Equality versus solidarity

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Abstract. Although equality and solidarity are often thought of as constituent parts of the same ideological framework, there are inconsistencies between them. Both concepts refer to a range of meanings: equality can refer to equal treatment, opportunity or result, and solidarity, a term which is of growing influence in European social policy, can refer to mutual aid or group cohesion. Despite the close association of these ideas in theory, there is a tension between them, and they offer prescriptions for policy which are likely to conflict. British pensions policy is taken as an illustration; the case for solidaristic redistribution has had to be balanced against that for egalitarian policies, with some unpredictable results. The concepts of equality and solidarity can be reconciled, but this depends on the application of a set of limiting interpretations; they can just as easily be represented as incompatible.

The idea of 'fraternity' is one of the great socialist ideals, though it is litle discussed in comparison with the literature on 'liberty' or 'equality'. The term was defined after the French Revolution, in the constitution of year III, in the following terms:

> "Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you; do constantly to others the good which you would wish to receive from them." (cited Tulard et al, 1987, p.832).

Although this is not a very accurate description of the concept - it misses almost altogether the dimensions of collective action and social bonding which characterise the concept - it helps to identify what the principle became. Barker (1951) suggests that the idea of 'fraternity' probably has more to do with emotion than with any principle of action; but in so far as it does have a content, it refers to 'co-operation' or 'solidarity' (1951, p.142). In the literature of social policy, 'solidarity' refers to the establishment of collective action and recognition of mutual responsibility (Spicker, 1990). This is often related to egalitarian policies, in one way or another. However, the prescriptions of 'solidarity' may tend in a very different direction to policies which pursue equality. Equality and solidarity are not necessarily incompatible objectives, but as commonly understood, there is a tension between them which means that each might undermine the other.

Equality

Equality refers, in a social context, to the removal of disadvantage. A number of critics tend to confuse 'equality' with 'sameness' or uniformity; but people are not considered 'unequal' simply because their hair is a different colour, because some are fat or some are thin, or even because, like the ant and the grasshopper, some people make music while others make food. People are unequal because there is something which leads to them being advantaged or disadvantaged in terms of treatment, opportunities or circumstances. This may be based in differences between people - the classic examples are race and gender (both, it is important to note, socially constructed issues); but the objective of policies concerned with equality is not to remove differences, but to change the relationships which the differences imply.

Egalitarian policies are commonly framed in three main ways (though there are many dimensions: Rae, 1981). Equality of treatment, or procedural equality, is concerned with the removal of bias or unfairness in the way people are responded to; this includes measures against discrimination and equality before the law, and in the context of social policy, it is primarily linked to access to services. Equality of opportunity might be taken to mean that everyone has an equal opportunity to compete (in which case it is not necessarily distinguished from equality of treatment), but it may also be taken to mean that people are able to compete on equal terms, which implies a removal of substantive disadvantages in the means to compete. Equality of result, or substantive equality, is concerned with the distribution of rewards and privileges. (I have discussed these issues at some length elsewhere: Spicker, 1985; 1988).

Equality is frequently, and not surprisingly, linked with the issue of redistribution. 'Redistribution' covers generally those circumstances in which the resources of some are transferred to others, or used to benefit others. This might, of course, include regressive as well as progressive measures, and not all redistribution is egalitarian in its intention or its effects; but redistribution is seen as one of the principal means through which greater equality can be achieved. Equality of treatment implies redistribution only in the most limited terms, in so far as the power and advantages of some are limited in order to protect the position of others who are disadvantaged. Equality of opportunity, taken to mean the provision of an equal foundation for competition, implies rather more progressive redistribution; it is necessary to provide at least a base level of goods, services and resources in order to realise opportunities. Equality of result, of necessity, requires a major progressive redistribution of resources and powers. Although these positions represent arguments which are qualitatively different, they can also be seen as progressively increasing stages in the demand for egalitarian redistribution.

Rae (1981, ch 6) outlines four strategies for the reduction of disadvantage. The first is maximin, which is to maximise the minimum standard experienced. This reduces inequality in so far as the disadvantage of those who are poorest is reduced, though it does not necessarily imply that that redistribution is progressive above the minimum level. Second, it is possible to change the ratio of inequality, which means that the resources of those who are worse off are improved relative to those who are better off. Third, there is the reduction in the range of inequality, by reducing the distance between those who are worst off and those who are best off, which Rae refers to as 'least difference'. (This may seem similar to the ratio principle, but it is possible to reduce the ratio while increasing the distance, for example by paying greater amounts to people who are better off, which is one of the the effects of earnings-related pensions.) Lastly, there is 'minimax', or reducing the maximum; there is no absolute benefit to those who are poorest, but there may be a relative benefit because of changes in the structure of power and in competition for scarce resources. It is possible to defend any of these principles in terms of equality of opportunity; and each of these four strategies, taken to its extreme, could lead to a similarly equal results. But not all of them have the same effects on the people who are initially disadvantaged during the process of implementation. Only maximin requires a concentration on the resources of the worst off. Minimax leaves them with the same resources, which will improve their position in relative but not in absolute terms. A concentration on the ratio or the least difference may allow for some improvement in absolute resources, but a reduction in inequality can be achieved with fewer resources being directed to those with least than would be the case with a maximin strategy.

The issue is not, then, simply one in which there are progressively increasing demands for egalitarian redistribution. What happens, instead, is that different understandings of the aims and methods of egalitarianism lead to important differences in policy, method and results.

Solidarity

The idea of 'solidarity', in its broad sense, is familiar as part of the literature of sociology, where it is used by Durkheim (1973) to refer to the ways in which people relate to each other in different divisions of labour, and so to the processes which bind society together. In the context of social policy, it refers primarily to a network of social relationships through which people support each other; and the term has come, through general use, to have a specific set of meanings in relation to welfare systems. In France, the term 'solidarit╤' is an established part of the language of social welfare provision: the concept has been included in the first article of the code of social security, and the Minister principally responsible for welfare provision is entitled 'ministre des Affaires sociales et de la Solidarité nationale' (Alfarandi 1989 p.181).

The use of the term has been widespread, and it has come to carry a range of associated meanings, rather than one unambiguous usage. On one hand, it refers to the establishment of relationships of mutual support between people, often through the mechanism of social insurance. Dupeyroux refers to 'la mutualité' as expressing solidarity within classes - 'exprimant une solidarité de classe' (1989, p.44). The emphasis falls in such cases on mutual aid for social protection, and joint action to achieve collective ends. But the idea of 'solidarity' is also used to imply progressive redistribution. The Fonds National de Solidarit, which in France is more or less equivalent to the exchequer contribution to the National Insurance fund for pensions, is solidaristic because it goes beyond the mechanisms of individual contribution and entitlement - though it is perhaps worth noting that the state contribution is minimal, much of the finance coming in practice from creaming off contributions (Spitaels et al, 1971, p 300; Alfarandi, 1989, pp 450-451). In practice, the idea of solidarity is most used for benefits which help the poor from general taxation, like the Allocation de solidarité spécifique for long-term unemployed people. This seems to identify the idea of 'solidarity' broadly with the mechanisms of social protection associated with welfare states.

The core of the idea of solidarity is the development and acceptance of responsibility for others. The nature of that responsibility depends strongly on an interpretation of the way in which people in society relate to each other. If people are seen primarily as individuals who interact with each other on certain terms, then the recognition of mutual responsibility can be interpreted in terms of 'mutualism', or mechanisms which depend mutual self-interest - the kind of relationships examined in Olson's book *The logic of collective action* (1971). The capacity of individuals to act can be increased by co-operation with others; co-operation in the field of welfare helps individuals to achieve their goals by offering social protection through pooling resources and sharing risks. Examples include not only the formal mechanisms of social insurance, but a range of protective services provided through a welfare state; basic provisions for health care or income support can be easily justified on a contractarian basis.

If, by contrast, the view of society which is adopted is collective, the kinds of responsibility which people have to each other have to be understood not in terms of individual self-interest but rather of social cohesion or bonding, which is much closer to the sense in which Durkheim uses the idea of solidarity. Solidarity as a form of social cohesion can be seen as having a wider application than it does to welfare provision alone; norms, patterns of exchange, and social roles might all be seen as different means through which relationships of mutual responsibility are formed. This is solidarity as 'fraternity' rather than 'mutualism'.

All forms of collective provision can be seen as 'solidaristic' in the broad sense of the term, if only because collective action requires a degree of solidarity to be possible; but welfare provision is often represented as particularly important for social cohesion. From the point of view of the providers, the provision of welfare represents a practical expression of social responsibility; for recipients, welfare provision has an important

integrative function (see Boulding, 1967; Titmuss, 1974). Equally, group cohesion is strongly associated with collective action. This view is reflected, for example, in a report to the Swedish Labour Party:

> "in a society which claims solidarity as a basic principle, is demanded organised co-operation and strengthened influence of society in order that a redistribution of the unevenly distributed resources and opportunities can occur" (cited Kvist, Agren, 1979, p 34).

The influence of the Swedish model can be seen in Furniss and Tilton's work (1979). The development of solidaristic action into issues of participation and political organisation, which Furniss and Tilton advocate as part of a fully developed welfare state, is simply an extension of the principle of 'fraternity' in the context of welfare.

It is debatable whether the idea of solidarity relates directly to the circumstances of people who are disadvantaged, because of their limited ability to participate, but it is widely interpreted as if it did so, and the implications of the principle of solidarity for those who are most disadvantaged are no less complex than those of different forms of egalitarianism. Solidarity as mutualism tends to refer to situations in which people might experience low income - like unemployment, sickness, disability and old age - but it does not necessarily relate to all such circumstances, and the Implications of any redistribution would depend strongly on the nature of the group within which solidaristic relationships were held to exist. The social protection which solidarity provides can be used to reinforce the position of relatively privileged groups, like professional associations, and it does not necessarily extend to others who are excluded; indeed, much of the disillusion with the concept in France relates to the failure of solidaristic arrangements to protect those who are most vulnerable. (Mossé, 1985; Alfarandi, 1989).

Solidarity as fraternity is sometimes identified with redistribution to those who are poorest. This is perhaps implicit in the identification of solidarity with patterns of social security which are not related to the mechanisms of contribution and entitlement; in some cases, though, the identification is quite explicit. Dorion and Guionnet write of the caisses d'allocations familiales in France that they are not there just to provide 'horizontal solidarity' - between people without children and those with them: their role 'is also to go beyond ... horizontal solidarity and to look to improve the situation of the most disadvantaged families. A vertical solidarity is then superimposed on the horizontal solidarity'. (Dorion, Guionnet, 1983, p 104) A similarly strong identification of solidarity with redistribution is implied by the 'solidaristic wage policy' pursued by the trades union movement in Sweden. The objectives of the policy are expressly egalitarian in form: it is intended to pursue united action for an improvement of living and working conditions, the limitation of differentials, and a level of income transfer. (Robinson, 1974)

However, it is not clear from this that the kind of redistribution demanded by solidarity is of the same kind as that demanded by the different strategies of equality. The kinds of solidarity which are being demanded here are seen as 'solidaristic' because people stand together: this can be achieved through egalitarian policies, but it might also be achieved by other means. Solidarity might be taken to imply the recognition of mutual interdependence, which would argue for a limited income transfer but which might still fall short of egalitarianism. It might imply social protection: but social protection can mean the protection of people in unequal circumstances, as it does in the case of earnings-related pensions - which prompted Titmuss's fear of 'two nations in old age'. It might favour horizontal redistribution - that is, from people in some categories to people in others, including for example redistribution between generations, or from those without families to those with families. Horizontal redistribution can be regressive in effect (as it generally is in cases of redistribution to older families; and

Le Grand argues that in general the effect of universal provision in the welfare state has been to favour the middle classes: Le Grand, 1982) . The patterns of redistribution identified as solidaristic are different, then, from those implied within egalitarian redistribution.

Equality and solidarity

Theoretical examinations have identified the concepts of equality and solidarity closely. Titmuss's model of 'institutional- redistributive' welfare presents them as part of an ideal form of welfare, associated with the idea of the 'welfare state'. (Titmuss, 1974) Institutional welfare is based on the view that needs are socially constructed, and that conditions of dependency are a normal part of each person's life. Provision for need is, as a result, 'institutionalized' in society. This is close to the principle of solidarity; both constitute a set of arguments for social protection on a collective basis. Titmuss saw this principle as egalitarian - the 'redistributive' element of his model - because it meant that social protection would be offered to everyone, and effectively the losers in society would be compensated by the gainers. Institutional welfare is egalitarian, too, in another sense; it has been informed by a strategy which has emphasized not simple redistribution from rich to poor, but the use of social provision as a means of reducing disadvantage in society as a whole. Tawney argued that the object of egalitarianism

> ... is not the division of the nation's income into eleven million fragments, to be distributed, without further ado, like a cake at a school treat, among its eleven million families. It is, on the contrary, the pooling of its surplus resources by means of taxation, and the use of the funds thus obtained to make accessible to all, irrespective of their income, occupation or social position, the conditions of civilisation which, in the absence of such measures, can only be enjoyed by the rich. (Tawney, 1931, p 122)

This kind of position lends some support to Mishra's representation of the institutional model as an intermediate stage on the road to socialism, (Mishra, 1981) and if the institutional model can be represented as a means of achieving greater social equality - even though its practical effectiveness in doing so has been disputed (see Le Grand, 1982) - it seems to follow that solidarity can be taken in the same way. However, despite the apparent compatibility of the concepts, there have to be some reservations. The relationship of solidarity and equality is a complex one. The initial position from which a discussion of the relationship between the two concepts has to begin is not that they are compatible or incompatible, but only that they are independent of each other; they refer to a different, if interrelated, set of issues, and offer different prescriptions for policy.

The first, and most evident, tension stems from the nature of the groups to which the different concepts refer. Solidarity as mutual support implies that people support others who are supporting them - and those who have not been able to contribute, like foreigners, long-term unemployed, or chronically sick and disabled people, will either not be included or be included only on inferior terms to others who do contribute. This could be represented as treatment of people on the same terms, with the pretence that people would not have been excluded if they had only met the requirements, but the conditions are manifestly not equivalent. The mechanism is seen most clearly in the bifurcation between insurance-based benefit systems and means-tested systems; if insurance tends to be relatively generous in relation to means-testing, it is not least because the means-tested programmes are directed at those who fail to meet the contribution conditions of the insurance-based programmes. Solidarity as fraternity could be extended to take in many of those excluded on a mutualist basis. Even then, however, one has to ask to whom the principle of fraternity extends. Ideas of 'community', 'fraternity'

and even 'citizenship' are necessarily exclusive as well as inclusive; there are those who are defined as falling outside the boundaries as well as those within. Where welfare systems have developed on a specifically industrial basis (as in the *régimes speciaux* in France) they tend to become, not symbols of universal brotherhood, but clubs - distinguished not only by internal bonding but also external barriers. The formation of exclusive groups, or even of groups with a strong local solidarity, might be seen as being inconsistent with equality in most senses.

The second principal tension concerns the prescriptions which the different concepts offer for redistribution. Solidarity and equality are at their most compatible in cases where both call for progressive redistribution. Dupeyroux suggests that the idea of solidarity might justify progressive contributions in insurance schemes (Dupeyroux,. 1989, p 147), but the mechanisms often go beyond this; the French régime de solidarité; for example, is intended to protect those who have been unable to contribute. Progressive redistribution to those who are poor or disadvantaged seems to be substantively egalitarian, at least in the sense that people finish in a situation which is more 'equal' as a result of the redistribution. However, the redistribution which results from solidarity may fall far short of equality, for the kinds of reason which have been discussed above. For solidarity and egalitarianism to be reconciled, the solidarity has to be of a kind which leads to a substantial progressive redistribution of resources. In other words, it has to be egalitarianism under a different name.

In many political debates, the issues of solidarity and egalitarianism are often confused: for example, the case for Child Benefit is often made in terms of its effects on poverty When most of the poorest families receive no net benefits from it; objections to student loan schemes, or any other alternative to the highly regressive grant system, are presented as a defence of disadvantaged students. The character of these arguments largely reflects a common political tradition, which has led to a close ideological identification. But in practice, the two principles have different implications for policy, and if there are tensions between them it is not least that they have the potential to pull decision-makers in different directions. An emphasis on greater equality can be taken to reduce the scope for mutualism - not least because mutualism has been closely associated with the independent sector. And a stress on solidarity as fraternity can lead to policies which, if not inegalitarian in a strong sense, may fail to redress inequalities (like universal provision in education and health); may reflect existing inequalities, like earnings-related benefits; and may even imply distinctions and divisions between in-groups and out-groups, like differential benefits for unemployed people or discrimination on the basis of nationality or citizenship.

Equality versus solidarity

The analysis given of the concepts earlier suggests that there is not only one kind of equality, or one kind of solidarity, but several logically separable principles which stand in a variety of relations to each other. This means, unsurprisingly, that there are likely to be contradictions betwen the various dimensions and formulations of the concepts.

Conflicts between equality and solidarity might be resolved in several ways. One option is to emphasise one value or the other as being of particular significance, so that equality is desirable in so far as it promotes solidarity or conversely that solidarity is desirable in so far as it promotes equality. It is possible to argue, for example, that greater equality leads to greater solidarity, on the grounds that inequality tends to be divisive. In this case the justification for equality is framed partly in terms of solidarity; equality is, at least in part, a means to an end. This suggests that egalitarian policies which undermined social cohesion would be suspect; Crosland's idiosyncratic defence, in his discussion of equality, of the London clubs and the Guards is consistent with this principle, as would be a defence of the monarchy (Crosland, 1956, p.217). It is possible

for conservatives to defend the role of the voluntary sector and charity in similar terms; if the 'gift relationship' is solidaristic, then the assumption of this role by the state in the name of equality might tend to undermine solidarity.

Conversely, one might argue that solidarity is justified in so far as it leads to greater equality, because solidarity implies sharing and redistribution. It may happen that solidaristic policies have an inegalitarian impact, because solidarity can also reinforce people's position within the social hierarchy. Examples are student grants, which generally favour a richer section of the population, and subsidies to owner-occupiers. Student grants might be defended in terms of equal treatment or of equality of opportunity; subsidies to owner-occupiers are difficult to defend on any terms. But it is not necessary for an egalitarian to oppose the subsidies directly, because greater equality can also be achieved through the development of subsidies for other kinds of household.

One has the option to accept the value of both solidarity and equality, rejecting the aspects of each which come into conflict with the other and fostering those aspets which are complementary. This implies rejection of solidarity which is inegalitarian (like the formidable social cohesion of a caste system) or egalitarian policies which are not solidaristic (like the attempts of French or Soviet revolutionaries to overthrow traditions). This seems attractive, but it does surprisingly little to limit the scope for conflict. Because both equality and solidarity are complex ideas, they cover a range of different kinds of policy. Equality and solidarity can be made compatible, but much depends on the sense in which the terms are taken; it may mean that equality of treatment might lead to greater mutual dependence, but it could equally mean that equality of results leads to a stronger sense of fraternity - two statements of a very different kind, drawing on different kinds of principle and referring to different values.

Solidaristic policies may be mutual or fraternal, that is individual or collective; equality may refer to equality of treatment, opportunity or result. Because the ideas are complex, there is the potential for a great deal of ambiguity, and there is often a certain vagueness about the precise import of particular ideas. I have tried to show this in tabular form; although the shortened comments required in a table may seem cryptic, it is possible in this format to show the extent to which one is dealing with a matrix of inter-related ideas, rather than a simple relationship between two monolithic concepts.

Equality leads to solidarity if

	Solidarity means:	
	Mutuality	Fraternity
Equality means:		
Equal treatment	People are able to contribute and receive on equal terms	People are seen as citizens
Equal opportunity	Gainers compensate losers	Class barriers break down
Equal result	Benefits and services are	There is social justice

universal

Solidarity leads to greater equality if

	Solidarity means:	
	Mutuality	Fraternity
Equality means:		
Equal treatment	People join mutual societies on equal terms	People co-operate and give each other common respect
Equal opportunity	People are protected by solidaristic benefits	People accept a social responsibility for others (especially children)
Equal result	Shared risks lead to redistribution according to need	Solidarity results in progressive redistribution

Equality can undermine solidarity if

	Solidarity means:	
	Mutuality	Fraternity
Equality means:		
Equal treatment	Distinctions between in and out groups are barred	Solidarity was based in structured differences
Equal opportunity	People cannot co-operate for mutual advantage	Competition undermines co-operation
Equal result	People lose personal responsibility for mutual aid	There is no 'gift relationship'

Solidarity can undermine equality if

	Solidarity means:	
	Mutuality	Fraternity

Equality means:

Equal treatment	Solidarity implies a preference for some over others	Solidarity is exclusive
Equal opportunity	Solidarity preserves advantages	People finish very unequally
Equal result	Limited solidarities differentiate groups	The principle of cohesion preserves structured differentials

What these tables show is that solidarity and equality can be reconciled, and without too much difficulty; but also that this depends on a particular set of interpretations of both concepts. It is quite possible to interpret the concepts, with equal force, in terms which are incompatible. The principles are both complex and independent from each other; as such they offer different prescriptions for policy which are as capable of contradicting as they are of reinforcing each other.

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