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, Locke, Spinoza, and human-
ists like Erasmus and Moore. Several movements, ideas, and inventions
thus paved the way for the Enlightenment as an intellectual culmination.
The development of the preponderance of the notion of reason was often
argued to be one of the main triggers for the emancipation of individuals
from religious dogmas, but it has recently been argued that we have to
go beyond the antithesis between ‘religion’ and ‘Enlightenment’ because
the Enlightenment is in many respects indebted to religious sources and
beliefs (see Gillespie, 2008; Sorkin, 2008, but see also the chapter of De
Munck in this book).

A famous dictum that is often associated with the Enlightenment is
‘Liberty, equality and solidarity’. This dictum reflected the philosophical
and political ideals that have helped people to end the traditionally and
hierarchically structured Ancien Régime, known for the privileges and
power of the nobility and clergy executed at the expense of the common
people. However, while the French revolutionaries aimed to replace this
regime with a reason-based system, their ‘Revolution’ ended in terror
(Robespierre). For historians, the terror that came along with the French
Revolution implied the end of the Enlightenment as a relatively distinct
period in time. Yet, although the Enlightenment, as a period, ended in
rather bloody way, philosophers and politicians today can still think of
themselves as ‘enlightened intellectuals’ to the extent that they embrace
some elements of the so-called ‘revolutionary ideals’. In that sense, the
Enlightenment could be seen as an intellectual movement the end of
which has not been reached (and maybe will never be reached). Bristow
(2017) puts it thus: ‘For Enlightenment thinkers themselves, however, the
Enlightenment is not an historical period, but a process of social, psycho-
logical or spiritual development, unbound to time or place’. Indeed, in a
matter of speaking, the ideals of ‘freedom, equality and solidarity’ serve
as a perpetuum mobile. After all, as the idea of ‘moral equality’ is spread
around the geographical and temporal spectrum we can see that more
and more people indeed want to be treated as equals. In a quote that
seems also appropriate for current times characterized by socioeconomic
inequality (see below), Tocqueville (2002, p. 6) puts it likes this: ‘Is it
credible that the democracy which has annihilated the feudal system and vanquished kings will respect the citizen and the capitalist? Once people have come into contact with the ideal of equality, sooner or later they will revolt when they are not treated as equals. This means that equality reflects a strong moral intuition.

Notwithstanding the complexity with which one is faced when starting to elaborate on the Enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality, and solidarity—particularly what it means to put them into practice—the essence of these ideals remains crystal clear. People, it was argued, should be stimulated to become more self-directed both in thought and action, as this awakening of the intellectual and autonomous powers is key to a more fulfilling human life. People should thereby become free to live according to their own chosen conception of the good life and be able to reject or release the chains that bind them (liberty). Kant (1970, p. 54) stated in still one of the most cited philosophical passages that ‘Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: Sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own understanding!’ Therefore, what ultimately emerged from the eighteenth century, was a rather ‘spiritual image’ of the human being. People can vary from a physical point of view, but not from a spiritual point of view, considering they are each gifted with reason and thus with a capacity for autonomous thinking. No matter how different people are in terms of body, capacities, age, gender, etc., at the most fundamental level they are all the same and are therefore each other’s moral equals (equality). This perspective highlights the humanity within each individual being—and thus the equal moral value—and it is this humanity that is protected by means of all types of ‘equality politics’. Solidarity, then, refers to the involvement of individuals with other individuals: people should take care of each other because they are connected and are all part of one ‘spiritual species’.

As we have seen, views on politics, philosophy and science in the Western world reached their peak during the Enlightenment. The idea of
the moral equality of all men, along with freedom and solidarity, gradually led to established principles such as (1) the democratic governance where all people must have an equal say in matters that affect all; (2) the rule of law that equally protects people against the power of the state by ensuring that the government is bound by its own laws; (3) the welfare state with social rights that ensure that all people have equal and sufficient opportunities to make use of their liberties; and (4) the democratic (and assumed meritocratic) institutions such as the educational system and the labour market that ensure upward social mobility for all categories of individuals. The idea of human equality was also taken up formally in all kinds of declarations, charters, and modern constitutions, notably the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789), the American Declaration of Independence (1776), the US Constitution (1787), and later also in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (2000), and was followed in international organizations such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organization of American States, and the African Union. As the idea of human equality spread throughout the Western European and Anglo-American world, it has also generated a series of political and emancipatory movements designed to contest the lingering presence or enduring effects of older ethnic and racial hierarchies (i.e. decolonization, African–American civil right movement, multiculturalism) (Kymlicka, 2007). Moreover, it also inspired movements to contest all types of hierarchies, such as gender, disability and sexual orientation.

1.3 Why Enlightened Politics Were/Are Not Always so Enlightened

However, if history makes one thing clear, it is that we cannot speak of an obvious linear and straightforward trajectory towards more equality for all; neither in the (recent) past, nor in current times. Despite the positive depiction made by Pinker (2018) and Rosling (2018), ‘equality’ has been (and probably will always be) a precarious ideal, the survival of which cannot simply be assumed. More often than not, the ideal and its
realization has been impeded by all sorts of countermovements, ideals, or convictions (see also the chapter of De Munck in this book).

A first example of how linear progress is hampered is ‘race science’. Rather than that the so-called rationalization and scientification of European states led to more (universal) equality, in the nineteenth and twentieth century a whole ‘race science’ was developed precisely to rationally prove that the white European race was superior and to legitimize the subordination of other races. This ultimately gave rise to specific convictions (i.e. social darwinism) and policies (i.e. eugenics, separatism, racism, and fascism) (Bashford & Levine, 2010).

A second example relates to revolutionary France as it became clear that equality was ‘bounded’ to specific groups in society. The Enlightenment ideals of ‘Fraternité, Liberté & Fraternité’ were, for example, not meant to be applied to the ‘natives’ in France’s colonies. The political and legal equality that was enforced by the French Revolution also left intact the socioeconomic inequality and therefore the associated political and social lack of freedom. On the basis of the right of election, there was a distinction between ‘les citoyens actifs’ and ‘les citoyens passifs’, which means that the constitution excluded some three million of the total of seven million men (women were excluded from the beginning) above twenty-five from all electoral transactions. Moreover, the political and legally validated economic freedom of the bourgeoisie led to huge socioeconomic inequalities with the lower classes (Tocqueville, 2002). So, while ‘equality for all’ was at least officially proclaimed by many leading thinkers during the Enlightenment, what history illustrates is that despite people being eager to protect the so-called universal ideal of human equality, they usually defended that idea within the realm of specific (e.g. national) contexts and/or communities, and most often only for specific categories of citizens within these contexts. Entitlement to civic rights, for example, was (and still is) restricted (in every nation state of the Global North), and from the very start this created processes of civic stratification (Morris, 2009). To put it like this: the universal moral equality was rapidly translated into concrete policies to protect specific rights of specific people, in casu government’s own citizens. This is already visible in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, a document influenced by the idea of a universal human nature, and
drawn up by the French National Constituent Assembly in 1789. That Declaration became the basis for a nation of free French citizens, which became equally protected by the French law. Drafted on the foundational idea of the ‘universal’ human nature and adjoined rights, it led to a declaration of civil rights (but not necessarily their full implementation) for (all) French citizens in a specific French national context. The protection of universal rights thus rapidly became a protection for the equal rights of particular citizens.

Let us take the elaboration of the last point as our third example. Throughout history clear signs of processes of civic stratification that revolve around the question of who is entitled to citizenship or to acquire citizenship—and thus to equal treatment as equal citizens before the law and the state—were always present (Morris, 2012). These examples emphasize the importance of studying the ‘real life’ limitations that are placed upon conceptualizations of the ‘ideal’ of human equality. From early on these tensions were present in discussions about race, nationality, and citizenship, and they are still at the heart of the tensions emerging in ongoing discussions on migration and the inflow of refugees (Bhambra, 2015; Morris, 2011). Moreover, as several new studies have shown, the idea of an equal and cosmopolitan European ideal is fundamentally flawed. Not only, as is shown above, does this ideal go hand in hand with the emergence of some of the most severe and exclusionary scientific studies and policy actions, it also steered supranational European politics in the postwar period. Hansen and Jonsson (2017), for example, showed that the political discourses and practices of the founding fathers of European Unity (the current European Union) were rife with references to the superiority of European civilization and contained fundamental contradictions in their reasoning and ambitions with respect to equality. The EURAFRICA project is a particularly illuminating example. After WW II the emerging ‘European Community’ in the 1950s and 1960s was mainly focused on the inclusion of the African countries (and its resources and peoples) colonized by individual European countries such as France and Belgium into the collective European Unification project to the benefit of all European states included in this unity. Or, to put it in the words of Jean Monnet himself: France could give Africa as a
dowry to Europe (Hansen & Jonsson, 2011). This was felt to be necessary to share the ‘benefits’ of the colonies across European countries to strengthen them all together, instead of strengthening individual European states. So, in the early postwar decades, one can speak of a collective colonialism (of united European states) rather than of an individual colonialism of individual states. The ideal of universal equality was clearly not part of the practices of the ‘European unification project’. Thus even in such comprehensive and cosmopolitan political and economic projects to prevent war in Europe and to encourage intra-European cooperation on a supranational level, the ideal of ‘equality’ was mainly focused on achieving ‘equality’ for ‘in-group members’ rather than for ‘out-group members’.

A fourth example is that Enlightenment was not only been held responsible for the reign of terror during the French Revolution, in later times it was also accused for being the breeding ground for fascism, communism, mismanagement in psychiatry, economic exploitation, sexism, extinction species, reckless utopian projects, environmental pollution, and much more (Garrard, 2006; Gottlieb, 2016). While some will argue that this has nothing to do with the Enlightenment ideals, the point is that there are several possible readings of the Enlightenment.

The mentioned historical examples show that ‘equality’ was certainly part of the political and public narratives in European societies, but they also illustrate the limitations of the narrative of equality. It sounds well in theory, but in reality, it was hard to find a society where all people were indeed treated ‘as equals’ or that really brought the idea of ‘moral equality’ into practice. Also in current times the ideal of equality is challenged. While some claim that there is a more or less (though fragile) linear progress towards more equality (Pinker, 2018), others point strongly at the tenacity of specific inequalities, even to the extent that certain inequalities—e.g. in the socioeconomic domain as shown by Piketty (2014)—are increasing, thus empirically denouncing the linear progress approach. Also in the field of sociocultural equality, it would be foolish to claim that there is only a steady progress to be observed, as not all people nowadays enjoy a full and equal amount of respect and ‘new’ groups may encounter stigmatization (e.g. LGBTQ). In the following two sections we focus on the ‘two faces of inequality’: socioeconomic and
sociocultural face. What are some of the equality challenges for modern societies?

1.4 Current Challenges on the Socioeconomic Level

While the recent work of Atkinson (2015), Piketty (2014), Piketty, Chancel, Alvaredo, Saez, and Zuckman (2018), and Stiglitz (2012) has put the debate on socioeconomic inequality from a macro-level perspective back on the agenda and while former President of the United States of America, Barak Obama, described rising income inequality even as the ‘defining challenge of our time’ (Newell, 2013), there is no general trend to higher inequality when one takes a look at inequality across the globe. In some countries inequality has risen, while in other countries it has fallen. Based on estimates from two databases (PovcalNet which is run by the World Bank and the Chartbook of Economic Inequality), Hasell (2018) comes to the conclusion that there are clear regional patterns. Almost all Latin American and Caribbean countries show very high levels of inequality, but considerable declines from 1990 to 2015. Conversely, advanced industrial economies show lower levels of inequality, but it increases in most, though not all, instances. There were, for example, rises in inequality in some of the world most populous countries, including China, India, the United States, and Indonesia (together accounting for around about 45% of the world population). A number of Eastern European countries experienced rising inequality as they transitioned from socialist regimes. Across the studied countries from the Middle East and North Africa region, there are falls. In Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia and Pacific region, the trends are more mixed. Even though the figures are different from region to region, it is clear that socioeconomic inequality still exists. Socioeconomic inequality is accompanied by several challenges of which we will mention only four. These closely related challenges all point at the danger that not all people are treated as moral equivalent persons, in the sense that they cannot fall back on the same secure and stable grounds upon which they can built up their personal lives.
The first challenge has to do with the welfare state. Though welfare policies have been installed for many decades as concrete ways in which national and European politicians can show the extent to which they value socioeconomic equality, recent research has illustrated serious flaws with respect to the protection of vulnerable groups (Cantillon & Vandenbroucke, 2013; Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013; see also the chapter of Van Lancker & Van den Heede in this book). The paradox, however, is that economic growth has not always been a way to feed the welfare state, but it has rather become a (neoliberal) end in itself and yet a way to condone the dismantling of the welfare state. Many welfare states in fact did not succeed in making any further progress in the fight against (relative) income poverty, particularly within the working-age population. How, then, should the welfare state be reconceptualized in an era of increasing fluidity, globalization, mobility, meritocracy (see below), and neoliberal dictates that might condone forms of inequality? And, what type of inequalities can we accept?

This brings us neatly to a second challenge; the role of meritocracy and hence the expectation that one’s educational and/or labour market success is primarily (or solely) due to one’s individual ambitions, efforts, and choices. It is not a coincidence that while the equalizing impact of welfare states is in decline, meritocratic narratives have become more popular as they shift the responsibility for one’s socioeconomic situation towards the level of the individual. What people have or have not, is what they deserve. Yet, according to some, the welfare system spoils and even maintains the ‘underclass’ (see, e.g., Dalrymple, 2001). The ethos that comes along with meritocracy, however, can lead to increasing social tensions and even to a demonization of the (poor) working class. Owen (2011), for example, has described how the working class has gone from ‘salt of the earth’ to ‘scum of the earth’. The stereotype of the ‘chav’ is invoked to both avoid engagement with social and economic problems and to justify the inequality gap. Also egalitarian philosophers such as Wolff (1998) have argued that ‘luck egalitarianism’—the view that inequalities are legitimate and thus should not be compensated when they derive from personal choices—promotes a wrong kind of ethos by encouraging the state to view the disadvantaged with distrust and as potential cheaters. Needless to say, but this stereotypical portrayal can
be detrimental for the shared sense of belonging together, in particular combined with emerging tensions related to an inflow of refugees and continuing migration (as migrants often preoccupies the less paid jobs). The question, thus, is the extent to which meritocracy jeopardizes social cohesion?

A third related challenge has to do with the ‘numerous and rapid successive technological innovations’ that have dramatically changed current societies. The evidence and the speed with which these changes take place have endangered some jobs, especially low-skilled jobs that can be taken over by all sorts of technology-driven equipment (Goldin & Katz, 2008). Some highly skilled jobs (especially those with cognitive and manual routine tasks that can be executed by computers) are also endangered. Nevertheless, the technological developments also provide opportunities for the creation of new jobs. These new jobs will increasingly rely on specific profiles and on the so-called ‘21st century skills’, even though there is still much debate on what these skills precisely are (Voogt & Pareja Roblin, 2012). However, all kinds of institutional factors, such as rigidities in the labour market, the insufficient influx of students (especially those with a migration background and/or lower socioeconomic status) to higher education or the use of ‘non-adapted curricula’ (where, e.g. routine skills are taught and creativity is not encouraged), make some countries and individuals to greater or lesser degrees able to compensate for the loss of certain jobs and to match the fast creation of jobs which arise precisely because of innovation. The emergence of ‘knowledge-based societies’ that rely on the capacities of their citizens to drive the innovation, entrepreneurship, and dynamism of society’s economy bears the risk of creating new social and economic division between those that are sufficiently ‘adapted’ and those that have ‘anachronistic profiles’ (due to e.g. the unadjusted curricula or the mere lack of talent to acquire the wanted skills). How to secure that people with ‘anachronistic profiles’ will be treated as equals, given the already mentioned popularity of meritocratic discourse and the stigmatization of the working poor?

The mentioned appeal to responsibility also becomes apparent in a fourth challenge that is related to discussions about ‘global and environmental justice’ (e.g. Miller, 2007; Pogge & Metha, 2016). What do we owe to those with whom we might not have a direct relation, but who
Climate change is a global issue, but some will be more disadvantaged (IPCC, 2018). The climate change, is just one example, others are the refugee crisis, the threat of terrorism, the banking crisis, and the Covid-19 pandemic. Beck (1986) coined the term ‘risk society’ to refer to those problems and challenges for which national institutes cannot provide adequate solutions. What is needed is a global form of solidarity implemented by powerful global policies. However, it remains uncertain whether this can be ever be installed. After all, modern notions of solidarity and social justice materialized in redistribution are first and foremost based on national income taxes and national collective agreements. The Brexit is just one example of the fragility of pan-national organizations, and as we have seen in the previous section, despite the universal consensus about the moral equality of all people, this ideal has not automatically lead to a treatment of all people with the same degree of respect and concern. How, thus, should we deal with the hazards and insecurities induced by a global world if even our pan-national institutions and goals seem so fragile?

1.5 Challenges on the Sociocultural Level

In recent years a specific way of describing current Western societies, and in particular urban areas, is to define them as ‘superdiverse’ (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014; Vertovec, 2007). The diversification of societies also impacts on current perceptions of and considerations on equality. Indeed, in deservingness studies ‘migrant background’ is one of the few ‘identity categories’ that seems to play a crucial role in people’s view on who ‘deserves’ support (see also the chapter of Reeskens & van Oorschot in this book). When it comes to the increase of diversity due to migration, the challenges for equality are at least fourfold. What these challenges have in common is that they point at a collapse of social cohesion. If a society lacks a shared sense of togetherness, it lacks the social basis for redistribution. Socioeconomic challenges, thus, go hand in hand with important sociocultural transformations in societies. When people don’t care about the fate of others because they do not feel sufficiently
connected, it will become very difficult to uphold the idea of treating people as equals.

A first challenge is related to the so-called ‘heterogeneity-redistribution trade-off’ (Banting & Kymlicka, 2006). Several studies indicate that redistributive attitudes would be difficult to maintain when societies become more diverse. Goodhart (2004) and Pearce (2004) refer to what they call a ‘progressive dilemma’ between diversity and redistribution. The idea is that the more different we are from one another, and hence the more diverse our ways of living and our religious and ethnic backgrounds are, the less we share a moral consensus or a sense of fellow feeling, the less happy we will be in the long run and the less we will support a generous welfare state. According to Putnam (2007) diversity brings out the turtle in all of us: in the superdiverse era, people are more afraid of each other and therefore tend to hunker down or withdraw. The relation between heterogeneity and solidarity has been the subject of many studies—not least because Putnam believed to have found a ‘social law’ and therefore invited fellow researchers from all over the world to examine his thesis. The broad post-Putnam research, in fact, has led to what Van der Meer and Tolsma (2014) call a ‘cacophony of empirical findings’ that make it difficult to make strong and general statements. While there are many variables that need to be taken into account, it is clear that increasing amounts of diversity forms a challenge, in particular for societies that were generally imagined as rather homogenous. According to Bauböck (2016) there is no dilemma, but rather a trilemma between openness for immigration, multicultural inclusion, and social redistribution. The question then concerns the possibility of achieving social solidarity in culturally diverse states with fairly open borders.

A second challenge is related to what is known as the ‘recognition-redistribution trade-off’ (Banting & Kymlicka, 2006). Policies that recognize the ethnocultural diversity by means of diversity accommodating and multicultural policies would be detrimental for redistribution attitudes. The claim here is that recognition policies emphasize too much what is different and therefore undermine the shared sense of belonging together as a condition for feelings of solidarity and redistribution attitudes (Fraser, 1995; Koopmans, 2010). Or, as Barry (2001, p. 8) puts it: ‘A politics of multiculturalism undermines a politics of redistribution’.
However, this is up until now not substantiated by empirical evidence (Kymlicka, 2012; Levrau & Loobuyck, 2013; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). Whether or not multiculturalism leads to a collapse in feelings of social belonging, it is a fact that reciprocity and exchange between equals, have become challenged by ‘social imaginaries’ that construct rigid boundaries between specific social groups. Nussbaum (2012), for example, has pointed at the impact of populism and far-right parties that feeds on a ‘politics of fear’. Increasing amounts of uncertainty, fear, complexity, and individualism as a consequence of rapidly changing social, cultural, and economic processes pose fundamental challenges to ingrained notions and practices of solidarity that were easier to trigger in rather homogeneous cultural and stable communities. One of the issues that societies (from the local to the supranational level) will have to deal with is how to keep people together given the impact of migration, globalization and technologization which have led to a ‘superdiverse’ and ‘liquid’ modernity, to use the apt phrases of respectively Vertovec (2007) and Bauman (2000).

A third and related challenge has to do with the observation of Habermas (2008), namely that large parts of European societies have become ‘postsecular societies’ as they witness the persistence or resurgence of religious beliefs and practices. What is the place of religion in a society that has become more and more secular? To what extent is Islam (and other types of religious diversity) compatible with the western liberal-democratic rule of law, and settled freedoms, equalities, and rights? This question has become even more important since the rise of Islamic extremism. While Marx (1978), for example, wrote about the ‘Jewish Question’ in the nineteenth century, nowadays, it seems fair to say that it is not the situation of the Jews that stirs attention, but of Islam, eventually leading to a much-debated ‘Muslim Question’ in European societies (Norton, 2013; Parekh, 2008). Islam has undoubtedly become ‘the religion of the pariahs’, which may destabilize the common ground for inclusive societies built upon a shared sense of belonging together. All societies thus have to be vigilant about the possibility that they become imbalanced as specific groups get negatively targeted.

A fourth threat is caused by the belief in what is called ‘Big Society’, a political ideology developed in the early twenty-first century that aims for
strengthening the initiatives of citizens and their associations, reforming public services and addressing the power of local networks in order to deal with the economic, democratic, and social crisis (Scott, 2011). Formal British Prime Minister David Cameron (2010), for example, has argued that ‘the Big Society is about a huge culture change where people, in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighborhoods, in their workplace don’t always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities’. Citizens must be empowered to play a more active role in society. Therefore the government pulls back and leaves more space for citizens and professionals, while highlighting the responsibility of people rather than their weaknesses. While encouraging people to work together in close networks might seem a promising strategy to foster solidarity and tackle inequality, the government in fact retreats and delegates responsibility to the people. Social divisions may then occur between those who are willing to and capable of empowering themselves both on the individual and communal levels and those who are not. Furthermore, the need for citizens’ initiatives is clearly most stringent in vulnerable neighbourhoods (which are often areas segregated in terms of ethnocultural origin), but they are frequently populated by residents who are not always able and do not have the resources to absorb the effects of a receding government (Engbersen, Snel, & ‘t Hart, 2015). The Big Society responsibilities relate well with the contemporary focus on ‘civic integration for newcomers’. While in this reasoning multicultural policies are thought to pamper newcomers leading to a so-called backlash against multiculturalism (see above), civic integration would provide newcomers with the necessary opportunities to find their own way in society (Joppke, 2004). If newcomers fail to integrate, it is easier to assert that it is their own fault, as they were ostensibly given the necessary tools. The rigor with which Big Society and civic integration policies are implemented, is a good illustration of the meritocratic ideal that can be increasingly detected in current societies (see above). The risk is, again, that not all people will enjoy equal status: those who find themselves in unequal circumstances primarily have themselves to blame as they have not taken up their responsibilities.
If we look at the examples of socioeconomic and sociocultural cleavages, it becomes clear that what is wrong with inequality—and hence why equality is important—is that the moral equality of people is denied as some people are considered or treated as inferior or, in the worst case, as even not fully human. Scanlon (2018) has summed up several specific reasons why inequality is morally objectionable. The first reason has to do with the fact that inequality creates status differences that are humiliating and stigmatizing. In some societies members of certain groups (e.g. caste, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation) are perceived as inferior and are therefore excluded from social roles and occupations that have a high standing. A second reason has to do with the unacceptable forms of power and control that the rich can exert over those who have less. The management of large corporations, for example, can determine the working conditions of the others. When people become extremely dependent on the owners (in terms of how and when they should work, what they earn, etc.), their feelings of autonomy and control over their own life and their self-esteem will decrease, even to the extent that they might feel humiliated or worthless. A third reason is that a great imbalance in wealth and income jeopardizes the idea of equal socioeconomic opportunity. People who grow up in a poor family usually have not been given the same support, did not have access to the necessary resources or cannot rely upon the full recognition of their agency and thus lack equal opportunities. The place where the cradle stands has an unfairly large impact on the possibility to become successful in later life, also due to the limitations put on poor individuals and families by structural obstacles and institutional actors such as policymakers, educators, and employers. A fourth reason is related to the possibility that inequality in wealth and income undermines the fairness of political institutions. The rich can manipulate political life in the sense that they can weigh heavily on political debates and influence particular outcomes (Christiano, 2012). A fifth reason is that inequality can result from a failure of governments to treat all people as equals by ignoring the needs and interests of specific categories of people/groups thereby differentiating between those deserving
support and those that do not. A *sixth* reason for why inequality (of income and wealth) can be called morally wrong is that inequality can be the result of economic unfair institutions. What is deemed to be unfair here is, for example, the way in which unequal rewards are assigned to certain economic roles or positions. Frank and Cook (1996) have famously declared current society to be a ‘*winner-take-all society*’.

There are of course other objections to inequality. With an abundance of figures, Marmot (2004) and especially Wilkinson and Pickett (2009, 2018) have shown that unequal societies have far-reaching consequences on almost all criteria of health, including for the middle class and even the higher class. The titles of the books of Wilkinson and Pickett say it all: ‘*Why more equal societies almost always do better*’ and ‘*How more equal societies reduce stress, restore sanity and improve everyone’s wellbeing*’. Equal societies might also be preferred because it leads to more social stability. After all, people share a sense of belonging, trust each other more, and feel that the government cares for all people. If, for example, a small group owns a disproportionately large part of the resources and if that group can also slip through the loopholes through fiscal blackmail, then the poor have reasons to think that their government is mainly in favour of the ‘strongest’ or ‘richest’. A society that maintains great socio-economic inequality seems to have more attention and respect for the needs of the rich group. Moreover, if the ‘strongest’ do not set a good example and if politics seem unable to restrain the ‘strongest’, feelings of resentment at the ‘bottom’ of society will grow.

The listed arguments make clear that demands for equality are not necessarily *expressions of envy* and that redistribution does not necessarily imply an immoral interference of the individual liberty of the rich who deserve their wealth (as proposed by Nozick, 1974). However, if equality is indeed so important, should we then reduce the difference, even if this means that no one becomes better? Many objections can be made against this type of reasoning. Some (Parfit, 1984) have said we should focus on the worst off, while others have claimed it is about making sure that everybody has ‘enough’ (Frankfurt, 1987). These considerations (which will be examined in the chapter of Levrau in this book), however, remain deeply egalitarian when the poorness, lack of priority, or insufficiency...
results from unequal status, violations of equal concern, or when they reflect a lack of fairness in political and economic institutions.

1.7 Politics of Equality

A politics that wants to treat all people with equal concern and respect, has to engage with the ‘two faces of inequality’ (socioeconomic and sociocultural inequality). Both the socioeconomic and sociocultural hierarchies can overlap as the most economically vulnerable groups are frequently those who score the lowest in terms of sociocultural status. However, they must be treated distinctly, since highly educated, affluent immigrants, for example, may also be victims of racism, discrimination or misrecognition. Thus, although the two politics can work together (since in reality they frequently focus on the same target groups), they are nevertheless distinct (because they focus on different dimensions of equality). According to Honneth (2001), however, the politics of redistribution falls under the politics of recognition because redistribution claims ultimately are expressions of struggles for recognition (see also Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

Multicultural policies are good examples of policies that deal with both recognition and redistribution issues, for they often involve a significant redistribution of economic resources and political power besides the symbolic recognition of cultural identities (see the chapter of Modood & De Waal in this book). Multiculturalists like Kymlicka (1995) and Modood (2007) generally argue that it is too one-sided to define justice exclusively in terms of distribution of material resources. Moreover, they refer to the fact that thinking in terms of universal rights (such as freedom of conscience, freedom of speech and assembly) may not address the specific needs of minority groups. It is precisely in its contrast with this standard liberalism that one can define the raison d’être of (liberal) multiculturalism. Indeed, one popular way to deal with cultural and religious diversity is the implementation of a citizenship model based on common citizenship rights. Multiculturalists argue that what appears on the surface to be a neutral system is, on closer inspection, a system that often favours the majority group. Due to seemingly inevitable processes
of nation-building, it is indeed the majority’s language that is used in public institutions, the majority’s holidays that are recognized in the public calendar, the majority’s history that is taught in schools, etc. The consequence of this inevitable lack of cultural and language neutrality is that access to one’s culture can be difficult for cultural minorities. A compensating or accommodating multicultural policy is needed here. In its liberal incarnation, such a policy is not concerned with bestowing unfair privileges on certain groups; on the contrary, it tries to balance laws and eliminate unfair disadvantages. According to multiculturalism, there are cases in which differentiated treatment and thus the emphasis on difference is the best way of treating all citizens as equals.

1.8 Enduring Equality

Thus far we have explained in general terms what equality refers to (moral equality), how it can be denied (two faces of inequality), how the denial comes to the fore in previous and current times (the challenges) and how it can be dealt with (politics of equality). What we have not considered yet is why some forms of inequality seem to endure. Given the moral and political consensus about the importance of equality—at least since the French Revolution, the idea of ‘equality’ has served as one of the main political and normative ideals in European and North-American societies as it has been taken up in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is affirmed in many human rights documents and treaties, is a nodal point taken up in many national policies, and is at the heart of many political and philosophical reflections—it is remarkable that many societies nowadays are still gripped by equality debates. As Lamont and Pierson (2019, p. 5) state: ‘It is the persistence and deepening of inequality that raises many of the most troubling issues’. Also Piketty (2014) worried about the extent to which inequality takes extremely durable forms. In one way or another structures of advantage and disadvantage seem to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. Equality-generating policies and realities that mitigate excessive inequalities are (at least partly) overshadowed by inequality inducing processes. How does this come? How does inequality exist, how is it perpetuated and, above all, how does that inequality over
individual life courses and generations become enduring? With *Durable inequality*, Charles Tilly (1998) has written one of the key texts that deal with these questions.

Central in the work of Tilly is the idea of ‘categorical inequality’. Categories are asymmetrical, unequal social groups that often occur in pairs and that can only be understood in relation to each other (e.g. male/female, black/white, citizen/foreigner, have/have-nots, child/adult,…). ‘The central argument runs like this: Large, significant inequalities in advantages among human beings correspond mainly to categorical differences (…) rather than to individual differences in attributes, propensities or performance’ (Tilly, 1998, p. 7). Tilly sees the boundaries drawn between the two halves of categorical pairs as essential for creating and maintaining inequality. Categories have two important functions in perpetuating inequality: (1) a categorical structure facilitates the exploitation and/or establishment of (old and/or new) favoured members and (2) the high costs of a change of a categorical order perpetuate the existing relationships or facilitate the introduction of existing relationships in new circumstances. According to Tilly there are four basic mechanisms that create and sustain categorical inequality: ‘exploitation’, ‘opportunity hoarding’, ‘emulation’, and ‘adaptation’. *Exploitation* means that if people already have some power, they can create added value through the efforts of others (people who usually do not belong to their own category). The second mechanism, *the hoarding of opportunities*, refers to the fact that if members of a non-powerful group see an opportunity to gain access to a resource that is valuable, they will attempt to monopolize this access for their own group. By hoarding opportunities and monopolizing knowledge within their own group, the non-powerful group also creates inequality. Tilly does not see these mechanisms as deliberately creating inequality. For him, inequality is rather a side effect of organizational improvisation of individuals/groups to achieve something for themselves. The inequality that results from exploiting and hoarding opportunities is given a more sustainable form by two other mechanisms. *Emulation* refers to copying existing social relationships because this is easier than inventing new social relationships. An example is the phenomenon that inequality in the division of labour between women and men within families is ‘copied’ on the labour market in a division between men
and women professions. According to Tilly, this means that inequality in households—women doing unpaid work for men—has entered the labour market: women get paid less for work that looks like domestic or care work. Adaptation is a process of socialization, whereby even the most disadvantaged develop routines based on the existing structural inequality. While copying and adaptation help solving many problems, it also leads to the fixation of categorical pairs, and therefore of inequality. Tilly is rather pessimistic about the possibilities of politics to reduce or eliminate the patterns of inequality. According to him, states are also subject to the described mechanisms. Moreover, they have the power to legally fixate the categorical couples. States, for example, establish the categorization of citizens, and thereby install inclusion and exclusion: who is a citizen, who has a conditional citizenship, etc.? Members of the dominant categorical groups also have more opportunities for exploitation or for hoarding opportunities. They make continuous decisions about how to draw the line between groups, how to arrange solidarity, loyalty, and control, how to monopolize knowledge that leads to more benefits for themselves.

Equality reduction, in fact, is often the result of the functioning of a broad democracy, for example in the form of social movements. However, even in that case, Tilly remains skeptical in the sense that social movements often create or activate categorical couples, albeit with the aim of preventing unjust treatment of the ‘weaker’ half of these couples. In their struggle for recognition and inclusion, they present their own category as coherently as possible and other categories are excluded or seen as less important. This is a well-known critique that has also been formulated by critics of identity politics who claim that struggles for recognition often lead to essentialisation of a group and to ignoring the interests of the so-called ‘minorities within the minorities’ (see, e.g., Eisenberg & Spinner-Halev, 2005).

However, at the same time (dominant) majority groups also engage in ‘identity politics’ but this is often overlooked as their engagement seems self-evident and often remains unquestioned. Since the birth of ‘nation-states’, in particular in the past two centuries, top-down strategies have been implemented to secure the position of certain cultural emblems,
such as language and religion, deemed essential to further development and continuity ‘the nation’ across future generations of ‘nationals’ (Wimmer & Feinstein, 2010). While at the time the imposition of, e.g. one national language has had a major impact on social life and individuals, this has become a widely accepted strategy. However, mainly due to ongoing migration in various countries these issues have come to the fore again. For example, in national public education systems in countries (and regions) such as The UK, The Netherlands, and Flanders, curricula on Britishness, Dutchness, and Flemishness are designed to be taught to all school-aged children in these countries to instill positive identification and feelings of belonging to the so-called ‘national values and identity’. Whereas in the past the development of a national identity was an explicit goal, nowadays these strategies are implemented with a different goal. Developing these strategies is not necessarily an expression of mainstream majority’s struggle to have its identity recognized, as the country’s constitution and various laws explicitly protect majority’s cultural emblems, rather these strategies are developed to incorporate ‘minorities’ into the national imagination. However, in many parts of the world, and particularly in Europe, this incorporation process is often based upon an underlying ‘assimilation rationale’ as minorities are much more limited (and in some cases even forbidden) to express certain linguistic, cultural, or religious identities in society’s main institutions such as schools or public office (Alba & Foner, 2015). This is fundamentally different for the ‘native majority’ as, for example, its mother tongue language is often the official language and citizens are often obliged to use them in these institutions. Thus, also from this perspective, minorities are much more limited in expressing ‘their’ identities and the recognition of minority identities, languages, and religions in society’s institutions is often (very) difficult. This leads to an unequal playing field wherein not everybody can apply the (cultural) resources at their disposal in the same ways.

Charles Tilly obviously is not the only one who has examined the mechanisms that explain the persistence of inequality. Lamont and Pierson (2019) have identified several related social mechanisms that illuminate how, over time, particular forms of inequality may be reinforced.
The first mechanisms are ‘evaluation’ and ‘legitimation’. These mechanisms refer to the categorization of individuals, goods as well as the justification of hierarchies. As Lamont and Pierson (2019) explain, evaluation is central to the creation of the standards of deservingness and meritocracy that increasingly guide the distribution of resources as well as the recognition of status. Banting and Kymlicka (2015), for example, state that nowadays people are no longer accepting the excessive gap between the 1% and the rest, but one can also witness hardening attitudes towards specific recipients, including the unemployed, single mothers and, especially, immigrants. So, although the public is inclined to think that the rich do not necessarily deserve all their good fortune and should be taxed more, it has also apparently started to believe that the disadvantaged deserve their bad fortune, and is therefore less keen on supporting them. Likewise, support for multicultural policies is less substantial if the majority believes that migrants cannot be trusted. In the words of Kymlicka (2012, p. 2): ‘Multiculturalism tends to lose support in high-risk situations where immigrants are seen as predominantly illegal, as potential carriers of illiberal practices or movements, or as net burdens on the welfare state’. People seem to accept the status quo by holding to the conviction that the society with its institutions is fair. When confronted with unjust situations, people solve the felt cognitive dissonance by believing that the world is, all in all, a fair place and that people, therefore, get what they deserve. ‘Legitimation’ thus implies the conviction that those who really want, can become successful and that those who are poor must be held responsible for not having taken the provided chances. Enduring equality, thus, does not mean that social mobility is difficult, but it rather confirms prejudices towards the poor as merely lazy people. Son Hing, Wilson, Gourevitch, English, and Sin (2019), for example, have examined why the rising inequality does not lead to more public outcry. They contend that intensifying degrees of inequality activates psychological processes that stifle outcry (see also the chapter of Pretsch in this book). People then are blind to the true extent of inequality, and legitimize rising disparities, and reject redistribution as an effective solution. The result is that the institutions that produce all types of inequality are legitimatized.
‘Policy drift’ is yet another mechanism that explains why inequality has such a persistent character. It refers to the effects that follow when policy arrangements remain static at a time where social conditions shift. This can happen when political reform is complicated and obstructed while society is characterized by rapid economic change and weaken political commitments to equality. A policy that does not observe closely and does not react rapidly can intensify inequality, for example, when minimum wages or social benefits are not adjusted to the dynamics of inflation, or when regulatory arrangements are not adapted to changing markets or social relationships (Lamont & Pierson, 2019). Another example might be the emerging knowledge economy the effect of which is that people with some profiles will become rather anachronistic. A politics of equality should estimate well the short and long term impact of rapidly transforming economies and should generate sufficient solutions for people who are left out.

‘Quantification’ (the quantitative measures of performance) and commodification (the process whereby more and more aspects of human actions and the results thereof are expressed in a monetary value instead of the intrinsic or inherent value) are two other mechanisms that provide insights into the phenomenon of enduring inequality. While metrics might increase fairness, it can also reinforce inequalities. Metrics can, for example, obfuscate the needs of the disadvantaged, as all people can be compared to the same performance standard. Those who fail are seen as ‘losers’, while those who meet the expectations are successful. However, if the proper situation of the disadvantaged is not properly taken into account, the idea that metrics can help rewarding merit may in fact rather reinforce existing inequalities. This eventually leads to an economical ‘survival of the fittest’. The examples can be found in any sector. To give just three diverse examples: (1) multinationals that have exorbitant bonus schemes for management but exploit employees; (2) academia with the ‘publish or perish discourse’; (3) hospitals which turned into ‘healthcare companies’ that maximize profits and minimize costs so that ultimately the provided care is of poor quality (Sennett, 2006; Verhaeghe, 2014; Watermeyer, 2019).
1.9 Egalitarian and Skeptical Voices

As illustrated, current societies are still witnessing political, philosophical, and public turmoil due to issues related to equality. Where tense discussions on increasing socioeconomic inequalities are dominating public and political debates, discussions on the sociocultural recognition of difference are also lingering. The persistent gap between the ideal and the real vis-à-vis equality might lead to rather cynical comments. Skeptics may invoke the observation that there is an intractable human selfishness that will prevent equality to prosper, or that those who do act in accordance with what Cohen (2000) has coined ‘the egalitarian ethos’ and Levrau (2018) ‘the interpersonal ethos’, will be exploited by those who follow their selfish impulses. Critics here may also point at an innate tendency to show distrust towards ‘the other’. Moreover, they can argue that it is nowadays difficult to ignore the impact of harsh populist voices, the neoliberal hegemony that promotes competition, and a form of hyper-individualism supported by narrow positivism (e.g. the dominance of quantitative measurements) and fierce meritocracy in a wide range of disciplines and professions (including academia and healthcare). This is, of course, not to say that neoliberalism has brought us anything but pain; on the contrary, but it is important to study the deep (in)egalitarian effects of a climate where a certain ideology seems to prevail (Dorling, 2015). However, even in current neoliberal societies there are moments when people do relate to each other in a spirit of equality and community, for example, on a camping trip where everyone—regardless of their background—lives together in relative harmony and where everybody both gives and takes equally (Cohen, 2009). This is of course an atypical situation, but, as Cohen notes, is it not possible to think that it is only because of the lack of such means and situations that people rely on market principles that foster greed and egoism? The market systems that have resulted in large socioeconomic inequalities will not thrive when the background culture with its social norms places a higher emphasis on values such as equality, generosity, friendship and care. If people believe that the right thing to do is to show solidarity rather than to go for the maximization of individual property, this might have a severe impact on the functioning and dominance of the free market.
Likewise, multicultural societies seem to be swamped by all sorts of anxieties. We are neither arguing that people should fully embrace multiculturality, nor that the ethnocultural and religious diversification of societies and cities is only a success of conviviality. We, however, believe that the worldwide surges of populism have led to a dangerous situation where the equal rights of people are endangered. We should therefore be cautious about how things are presented—a critique that also comes to the fore in the chapter of Lemke in this book. Beaman (2017), for example, argues that currently too much emphasis is put on (religious) differences and conflicts. It gets ignored all too often that in the many everyday negotiations people who may be very different from each other get along well, inspired by what she calls ‘deep equality’. People spontaneously search for what they have in common in order to relate to each other, and those commonalities often weigh far more than the differences, which in turn gives rise to an alternative narrative to that of diversity being a problem to be solved. When people believe that migrants should be handled with dignity and when the ‘politics of fear’ (Nussbaum, 2012) is somewhat tempered, the chances will be higher that solidarity, equality and an enduring, shared sense of belonging together will be created.

The voice of the skeptic can also be somewhat mitigated by pointing at the fact that the current states of inequality have regularly stirred the emotions of those who are committed to the questions and realities of inequality. After all, based upon large-scale values surveys across the world, Schwartz (2012) showed that one can find ten basic human values in almost every ‘society’. Moreover, the most important values in these societies—rather independent of their socioeconomic, religious, or ethnic composition—are similar and concern values related to self-direction, freedom, social justice, and equality. To put it like this: ‘equality’ is not just a philosophical highbrow term, it is something that is embraced by most people as a fundamental value. In the wake of the financial and economic crisis, for example, a lot of public and political debate has arisen about the legitimacy of the 1% richest, about the feasibility and desirability of the global tax on wealth, the need for international redistribution, the (mis)management of the financial sector that has led to the financial crisis, the ‘bonus culture’ in private and in public...
companies, the most desirable wage pressures in companies, the need for minimum wages, and social minima, etc. (Chomsky, 2012). The ‘common man’ has also expressed his concerns through among other means, the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ protests, which have inspired a wide international response. This movement was organized as non-violent protest action against socioeconomic inequalities. People used it as a means to express their anger and disappointment as well as their hopes for a more egalitarian future. One of the slogans that was frequently chanted and that has obtained symbolic and ‘community-building’ power was ‘We are the 99%!’ referring to the top 1% wealthiest people that have a disproportionate amount of capital, political influence, and means of production (Dorling, 2019).

The social platforms of resistance and the rise of the ‘enraged citizen’ (see also the gilet jaunes) may lead egalitarians to allow for some optimism. All sorts of citizens who would otherwise never meet or know each other demonstrate and strike together in the traditional forms of protest, but they also come together in deliberative platforms and work out their own proposals for public issues. Authors like Judt (2010), however, remained skeptic. He agrees that people are bound together on these rallies and marches by a shared interest, but the effort to convert these interests into real collective or egalitarian goals is undermined by the fragmented individualism of their concerns. ‘Laudable goals – fighting climate change, opposing war, advocating public healthcare or penalizing bankers – are united by nothing more than the expression of emotion. In our political as in our economic lives, we have become consumers: choosing from a broad gamut of competing objectives, we find it hard to imagine ways or reasons to combine these into a coherent whole’ (Judt, 2010, p. 135).

The emergence of the protest movements would not surprise behavioural biologists and evolutionary psychologists such as Boehm (2012), de Waal (2009), and Tomasello (2014) as they argue that the depiction of man as ‘a ruthless wolf’ does not correlate with human nature. These authors assert instead that the homo sapiens has a natural capability to become a ‘super homo sapiens’ on the condition that the ‘homo socialis’ in him/he can flourish. This notion should inspire all those who strive for the realization of more egalitarian societies. Indeed, two fundamental tendencies are typical of every human being: the craving to
be part of a greater whole whereby feelings of solidarity, care and altruism are nourished, and at the same time, the quest for independence whereby personal and quite often aggressive satisfaction is sought. However, it is often the societal and cultural environment that steers which tendency—empathy or egotism—becomes predominant. The current trends—the backlash against diversity and the neoliberal obsession with the individual at the expense of the other and the community—have rather ignored the fundamental human need for empathy, love, and hospitality. One of the major questions of our time, then, is how people can be stimulated to nourish egalitarian preferences, ambitions, goals, and aspirations. Therefore, if we have reasons to value equality, we need not only deeply consider its role, character, and impact, but also should we examine how equality can be communicated, promoted, and sustained. What is needed is a toolbox of strategies that are efficient when it comes to forming people’s egalitarian beliefs and attitudes. Examining the mechanisms by which beliefs are formed and changed and investigating how people can be motivated people to act on the basis of their egalitarian convictions is a fundamental challenge for current societies, and, at least from our standpoint, one of the most crucial ones, as—to put it a bit solemnly—the future of humankind may depend on it.

1.10 Outline of the Book

As this introductory chapter has illustrated, there are a lot of controversies about equality. The challenges and conundrums not only occur at the conceptual and institutional but also take place at the daily experiential levels. This is why the current volume addresses equality from a multidisciplinary perspective. After all, given the complexity of equality, in order to draw an accurate picture of equality’s nature, value, relevance, scope, and its relation to other values, a multidisciplinary approach is needed. This means that we need not only consider what history and (political) philosophy has brought us, but we should also take other insights into account; insights from adjoining disciplines, most prominently from cultural studies, political studies, psychology, socioeconomics, and sociology. With the aim to structure the insights in an accessible and elegant
way, we use a classic tripartite framework, including the macro level (broader systemic, historical, conceptual, and societal level), the meso level (the labour market, the welfare state, and concrete policies) and the micro level of the individuals and their relations and thoughts about equality.

The collection is divided into three parts comprising a total of nine chapters. The first part (‘Theories & Histories’) contains three conceptual chapters. The focus is on political philosophy, history, and multicultural theory. The second part of the book (‘Institutions & Policies’) deals with the implementation or institutionalization of equality. How is ‘equality’ translated in welfare policies, European policies, and in concrete policies such as the ones that defend reasonable accommodations at the workplace? The third part of the book (‘Experiences & Impressions’) considers the individual experiences and awareness of inequality. Insights coming from psychology, sociology and cultural studies are central. As the nine chapters disentangle equality from different theoretical perspectives they not only summarize the disciplinary state of the art on equality, but also identify promising areas of future research. Obviously, the collection does not cover all disciplines or all issues—only a fist thick book could capture all nuances, but that is not the ambition here. As the book is considered to be a comprehensive, yet introductory book on equality, we hope the collection offers a convenient starting point for anyone interested in ‘equality.

The first part of the book is about theory and history and brings together three chapters. In his chapter François Levrau provides a political philosophical tour d’horizon. From a political-philosophical point of view, explaining what ‘equality’ exactly amounts to has turned out to be very tough. When equality is to be treated as a moral ideal, many issues come to the fore. Some of these deal with distributive justice. What is it that should be distributed equally? Should we strive for equal conditions or is it about equal endstates? Which political and social institutions are needed? Has equality implications for how people behave in daily life? These are just a few questions of a long list that has occupied the minds of our greatest political philosophers. In his chapter Levrau takes a helicopter view in order to elucidate how the egalitarian debate has been held so far and why it still leads to
pressing debates. In the next chapter Bert De Munck presents a historical overview of the thinking about equality. Present-day political ideas to fight inequality are mostly based on a logic of productivity and redistribution. While taxes on wages and on returns on capital dominate the political debate, alternative political imaginaries like the basic income or the commons are hardly taken seriously. In an attempt to transcend the current framework, this chapter traces its historical origins in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and reveals the alternative conceptions of inequality which have been eclipsed as it developed. While late medieval and early modern communal ideas fall short of providing political ground for modern alternative theories (due to the absence of basic ideas about natural rights and universal equality) the very emergence of equality in terms of universal rights will be shown to explain the impossibility to escape the present-day logic of redistribution. In the last chapter of the first part Tariq Modood and Tamar de Waal discuss the current state of the academic debate on multiculturalism and multicultural equality. Their chapter gives a brief historical overview of the political-philosophical paradigm and policy perspective of multiculturalism. In addition, it discusses a new frontier in academic multicultural debates: the so-called multiculturalism-interculturalism debate. Modood and De Waal also reflect on where multiculturalism and multicultural equality is now.

The second part of the book contains three chapter about institutions and policies. In their chapter François Levrau and Leni Franken deal with the extent to which religion can be accommodated in the workplace. As such they provide a legal-philosophical analysis of equality in the workplace. After elaborating the difference-blind and the difference-sensitive approach, they illustrate how and why both liberal egalitarian positions can lead to different outcomes. In order to flesh out the principle of reasonable accommodation, they discuss several cases that were ruled by the European Court of Human Rights and by the European Court of Justice. A distinction is made between ‘neutral’ companies (these can be private, semi-private or public) and ‘non-neutral’ or religiously affiliated organizations. Levrau and Franken conclude with some critical remarks and illustrate how discussions about religion in the workplace are hampered by the ambiguity of a number of frequently used concepts
such as ‘religion’, ‘reasonableness’, ‘discrimination’, and ‘neutrality’. The next chapter is from Wim Van Lancker and Aaron Van den Heede. These authors examine equality through the socioeconomic lens by analyzing the welfare state. Welfare states, they argue, emerged in times of industrialization and globalization, have since then withstood several economic downturns and financial crises, and have now adapted to profound changes in the labour market and in society. Today, the welfare state is heralded as an economic and social system that is superior to other forms of social organization in ensuring economic equality among its citizens. Yet, poverty figures demonstrate that substantial numbers of people are left behind and do not fully reap the benefits from the welfare state, while income inequality is rising within most welfare states. In their chapter, Van Lancker and Van den Heede discuss how and to what extent welfare states achieve economic equality. They focus on similarities and differences across the world, and review what type of welfare states achieve equality more than others. They conclude with a discussion of the major challenges that may jeopardize the achievement of economic equality in the future. In the third chapter of the second part of the book, Ruby Gropas focuses on the European Union perspective. In her chapter, she explains and illustrates that the EU has developed a substantial framework to promote equality, address discrimination, and manage diversity. Over the course of six decades of EU integration, the Union has integrated equality across the Union’s policies through multiple pillars combining law; funding for positive action programmes; a set of policy instruments that contribute to social cohesion, anti-discrimination and equal opportunities; and by creating spaces for mobilization, exchange of good practices, mutual learning and cooperation. Gropas considers what has driven the EU equality framework and its limitations. How have the concepts of discrimination, diversity and equity framed the EU’s framework? In a detailed way, the chapter traces the development of the Union’s framework, and argues that beyond attempting to steer Member States towards a common approach to equality, the EU institutions have taken a prescriptive approach aimed at promoting fair treatment, non-discrimination, and equal opportunities.

In the third part of the book, the focus is on experiences and impressions. In her chapter Johanna Pretsch considers the relationship between
(in)equality and (in)justice from a psychological perspective. Putting the focus on distributive justice, she outlines different justice principles (equality, equity, and need), their application, and their meaning for questions of (in)equality. Pretsch shows that from a psychological perspective one can neither say that inequality is fundamentally unjust nor that equality is fundamentally just. Rather, whether (in)equality is perceived as just or unjust depends on individual and subjective justice evaluations made on the basis of justice principles. In order to shed light on the question of how people react to inequality, Pretsch describes different psychological reactions to unfair distributions of limited resources in general. This is done for different spheres of life, namely the educational context (distribution of grades, learning conditions, attention, praise, etc.), the workplace (distribution of pay, benefits, rewards, performance evaluations, etc.), and the family (distribution of affection, recognition, control, etc.). Pretsch shows that reactions to unfair distributions are often similar regardless of the sphere of life where the unfair distribution is perceived. In their chapter, Tim Reeskens and Wim van Oorschot present an empirical answer to the question which model of redistribution Europeans prefer. Based on data from the 2008 wave of the European Social Survey, they examine whether people are appealed to the principle of equity, equality, or need. The authors consider redistributive justice preferences applied to two distinct welfare provisions, namely unemployment benefits and old-age pension schemes. In order to come up with detailed analyzes, they examine individual and contextual factors as individual opinions are not only imprints of personal circumstances, but also reflect national contexts. In the last chapter of this collection, Sieglinde Lemke discusses the role of the media in shaping the dominant view of (in)equality because artistic and media representations of economic suffering determine how a society perceives inequality. Lemke clarifies why cultural studies might inspire inequality scholars to move the current paradigm towards a transdisciplinary perspective. From its inception, this young discipline has endorsed equality to combat different, intersecting forms of discrimination. It has always integrated different approaches to generate a new critical paradigm. This chapter also bridges inequality studies with the germinating transdisciplinary field of precarity studies. Since the
socioeconomic conditions of precarity are so diverse, and its effects so far-reaching, any attempt to analyze inequality must incorporate different disciplinary approaches to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of class-based inequity. With this idea of the incorporation of different disciplines, Lemke captures neatly the main ambition of this book.

References

Alba, R., & Foner, N. (2015). Strangers no more: Immigration and the challenges of integration in North America and Western Europe. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Atkinson, A. (2015). Inequality: What can be done? Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Banting, K., & Kymlicka, W. (Eds.). (2006). Multiculturalism and the welfare State: Recognition and redistribution in contemporary democracies. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Banting, K., & Kymlicka, W. (2015). The political sources of solidarity in diverse societies (Working Papers). European University Institute.

Barry, B. (2001). Culture and equality: An egalitarian critique of multiculturalism. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bashford, A., & Levine, P. (Eds.). (2010). The Oxford handbook of the history of eugenics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bauböck, R. (2016). Why liberal nationalism does not resolve the progressive’s trilemma: Comment on Will Kymlicka’s article: ‘Solidarity in diverse societies’. Comparative Migration Studies, 4(10), 1–6.

Bauman, Z. (2000). Liquid modernity. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Beaman, L. (2017). Deep equality in an era of religious diversity. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beck, U. (1986). The risk society: Towards a new modernity. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Bhambra, G. K. (2015). Citizens and others: The constitution of citizenship through exclusion. Alternatives, 40(2), 102–114.

Boehm, C. (2012). Moral origins: The evolution of virtue, altruism, and shame. New York: Basic Books.

Bristow, W. (2017). Enlightenment. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2017 Edition).
Cameron, D. (2010, July 19). *Big society speech: Transcript of a speech by the Prime Minister on the big society*. https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/big-society-speech. Accessed 20 February 2020.

Cantillon, B., & Vandenbroucke, F. (Eds.). (2013). *Reconciling work and poverty reduction: How successful are European welfare states?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cantillon, B., & Van Lancker, W. (2013). Three shortcomings of the social investment perspective. *Social Policy and Society, 12*(4), 553–564.

Castles, S., De Haas, H., & Miller, M. (2014). *The age of migration*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chomsky, N. (2012). *Occupu*. London: Penguin Books.

Christiano, T. (2012). Money in politics. In D. Estlund (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of philosophy* (pp. 241–257). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cohen, G. A. (2000). *If you're an egalitarian, how come you're so rich?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Cohen, G. A. (2009). *Why not socialism?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dalrymple, T. (2001). *Life at the bottom: The worldview that makes the underclass*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

De Waal, F. (2009). *The age of empathy: Nature's lessons for a kinder society*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Dorling, D. (2015). *Injustice: Why social inequality still persists*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Dorling, D. (2019). *Inequality and the 1%*. London and New York: Verso.

Eisenberg, A., & Spinner-Halev, J. (2005). *Minorities within minorities: Equality, rights and diversity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Engbersen, Snel, & ‘t Hart. (2015). *Mattheüs in de buurt: over burgerparticipatie en ongelijkheid in steden* [Mattheus in the neighborhood: About citizen participation and inequality in cities]. Rotterdam. http://www.kenniswerkplaats-leefbaar.nl/wp-content/uploads/Mattheus-in-de-buurt_buurtparticipatie-en-ongelijkheid.pdf.

Frank, R., & Cook, P. (1996). *The winner-take-all society: Why the few at the top get so much more than the rest of us*. New York: Penguin.

Frankfurt, H. (1987). Equality as a moral ideal. *Ethics, 98*(1), 21–43.

Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a post-socialist age. *New Left Review, 212*, 67–93.

Fraser, N., & Honneth, A. (2003). *Redistribution or recognition? A political philosophical exchange*. London, New York: Verso.
Gaillie, W. B. (1956). Essentially contested concepts. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 56*(1), 167–198.

Garrard, G. (2006). *Counter-Enlightenments: From the eighteenth century to the present.* Abington: Routledge.

Gillespie, M. A. (2008). *The theological origins of modernity.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Goldin, C., & Katz, L. (2008). *The race between education and technology.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Goldthorpe, J. (2010). Too diverse. *Prospect.*

Gottlieb, A. (2016). *The dream of Enlightenment: The rise of modern philosophy.* New York: Norton.

Habermas, J. (2008). Notes on post-secular society. *New Perspectives Quarterly, 25*(4), 17–29.

Hansen, P., & Jonsson, S. (2011). Bringing Africa as a ‘dowry to Europe’. *Interventions, 13*(3), 443–463.

Hansen, P., & Jonsson, S. (2017). *Eurafrica incognita: The colonial origins of the European Union.* *History of the Present, 7*(1), 1–32.

Hasell, J. (2018, November 19). Is income inequality rising around the world? https://ourworldindata.org/income-inequality-since-1990.

Honneth, A. (2001). Recognition or redistribution? Changing perspectives on the moral order of society. *Theory Culture Society, 18*(2–3), 43–55.

IPCC. (2018). *Global warming of 1.5°C (An IPCC Special Report).* https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_High_Res.pdf.

Joppke, C. (2004). The retreat of multiculturalism in the liberal state: theory and policy. *British Journal of Sociology, 55*(2), 237–257.

Judt, T. (2010). *Ill fares the land.* New York: Penguin Press.

Kant, I. (1970). *An Answer to the question: ‘What is Enlightenment’?* In H. Reiss (Ed.), *Kant’s political writings* (pp. 54–60). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Koopmans, R. (2010). Trade-offs between equality and difference: Immigrant integration, multiculturalism and the welfare state in cross-national perspective. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 36*(1), 1–26.

Kymlicka, W. (1995). *Multicultural citizenship: A liberal theory of minority rights.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kymlicka, W. (2007). *Multicultural odysseys: Navigating the new international politics of diversity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kymlicka, W. (2012). *Multiculturalism: Success, failure, and the future.* Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.
Lamont, M., & Pierson, P. (2019). Inequality generation & persistence as multidimensional processes: An interdisciplinary agenda. *Dædalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 148*(3), 5–18.

Levrau, F. (2018). Towards a new way of interacting? Pondering the role of an interpersonal ethos. *Comparative Migration Studies, 6*(12), 1–8.

Levrau, F., & Loobuyck, P. (2013). Is multiculturalism bad for social cohesion and redistribution? *The Political Quarterly, 84*(1), 101–109.

Marx, K. (1843 [1978]). On the Jewish question. In R. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx–Engels reader* (pp. 26–46). New York: Norton.

Marmot, M. (2004). *Status syndrome: How your social standing directly affects your health*. London: Bloomsbury.

Miller, D. (2007). *National responsibility and global justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Modood, T. (2007). *Multiculturalism: A civic idea*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Morris, L. (2009). Civic stratification and the cosmopolitan ideal: The case of welfare and asylum. *European Societies, 11*(4), 603–624.

Morris, L. (2011). Rights, recognition and judgment: Reflections on the case of welfare and asylum. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations, 14*(1), 39–56.

Morris, L. (2012). Citizenship and human rights: Ideals and actualities. *The British Journal of Sociology, 63*(1), 39–46.

Newell, J. (2013, December 4). Obama: Income inequality is ‘defining challenge of our time’. *Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/04/obama-income-inequality-minimum-wage-live.

Norton, A. (2013). *On the Muslim question*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Nozick, R. (1974). *Anarchy, state and utopia*. New York, Oxford: Basic Books, Blackwell.

Nussbaum, M. (2012). *The new religious intolerance: Overcoming the politics of fear in an anxious age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Owen, J. (2011). *Chavs: The demonization of the working class*. London: Verso.

Parekh, B. (2008). *European liberalism and ‘the Muslim Question’* (ISIM Paper 9). Leiden: Amsterdam University Press.

Parfit, D. (1984). *Reasons and persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Pearce, N. (2004). Diversity versus solidarity: A new progressive dilemma. *Renewal: a Journal of Labour Politics, 12*(3), 79–87.

Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the 21st century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Piketty, T., Chancel, L., Alvaredo, F., Saez, E., & Zuckman, G. (2018). World inequality report. Paris: World Inequality Lab.
Pinker, S. (2018). Enlightenment now: The case for reason, science, humanism, and progress. New York: Penguin Random House.
Pogge, T., & Metha, K. (Eds.). (2016). Global tax fairness. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Putnam, R. (2007). E pluribus unum: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century. Scandinavian Political Studies, 30(2), 137–174.
Rosling, H. (2018). Factfulness: Ten reasons we’re wrong about the world—And why things are better than you think. New York: Flatiron Books.
Scanlon, T. M. (2018). Why does inequality matter? Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Schwartz, S. H. (2012). An overview of the Schwartz theory of basic values. Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, 2(1), 1–20.
Scott, M. (2011). Reflections on ‘The Big Society’. Community Development Journal, 46(1), 132–137.
Sennett, R. (2006). The culture of the new capitalism. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Son Hing, L., Wilson, A., Gourevitch, P., English, J., & Sin, P. (2019). Failure to respond to rising income inequality: Processes that legitimize growing disparities. Dædalus, 148(3), 105–135.
Sorkin, D. (2008). The religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna. Princeton: University Press.
Stiglitz, J. E. (2012). The Price of Inequality: How today’s divided society endangers our future. New York and London: W. W. Norton.
Tilly, C. (1998). Durable inequality. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Tocqueville, A. (2002 [1835–1840]). Democracy in America (B. Frohnen, Ed.). London: Regnery Publishing.
Tomasello, M. (2014). The ultra-social animal. European Journal of Social Psychology, 44(3), 187–194.
Van der Meer, T., & Tolsma, J. (2014). Ethnic diversity and its effects on social cohesion. Annual Review of Sociology, 40, 459–478.
Verhaeghe, P. (2014). What about me? The struggle for identity in a market-based society. London: Scribe Publications.
Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 29(6), 1024–1054.
Vertovec, S., & Wessendorf, S. (Eds.). (2010). The multiculturalism backlash: European discourses, policies and practices. New York: Routledge.
Voogt, J., & Pareja Roblin, N. (2012). A comparative analysis of international frameworks for 21st century competences: Implications for national curriculum policies. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 44*(3), 299–321.

Watermeyer, R. (2019). *Competitive accountability in academic life: The struggle for social impact and public legitimacy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*. London: Penguin Books.

Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2018). *The inner level: How more equal societies reduce stress, restore sanity and improve everyone’s wellbeing*. New York: Penguin Press.

Wimmer, A., & Feinstein, Y. (2010). The rise of the nation-state across the world, 1816 to 2001. *American Sociological Review, 75*(5), 764–790.

Wolff, J. (1998). Fairness, respect and the egalitarian ethos. *Philosophy & Public Affairs, 27*(2), 97–122.