EQUALITY AND THE MORALITY OF SOCIAL STATUS

by

Alexander Motchoulski

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2022

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by: Alexander Motchoulski
titled:

and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Allen E. Buchanan
Allen E. Buchanan — Date: Jul 28, 2022

Thomas Christiano — Date: Jul 26, 2022

Steven P. Wall
Steven P. Wall — Date: Jul 28, 2022

Justin Bruner
Justin Bruner — Date: Jul 28, 2022

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

We hereby certify that we have read this dissertation prepared under our direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Allen E. Buchanan
Allen E. Buchanan — Date: Jul 28, 2022
Philosophy

Thomas Christiano — Date: Jul 26, 2022
Thomas Christiano
Philosophy

Acknowledgements

Anyone who does philosophy, or does it well anyway, can appreciate just how social our discipline really is. And anyone who appreciates that can appreciate just how wonderful a place the University of Arizona is to do philosophy. The benefit of the guidance, discussion, feedback, and advice that I have received here cannot be overstated. The least I can do is make clear my debts of gratitude.

My greatest debt is one that I will never be able to adequately repay, as it goes to Jerry Gaus. Jerry did not so much teach me how to do philosophy as he taught me how to think. He was exacting, demanding, and highly critical, all while demonstrating unwavering support, friendship, and intellectual companionship. He did the most of anyone to scrub my intellectual vices into virtues (whatever vices remain apparent throughout the work are my own). Jerry's uncompromising commitment to the truth business, as he called it, inspires and guides my thought. His work served as a role model for the kind of clear-headed, self-reflective, and disciplined thinking that one must have when wrestling with fundamental social issues. It is because of Jerry that I have come to appreciate the value of interdisciplinary work and diverse methodologies when dealing the kind of deep moral and political issues that are worthy of philosophical investigation, and I hope the appreciation of that lesson is apparent throughout the work. The basic idea of this dissertation—a philosophical examination of relations of social status—was developed in conversation with Jerry over beers at Gentle Ben's. And it surely would have been better had I been able to continue arguing with him. I miss Jerry greatly, and I wish he could have been around to see what he helped me accomplish.

I owe a debt that rivals my debt to Jerry to my co-advisors Allen Buchanan and Tom Christiano. After Jerry's untimely death, Allen and Tom stepped in and helped me continue my research in as seamless a way as one could, given the circumstances. Allen's enthusiasm and support for the project was much appreciated, and he never failed to identify fruitful extensions and applications of the ideas developed. The good of his support is only rivaled by the good of his criticism and feedback, which regularly challenged me to improve on my thinking. While Tom was just as supportive as Allen, he was also far more critical, which was every bit as helpful, if not more so. The challenges that Tom brought to my attention,

especially from the perspective of other egalitarian schools of thought, were tremendously beneficial in helping me situate my own thinking. Most crucially, Tom helped me in thinking about the relationship between the morality of social status and principles of justice. It is never easy to lose a friend and a loved one, let alone when they are your dissertation advisor. The fact that I was able to continue to produce the work that I have in spite of suffering such a loss is a testament to the excellent of Tom and Allen.

The remaining members of my committee, Justin Bruner and Steven Wall, were no less helpful. Justin ensured that I got my thinking about status and social cooperation right, and he offered much needed guidance and support there. Thanks to Justin, I have a far greater appreciation of the complex way in which social status relations shape the social world. Steve challenged me along lines similar to those that Tom brought to my attention. He pressed me to get straight the relationship between the moral principle of social status that I defend and other kinds of egalitarian moral principles. Especially helpful was Steve's suggestion to think about the relationship between social status and justice in terms of envy. The most sophisticated statement of ideas, which is given in the appendix, was a product of Steve's guidance.

I have been thinking about these ideas for several years, and so naturally I have accumulated numerous debts to friends that have offered help along the way. Many thanks go out to: Jacob Barrett, Chetan Cetty, Adam Gibbons, and Julian Jonker. I owe an especially great debt to Elizabeth Levinson. Not only did Liz provide regular feedback in my thinking about social status, but she is also the only person who has seen my ideas at every single stage and had the patience to help me between each one. Without our numerous, productive conversations about social status and social order, my thinking about the phenomenon would be far worse. I am truly fortunate to have her help and companionship.

Dedication

For Jerry

CONTENTS

being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature, there cannot be supposed any such *subordination* among us

John Locke, *Second Treatise*

I. Introduction: A Moral Theory of Social Status

1. The Morality of Social Status Relations

A ubiquitous feature of human social lives, and of most animals really, is the presence of relations of social status. Most any person will have developed an intuitive grasp of social status relations, allowing them to understand the way in which certain persons hold a relatively "high" place whereas others hold a relatively "low" place. Such distinctions of social positions often play a profound role in shaping our social lives. One's relative social position can in large part determine the kinds of persons they meet and interact with, the kinds of opportunities made available to them, and the amount and kinds of goods and resources that they receive. It is no exaggeration, I think, to say that relations of social status are among the most fundamental constituents of social order.

The subject of this dissertation will be that of developing a moral framework for the assessment of relations of social status. What moral principles might there be for the assessment of relations of social status? What are the grounds of those moral principles? What implications do moral principles concerning social status have for other constituents of social order? The present work endeavors to address these questions.

I will argue that the morality of social status is deeply egalitarian. This account aims to make good on the ideal of social equality that finds expression in many forms of social and political discourse throughout human history. According to this ideal, individuals ought to be social equals. Who could not recoil at paradigm violations of social equality, such as master-slave or lord-servant relationships? Condemnation seems the natural response to these relationships—they are (rightly, many of us think) called demeaning, humiliating, or objectifying, among other expressions of moral disapproval.

The basic claims that will be central to my view is expressed in the epigraph taken from Locke. I will argue that relations of social inequality are inappropriate among beings who are moral equals. While it may be argued that Locke's sense of "subordination" concerns only relations of political power, the line of reasoning underlying Locke's statement is one that is applicable in the case of social relations: when certain social relations among us are unequal, we are wrongly neglecting our moral equality. I will argue that there are certain kinds of relations of social status inequalities of which are inimical to the basic moral freedom that all persons are equally entitled to. The idea, then, is that there is a kind of social hierarchy that is incompatible with the conception of persons as free and equal.

The claim that we share in a basic kind of moral equality is especially familiar to philosophers. Moral and political philosophers have for some time discussed the wrong or bad that occurs when the moral standing of individuals is unrecognized. A commitment to recognition of basic moral standing is implicit in Bentham's famous dictum that "everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one." And, the concepts

of dignity and humanity which are central to deontological moral theories such as Kant's give pride of place to respect for our equal moral standing.

Recent philosophy has begun to draw on the inherited wisdom concerning our basic moral equality to argue that this moral fact has profound implications for the organization of our social lives. Thinkers in the revived republican tradition conceive of our basic freedom as expressing an entitlement to non-domination by any other. And, relational egalitarians, whose views exert a deep influence on the present project, hold that our basic moral equality requires equality entails substantive egalitarian commitments in various economic, social, and political domains.

Following in the spirit of contemporary republican theorists and relational egalitarians, I will argue that our basic moral equality grounds an egalitarian moral principle with respect to certain relations of social status. A detailed discussion of the concept of social status will take place over the course of the subsequent two chapters. For now, it will suffice to provide a simple, if incomplete, contrast between the concept of our equal moral standing on the one hand, and the concept of social status on the other.

To start, moral standing is a fact about beings which moral agents are required to attend to in their deliberation and decision-making just because of the kind of thing that being is. Social status is how one is appraised of in comparison to other members of some specific group.

Unlike moral standing, which might only admit of differences of degree, social status comes in many different kinds as well as degrees. Status relations obtain in a diverse range of groups. I will be principally concerned with our social status within society as a whole. I shall refer to that kind of status as *public social status*. Put simply, your public social status is how good others think you are as a member of society in comparison to other members. Locke's basic insight, I will argue, is true in the case of public social status—relations of superiority and inferiority among individuals qua public persons are incompatible with persons understood as sharing in a basic moral standing as free and equal.

I will shortly elaborate on the general features of the theory that I will develop over the course of the dissertation. Before turning to do so, however, I think that it would be beneficial to discuss what is desired from a moral theory of social status. Such discussion will make the standards of success for such a theory clear and will further allow us to situate the moral theory of social status developed here in the broader tradition of analytic moral and political philosophy.

2. Some Remarks on the Method of Moral Theory

A basic desideratum of the present project, and indeed of a moral theory on any subject, I think, is that of making pertinent concepts clear. Oftentimes, our basic convictions and judgments may contain a great deal of ambiguity or vagueness. Such indeterminacy will

be an impediment to determining what our practical attitudes and commitments toward the relevant subject matter should be. Social status is no exception to this. It is not entirely clear what exactly social status is, whether equality of social status is an apt articulation of the ideal of social equality, or, indeed, what exactly is meant by the ideal of social equality. One would hope that we could arrive at a relatively precise characterization of the condition of equality of social status and the relationship between an egalitarian account of social status and the more general ideal of social equality.

Clarity concerning the concept of social status and the demands concerning it is important to achieve, since ambiguity left within the theory can give rise to a number of practical challenges. It is inevitable that in our complex and often imperfect collective social and political lives we will encounter various hard cases. Will the pursuit of equality of social status be worthwhile a particular social cost? When, if ever, can the pursuit of other values be subordinated for the sake of promoting equality of social status? An attractive theory will at the very least provide us with a framework for working through such questions.

It should be stressed that satisfying this aim does not require that we provide a determinate judgment in all possible cases where there is conflict. Surely that would ask too much of any moral theory. There are various contingencies that can shape the moral landscape of our world in important ways, many of which cannot be anticipated or accommodated within the scope of a single philosophical work, let alone several. The more appropriate aim, I think, is to develop a framework for the assessment of relevant claims, so that we have some set of well-defined guidelines that will assist in taking account of all reasons that may be relevant so as to guide our practical deliberation where equality of social status is at issue. We may thus summarize the first desideratum of a moral theory of social status, then, with the claim that the theory should make explicit and clear the moral demands that concern social status, such that we can tractably appeal to and deliberate about those demands within the context of our social-moral practices.

The second desideratum of the theory is that of bringing coherence to moral claims concerning social status. There is no guarantee that our pre-theoretic convictions that make any given theory of the morality of social status attractive at the outset are in fact mutually consistent. Judgments concerning social equality may be incompatible in a way that frustrates our deliberation or, in the worst case, risk making such deliberation incoherent. To mention one relevant example, those who find appeal in the ideal of relational equality often make distinctions between the kinds of relations that ought to be egalitarian, and those that justifiably need not be egalitarian. Many seem to hold, for instance, that caste systems are unjustified forms of social inequality, whereas inequalities of status between parents and children are justifiable. An important aim for a moral theory of social equality is to explain how such boundaries concerning the claims of social equality can be drawn in a principled way. Absent that, we risk resting the theory on

jointly inconsistent judgments, or otherwise on the basis of unprincipled and *ad hoc* argumentation that is contrary to the very aim of rigorous philosophical analysis.

Mere consistency, of course, is not all that coherence consists of. A coherent theory will illustrate how it is that many related judgments and principles are systematically related. This consists of more than merely ordering the demands articulated by a moral principle of social status. We should also hope to establish coherence with respect to other relevant moral principles or commitments that are thought to be related in some important way to the morality of social status.

Two commitments are often thought to be related to the morality of social status, especially when the latter is conceived of in egalitarian terms. The first is that of distributive justice, the second is democracy. It is quite natural to think that equality in the domain of social status can have important relationships to equality in distributive and political settings. To appreciate the importance of establishing coherence among associated normative notions, let us consider the relationship between an egalitarian conception of the morality of social status and democracy in some greater detail.

The idea that we ought to relate as equals within society has been understood to provide justificatory grounds for democracy.[1] An egalitarian theory of social status, then, should also make clear and render coherent the relationship between these two normative aims, for, it is not entirely clear that the relationship with democracy is as direct as many theorists have thought.[2]

The standard rationale proceeds along the following lines. An important component of our social relationships are our political relationships. Political relationships of inferiority and superiority, it is often thought, give rise to social relationships of inferiority and superiority. For the sake of maintaining equality within our social relationships, we ought to have equality within our political relationships. Consequently, social equality requires democratic equality. There are numerous complications that need to be addressed regarding this point. I will mention two that I think raise important challenges.

First, democratic arrangements are normally understood to provide individuals an expansive liberty to choose whom they will associate with. The private associations that individuals choose to participate in may very well involve social hierarchies. So, we should hope to make clear the relationship between the moral theory of social status, democratic institutions, and hierarchical private associations. Are hierarchical associations permitted given a commitment to social equality? Does the equality of social status provide us with any basis for assessing private hierarchies? And, is there any difference between, on the one hand, the relationship between social equality and

[1] Indeed, Elizabeth Anderson initially presented her theory of relational equality under the label "democratic equality," in her "What is the Point of Equality?" See also Kolodny, "Rule over None II;" Viehoff, "Democratic Equality and Political Authority."

[2] For a challenge in this spirit, see Viehoff, "Power and Equality."

democracy, and on the other, the relationship between social equality and private hierarchical organizations?

Second, we need to take into consideration the fact that social inequalities will obtain even under democratic institutions. It is not entirely true that democratic institutions are fully egalitarian with, even with respect to such things as power. Most democratic institutions allow for inequalities of power between citizens and political officials, such as elected representatives or judges. Is there any principled basis that explains why these kinds of political inequalities may be justified, but other, non-democratic ones, cannot? If no principled basis can be offered in reply this question, then it may be that ideal of social equality would require a rather radical form of direct democracy.

The answers that a moral theory of social status provides to the above questions will bear considerably on how plausible that theory is. And, such answers should be developed in a principled way that makes clear their relationship to the overarching moral theory of social status. So, the second desideratum of the moral theory of social is that the theory should establish coherence among various evaluative dimensions and related evaluated commitments that pertain to social equality. An appealing theory should explain how various moral commitments that make up the theory of social status hang together in a systematic way.

Lastly, we have the desideratum of establishing a grounding for the principles that make up the moral theory of social status. As appealing as the ideal of social equality may be, the simple fact that one finds such an ideal attractive is hardly enough to serve as a ground for an egalitarian theory of social status relations. Intuitions can only count for so much, and they are no substitute for arguments. Our normative allegiance may easily be misplaced, a lesson that history repeatedly reminds us of. Many of even our most dearly held convictions are a product of our time and place. The appearance of self-evidence has too often proved illusory. We should ask of our moral principles, then, whether there is some reasoned basis for them aside from the simple fact that we find them attractive.

Now, this is not to say that every notion that makes up the theory must have some kind of justification. Such a requirement would surely be too demanding—every philosophical argument must begin with some premise, or set of premises, that is taken for granted. The present desideratum holds only that when it comes to defending an egalitarian moral theory of social status relations, we must do more than simply appeal to the fact that there have been a number of occasions where persons have found what appears to be a related social ideal especially intuitive or appealing. Social equality will trivially be a moral ideal if we take that as our starting point. The more interesting question is whether there is any widely held enduring commitment common to persons of diverse moral views that can be relied on to provide a justification for an egalitarian principle of social status. Put another way, we might ask: is there anything that can be

said on behalf of an egalitarian theory of social status to make such a theory appealing to others who do not share in a basic egalitarian allegiance, or is the theory constructed on the basis of unshared intuitions and thus acceptable only to those who already have some underlying egalitarian commitments? A more interesting theory, I think, will be able to provide some compelling answer to the first disjunct in the preceding question, and in doing so it will satisfy the final desideratum of a moral theory of social status.

The discussion in this section, I hope, has made clear what exactly I hope to achieve by developing an egalitarian moral theory social status. To sum up the ideas, the general aim of a moral theory of social status is to provide a precise articulation of a moral principle that would govern relations of social status. That principle should further be shown to have an appealing ground that amounts to more than mere appeal to underlying intuitions. And, the development of the basic principle of equal social status and its entailments should strive to establish coherence among that principle, relative normative notions, and the principle's entailments.

These desiderata are, of course, standards that apply to a moral theory of social status as a whole, rather than to any particular claim or argument made within or on behalf of the theory. We may only tell whether the desiderata are satisfied or not when the complete theory is before us. As developing that theory is the task of the remainder of this dissertation, at this point I can only sketch in broad strokes the general features of my view in the hope of showing how it is that the complete theory will satisfy the desiderata of rigorousness, coherence, and plausible grounding.

My proposal is that there is a distinct kind of social status that is of particular moral significance. As mentioned above, that kind of social status is what I will call *public* social status. Relations of social status apply within specific social contexts, and what is distinctive of public social status relations is that they apply to society as a whole. The central principle on this view is the *principle of equal public social status*, according to which we ought to be equals within relations of social status. I will defend the principle of equal public social status on the ground that there is a deep relationship between our moral freedom and public social status. Under conditions of inequalities of public social status, those who are deemed low status will suffer often severe impediments to the development of their basic capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good, in addition to being vulnerable to various forms of moral mistreatment. The relationship between equality of public social status and moral freedom is thus contingent, but deep. The relationship is deep because it based on enduring and basic features of our social psychology, features that seem to be so deeply ingrained that they are manifest in most any social setting across all of human history. It may not be true that humans in all possible worlds will have such a psychology that establishes the relevant relationship between equality of public social status and moral freedom, but I believe that it will be true of our psychology in our actual world that the relevant relationship will obtain in it.

The principle of equal public social status will play the central organizing role in my theory. From the grounds of that principle, I argue that we arrive at conditions for the justification of some inequalities of public social status. Some such inequalities will be justified because they will be normal byproducts of the pursuit of other goods and values that individuals are entitled to pursue as an exercise of their basic moral freedom. The grounds of the principle of equal public social status, then, establish the limits that are set on the principle as well. Drawing on relationships between public social status and, respectively, resources, political power, and legal status, I go on to argue for a qualified principle of equal resources, a justification of democratic institutions, and their authority.

At this point, I think it may be appropriate to say a few things about how I conceive of the theory just sketched within the context of broader traditions of moral and political thought in analytic philosophy. Traditions in analytic philosophy are built around common basic commitments or acceptance of some shared basic premise. We often find, however, that there are numerous basic starting points available, many of which seem to offer an equally attractive ground for a moral theory. It is the business of philosophy as an ongoing social practice to investigate these different starting points by building comprehensive theories on them that aim for overall coherence. We may then compare the theories that we construct from different starting points, asking whether they may be compatible, or whether one produces reasons that challenge the other. From there we engage in the familiar activity of argumentation, revision, and refinement of our views. When a view shows itself to be resilient by surviving this activity over time, we begin to have grounds for thinking that the theory has achieved an attractive kind of coherence. This is the kind of coherence that I think is captured by John Rawls' notion of narrow reflective equilibrium.[3] But, achieving internal coherence while successfully answering external challenges is not the entire story. For there still may be other appealing fundamental grounds that we may have taken as our starting point that produce entirely different moral theories. We should still hope to show that an internally coherent view that survives challenges over time is in some way compatible with other views (which took on different starting points) that achieve that same kind of persistence and internal coherence. On this picture, the pressures that drive a moral theory toward reflective equilibrium (or, if it cannot be successful, to abandonment) occur at many different levels simultaneously.[4] The theory must strive to achieve internal coherence, it must be able to answer pressing challenges from external competing theories, and it must be shown to

[3] *Justice as Fairness,* pp. 29-30.

[4] To continue to borrow Rawls' terms, the thought here is that we pursue wide reflective equilibrium by way of achieving narrow reflective equilibrium from different starting points and then trying to integrate the conceptions that are in narrow reflective equilibrium together. The aim, then, is to achieve reflective equilibrium among a set of conceptions that have attained such equilibrium internally. For Rawls' discussion of wide reflective equilibrium and the contrast with narrow reflective equilibrium, see *ibid.,* pp. 30-1.

be compatible, and perhaps even coherent, with other enduring theories based on different appealing starting points.

My hope is that the egalitarian moral theory of social status that I develop can achieve the requisite degree of internal coherence while being based on an appealing moral ground that is shared widely among many different moral views. That moral ground is, of course, the conception of persons as free and equal who are in possession of the capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good and who have a claim that others do not undermine the development of that capacity. Most of this dissertation will be focused only on achieving internal coherence within the moral theory of social status while addressing objections whenever they arise. Supposing that the theory can indeed be shown to achieve the relevant kind of internal coherence and persistence in the face of challenges, the hope will then be that the theory can be integrated and made coherent with other attractive moral theories of different subject matters because the present account is based on a starting point that is widely shared among other theories. Moreover, the hope for inter-theory reflective equilibrium is understood to be further advanced by establishing a clear relationship between the present moral theory of social status and moral theories of such things as democracy and the law. I will argue that the present view ultimately converges with the considered judgments we reach concerning democratic institutions and the organization of the law, and I take this convergence to be a consideration that speaks in favor of the present theory as a whole. So, I understand this work as one that develops a moral theory that can be integrated into and made coherent with any other theory (that achieves the requisite degree of internal coherence and persistence) which also takes as its starting point the conception of persons as free and equal. Thus, the present work advances our understanding of the conditions that a social order must satisfy to be a society suitable for persons conceived of as free and equal.

3. Outline of a Moral Theory of Social Status

This dissertation will address many questions touched on in the preceding remarks: What exactly is social status? Why are inequalities of public social status in particular incompatible with our equal fundamental moral standing? What are the distributive consequences of a principle of equal public social status? How does the status principle justify democratic institutions?

Chapter II begins by providing a conceptual account of the idea of social status. I start by examining social scientific insights into the phenomenon of social status. There is an emerging scientific consensus that social status is, roughly put, how your peers evaluate you in comparison to others within a given group. I proceed to flesh out this characterization of social status by way of contrast with the concept of our basic moral standing. I conclude chapter II by distinguishing a particular kind of social status that will be of central importance throughout the dissertation. As I have mentioned above, I call

that kind of social status *public* social status, and it concerns your relative appraisal within society as a whole.

Chapter III develops an argument for the principle of equal public social status, or, as I will refer to it throughout, the "status principle." I argue that we ought to accept the status principle because inequalities of public social status preclude recognition of individuals' equal basic moral standing. This conflict arises on two grounds. First, inequalities of public social status risk undermining individuals' sense of self-esteem, which will preclude the adequate development and exercise of their capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good. Recognition respect requires at least that we avoid undermining that capacity, so consequently recognition respect will require equality of public social status. Second, when inequalities of public social status are too great, the low status are commonly regarded as non-persons. Pervasive inequalities of social status can thus directly give rise to failures to recognize the moral standing of persons, another clear failure of recognition respect. These two reasons supply the basis for the status principle, which I take to be an articulation of the moral ideal of social equality.[5]

Chapter IV identifies limits on the demands of the status principle. Without qualification, the status principle will be too demanding to be plausible, as it would require us to subordinate all other goods and values for the sake of equality of public social status. The right to the free development of our basic moral capacities, I argue, requires leaving for individuals sufficient room to form and pursue their own conceptions of the good, and that as a consequence inequalities of public social status may be justified whenever greater equality of public social status would come at too great a cost to other goods or values. This argument raises a novel challenge, namely that of determining when exactly inequalities of public social status will be justified. I suggest that this indeterminacy can be resolved by relying on institutionalized procedures for adjudicating conflicting evaluative claims.

Chapter V speaks to what kinds of institutions we should rely on for adjudicating such conflicts. There, I argue that the status principle provides a justification for democratic institutions. Inequalities of political power will normally cause inequalities of public social status, which means that the status principle will require that political power be allocated in an egalitarian, which is to say democratic, way.

---

[5] Following the defense of this dissertation, I realized that there was a significant flaw in the argument for the status principle. My mistake was to assume that considerations in favor of inequalities of public social status could at best have instrumental value by virtue of the positive effects that relations of social status can have on social cooperation. I think now, however, that it may very well be possible that normatively substantive considerations, like considerations of justice, may also be reasons in favor of greater inequalities of public social status. In order to correct this mistake, I have added an appendix which develops the relationship between justice and social status by examining envy. There, I argue that a revised form of the status principle is the ground of reasonable envy, which is envy that has as its object an inequality that the envious has a claim to have reduced. The revised account of the status principle given in the appendix should be understood to supersede statements of the principle offered at earlier stages of the dissertation. Similarly, the account of justified public social status inequalities offered in the appendix should be understood to also supersede the account offered in chapter IV.

Simply showing that democratic institutions are justified will not, however, suffice to resolve the problem that persons will disagree about whether some inequalities of public social status are justified or not. To complete the answer to that problem, we must also establish that persons have a duty to obey democratic decisions, at least within certain reasonable boundaries, even if they have substantive grounds for disputing the outcome democratic processes. Chapter VI answers this remaining worry by providing an argument for the authority of democratic institutions. I propose a theory of political authority that relies extensively on duties of reciprocity. Such duties, I argue, are based in a ground common with the status principle, namely that of recognition respect for our standing as fundamentally free and equal. The status principle conjoined with a principle of reciprocity provides us with an appealing theory of democratic authority, thus completing the solution to the problem of disagreement.

Chapter VII explores the implications of the qualified status principle for distributive justice and various kinds of social cooperation. I show that if we accept the status principle, we must accept a conditional principle of resource equality. I go on to show that in many kinds of cooperative settings inequalities of status can lead to appealing social outcomes, which provides reasons in favor of justifying certain degrees of status inequalities though, we will also often have countervailing reasons to constrain the degree of status inequality that we should tolerate. One aim of this chapter to illustrate the complex relationship that social status relations can have to other determinants of social order, and how this can complicate our pursuit of the advancement of equality of public social status.

Chapter IX concludes by reviewing the general theory developed here. The contribution I hope to have made is the development of a holistic moral theory of social status relations which satisfies the desiderata laid out in the previous section. The basic idea behind this theory is that moral equals ought to be social equals. Relations of public social inferiority or superiority are inappropriate among persons who are equal members of the moral community.

II. Social Status

I begin the development of a moral theory of social status in this chapter by developing a more precise characterization of the concept of social status. To start, I draw on various contributions to the social sciences to arrive at a preliminary characterization of social status. Roughly put, your social status is what members of a common group think of you in comparison to other members of the group. Then, I refine this characterization of social status by way of contrast with the concept of moral standing. The final section of this chapter then addresses the question of how specific characteristics of persons become sources of greater or lesser status. In the course of this final discussion, I distinguish a particular kind of social status that will be central throughout the dissertation, which I call *public social status*. Your public social status is how other members of society appraise you as a public person in comparison to other members of society.

1. A Preliminary Characterization of Social Status

To begin to develop a moral theory of social status, it will naturally be crucial to develop a clear understanding of what exactly relations of social status are. "Social status," as I will use the term throughout, refers to a specific feature of human social structures. In broad terms, one's social status is how others within a relevant group evaluate one in comparison to other members of the relevant group.

Social status is thus understood to pick out a distinctive kind of social fact. Just about any human being becomes acquainted with this kind of fact in the normal course of their social lives. Kids on a school playground, bosses speaking to subordinates in a firm, and tenured faculty interacting with graduate students are all sites where relations of social status shape social interaction. In these situations, and many others like them, we can pick out that some participants are "above" in some sense, while others are "below" in the same sense. But what sense do we have in mind exactly?

A first step toward developing a more precise characterization of social status is to distinguish it from related concepts with which it is often conflated. Some such related concepts are quite easy to distinguish. For instance, the term "status" is sometimes used to refer to one's relative economic position. The determinants of status on this use of the term are things like income, wealth, or the number of resources that one possesses. Clearly, we can distinguish status qua relative evaluation from status qua relative economic position. Throughout human history emerging merchant or trading classes have occupied relatively low positions of social status despite accumulating a greater degree of wealth than those "above" them. Or consider how so called "new money" is stereotypically thought to be lower status than "old money," even when the latter has wealth that is comparable, if not superior, to the wealth of the latter. So, though it is

sometimes natural to conflate one's economic status with one's social status,[6] the two are nevertheless distinct features of our social world.

Another concept (or bundle of concepts, really) that are often conflated with social status are concepts like power, *de facto* authority, or influence. For ease of reference, I will refer to this bundle of concepts simply in terms of "power." It will be particularly important to distinguish social status, as I will use the concept, from power, as conflation of the two is quite likely to occur. Psychologists have often thought that status and power could be used interchangeably,[7] and philosophers have been apt to think of status as being at least constituted by or related in some deep way to relations of power or authority.[8]

As the point here is that of providing an illustration of a distinction between concepts, we will not need an especially refined conception of power, so I will take for granted (without argument) that one's power is their capacity influence the world through the exercise of their own will. It is clear that power and status are often related. CEOs of major firms and heads of state are cases of persons who both wield a great deal of power and are regarded as being especially high status. Indeed, as I will later argue (in chapter V), this close relationship between power and status obtains because wielding power can be a source of social status. But this does not mean that power and social status are identical. There are just as many examples of persons who have power without status or vice versa. An oft appealed to example in the literature on the psychology of social status are Department of Motor Vehicle employees or Transport Security Administration employees in the United States.[9] Persons working for these agencies often wield a great deal of power over others, as they have control over whether others can receive drivers' licenses or board airplanes. But yet, this group of persons is often regarded as being especially low status. Or consider the case of a lame duck president in the United States. The lame duck president is still the president, wielding the greatest degree of executive power in the country. And yet, after elections pass, such presidents are generally regarded as being lower status than the president elect, who shares in none of the executive power.

The difference between power and status is borne out in laboratory experiments. Social psychologist Steven L. Blader and colleagues have conducted a number of experiments showing how individual decision-making is influenced by the receipt of power or social status. These experiments test the hypothesis that because power and status are distinct, when a person is endowed with one or the other, she will be disposed to track different features of her social environment. Specifically, since status is

---

[6] I should like to make clear that I do not mean to say here that social status and economic status are entirely unrelated. The point, rather, is just that the two concepts are distinct.

[7] For an extensive critique of the view that conflates status and power, see Blader and Chen, "What's in a Name? Status, Power, and Other Forms of Social Hierarchy." The discussion of the psychological literature that follows draws extensively from Blader and Chen's survey of the literature.

[8] Kolodny, "Rule over None II," pp. 295-6.

[9] Fast et. al., "The Destructive Nature of Power without Status."

understood, still roughly, as what others think of you in comparison to others, persons who are framed to think of their social position in terms of status should show a greater concern for what others think of them.[10] Persons endowed with power, on the other hand, should not demonstrate as great a concern for what others think of them, as the possession of power is independent of others' opinions of them. Because of this, power is often observed to have a liberating effect, leading persons to attend less to the perspective of others and to focus more on their own goals and desires.[11] The experimental evidence bears out these distinctions, with participants in high status conditions showing greater concern for others than in the control while persons in high power conditions showed less concern for others than in the control.[12]

Psychological theory and evidence thus provide compelling support for the claim that we should treat power and status as distinct social phenomena. Carefully designed experimental settings allow us to draw a contrast between the two concepts especially clearly. That being said, it is important to note that actual social contexts are hardly designed to keep the concepts distinct, and that it is quite natural for power and social status to be closely related in of subtle ways. As such, I think it will be helpful to examine one more study of the relationship between power and social status under less contrived social settings. To do so, I will turn to the case of what the anthropologist Christopher Boehm calls *reverse dominance hierarchies*.

Boehm has extensively studied numerous small-scale egalitarian societies. Small-scale societies across the world, occupying a diverse array of niches while being isolated from most other human communities, have remarkably similar commitments to norms of equality. Members of such society display a common, and often intense, commitment

---

[10] Blader and Chen, "Differentiating the effects of status and power;" Blader et. al., "Looking Out from the Top;" Flynn et. al., "Helping one's way to the top;" Ridgeway, "Conformity, group-oriented motivation, and status attainment in small groups;" Ridgeway, "Status in groups."

[11] Galinsky et. al., "Social power reduces the press of the situation;" Galinski et. al., "Power and Perspectives not Taken;" Guinote, "Power and Goal Pursuit;"

[12] For readers interested in greater detail, here is how one of these experimental studies were conducted (the details are taken from a study in Blader and Chen, "Differentiating the effects of status and power"). Participants were asked to role-play as a leader who was tasked with firing a subordinate. In being provided their role, participants were subject to different kinds of experimental manipulations, with some being described as being high status, some being described as having a high degree of power, some having both, and some having neither. Participants were then asked to write layoff memos. The language of the memos was coded by independent raters for how fair the decision and implementation of the termination appeared to be based on what was written, and participants were also asked to complete measures that would indicate their concern for fairness and their general degree of attentiveness toward the person being fired. The memos and indicators of persons in high status conditions showed a greater presence of a concern for fairness in the memo and on the part of the participant, and the exact opposite was observed in high power treatments. Interestingly, in cases where subjects were both high power and high status, the effect of the power seemed to override the effect of being high status, resulting in persons showing less concern for fairness and the point of view of others than in the control.

to mutual respect and equal individual autonomy.[13] Many resources in such communities are distributed equally. The precious resource of meat is shared equally, and authority is generally shared among the group as a whole. If it happens that one distinct person must be appointed as a leader to coordinate an activity such as hunting, then the superior position is made temporary and geographically bounded, expiring upon the hunting party's return home.[14] Despite a ubiquitous devotion to equality, such groups regard one kind of person as being socially inferior. Boehm found that within these groups, there is a widespread practice of belittling, shaming, and putting down young men.[15] Young men, who generally have the greatest share of natural power by virtue of possessing greater strength than most other group members, are deliberately marked as public inferiors. As one member of the !Kung, a tribe near the Kalahari, puts the point:

> When a young man kills much meat, he comes to think of himself as a chief or a big man, and he thinks of the rest of us as his servants or inferiors. We can't accept this. We refuse one who boasts, for someday his pride will make him kill somebody. So we always speak of his meat as worthless. In this way we cool his heart and make him gentle.[16]

These small-scale societies are especially vulnerable to being taken over and dominated by would-be alpha-males. In order to preserve their egalitarian social order, these societies deliberately mark would-be dominators as being inherently inferior; their contributions and accomplishments are "worthless," they are regularly ignored or addressed only indirectly, and they are even ostracized on occasion and made to occupy the periphery of their society. Reverse dominance hierarchies thus play an important role in constraining would be dominators in order to preserve the egalitarian order of small-scale societies.[17]

The case of these small-scale egalitarian societies is especially fascinating for a number of reasons. First, we see that status inequality can obtain even in a social situation where persons are equals along most other dimensions and indeed are deeply and uniformly committed to maintaining equality among themselves. The small-scale societies deliberately follow egalitarian norms when it comes to matters of resources or authority, and yet they are still able to bring about inequality of social status despite this egalitarian political and economic background. This provides further support for the claim that relations of social status are a kind of social phenomenon that is distinct from phenomena such as relations of authority or economic relations. Since reverse dominance hierarchies are instances of social status inequalities, the existence of such inequalities must be explained by some property of social relations that can obtain even when there are background conditions of equality of resources and authority.

---

[13] Boehm, *Hierarchy in the Forest*, pp. 65-9.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-5 and 69-72.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 43-59.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Second, we see a case of social status relations being shaped by group policies for a deliberate purpose. As the member of the !Kung quoted above makes clear, the status hierarchy is deliberately designed to keep young men at the bottom as a check on their dominating behavior. This suggests that status relations are a feature of our social world that are liable, to some extent, to being shaped and guided in a deliberate way. This suggestion will be important to keep in mind in later chapters where I examine the ways in which equality within certain particular status relations might be promoted.

Third, we see further support for the preliminary characterization of social status that has been relied on in the discussion thus far. That characterization, recall, conceives of one's social status in terms of what others think of one in comparison to other members of the relevant group. We see this characterization borne out in the case of small-scale egalitarian societies because the mechanisms by which the reverse dominance hierarchy is maintained are all designed to communicate clearly to young men that they are thought of very poorly in comparisons to others. Notice that it is *not* by way of changing their share of resources or authority that the young men are given a subordinate position. Rather it is through acts of belittling, shaming, ostracizing, and the like. What these kinds of behaviors have in common is that they deliberately aim to communicate to young men that group members evaluate them as their social inferiors. These young men are made to occupy the lowest rung of their group's social hierarchy by way of making these evaluations clear.

The preceding discussion, I hope, makes some progress toward developing a clearer characterization of the concept of social status that I will be using throughout this dissertation. The concept is informed a great deal by insights from various social sciences that have refined the folk concept that most any well-socialized human must have. Moreover, the scientific insights are not merely cherrypicked from various idiosyncratic results, but rather are gathered from a growing unified scientific theory of social status:

> The emerging consensus among many status researchers is to define social status as the prestige, respect, and esteem that a party has in the eyes of others. Status is an index of the social worth that observers ascribe to an individual or a group, and, as such, it is the outcome of observers' subjective evaluative process, which constitutes a critical part of the status conferral process.[18]

[18] Blader and Chen, "What's in a name?" p. 74. References are omitted in the quotation. Among the sources that Blader and Chen cite in support of their claim are: Anderson and Kilduff, "The Pursuit of Status in Social Groups;" Blader and Chen, "Differentiating the effects of status and power;" Fiske, "Interpersonal stratification;" Henrich and Gil-White, "The evolution of prestige;" Ridgeway, "Gender, Status, and Leadership;" and Ridgeway and Erickson, "Creating and Spreading Status Beliefs." Many of the sources discussed later in this chapter and throughout the dissertation provide further support, I think, for this conception of social status.

More, of course, needs to be said about what exactly social status is. What exactly is "social worth?" When do you have social worth in the eyes of another? A complete characterization of social status will need to address these questions.

I will shortly turn to developing such a (relatively) complete characterization by way of contrasting social status with what I will call our fundamental moral standing. Before turning to do so, however, I should like to address a potential worry that some philosophers might have with the preceding discussion. The worry, in broad terms, is that reliance on scientific perspectives of social status is in some way misleading or inappropriate. It might be misleading because the sciences cannot offer the conceptual clarity needed for proper philosophy. One might think that we should first get a clear sense on the concept of social status from the comfort of our armchairs, and only after having done that should we look at what our colleagues in the sciences think about status.

I must admit that I do not find this kind of worry particularly troubling. In the first place, it seems to me that the sciences can be effective processes for developing conceptual clarity. The process of formulating, testing, and refining hypotheses often involves a great deal of conceptual work that becomes progressively more sophisticated as hypotheses are made more subtle and complex. More importantly, I do not find the above worry troubling because social status is a kind of phenomenon for which scientific analysis will be especially fruitful at providing conceptual clarity. Social status is a distinctly social kind. Given the fact that we are social beings, we naturally have a predisposition for forming and refining mental models of status relations. But the data that we receive to form those models is predominantly gathered from our particular local social context. This raises the worry that our mental models may be inaccurate representations of social status relations as a general phenomenon. The models might be overfit to the parochial social conditions that we are accustomed to (thus neglecting differences that might arise in different kinds of environments), and those models may fail to appreciate global effects of social status relations that are not observable in local contexts (or, relatedly, we might mistakenly attribute local properties to the global phenomenon). This is not to say that our intuitive models of social status are worthless. Clearly they are not, as humans are quite often successful at navigating social status relations. Our intuitive models of status may very well satisfy the functional role of helping us navigate our local social environments while also being inaccurate representations of the global social phenomenon. If this line of thinking is correct, insights from the sciences will be indispensable for developing a more accurate concept of social status because the epistemic norms and procedures of scientific practice are precisely designed to guard against the kinds of failings that reliance on our parochial mental models will lead to. Accordingly, I think it is not only appropriate but necessary to rely on scientific insights on the phenomenon of social status in order to develop a more refined understanding of the concept. This is why the discussion throughout the

dissertation will draw a great deal on scientific insights about the phenomenon of social status relations.

I will now turn to developing a more precise characterization of the concept of social status. I will do so by contrasting the concept of social status with the concept of our fundamental moral standing. This contrast will not only illuminate a number of distinctive features of social status relations, it will also set the stage for the discussion in the subsequent chapter, where I argue that inequalities of a particular kind of social status are incompatible with recognition of our fundamental moral equality.

2. Social Status and Moral Standing

Received wisdom among moral philosophers is that, at the very least, adult humans who normally participate in social life have equal basic moral standing.[19] Put generally, to say that some being has moral standing is to say that the interests of the being count, morally speaking, for their own sake. To say that adult humans who are participants in social life have equal moral standing is to say that the interests of all such persons count for their own sake, and that no person's interests are more morally important than any others.[20] A being's moral standing is fundamental when the moral significance of its interests is independent of any external factor—the interests of the being count, morally speaking, because of the kind of thing the being is. Beings have equal fundamental moral standing insofar as the interests of one being are to be considered equally with respect to the similar interests of another being.

What it means to take moral account of an interest is, of course, a matter of considerable dispute among competing moral theories.[21] On a deontological theory, the

---

[19] I restrict my focus to solely adult humans, because adults are those who stand in relations of social status, and it is the beliefs and attitudes of adults that make up those relations. By restricting my focus on adult humans, I do not mean to suggest that only adult humans are of equal fundamental moral status, and that thus non-human animals have some kind of inferior moral status (or that they lack such status in the first place). The philosophical jury is still out on that question, and I have no need to take a stand on whether, and what kind, of moral status non-human animals (and perhaps even non-animal beings such as plants or ecosystems) in the context of the present project.

[20] I would like to note here that I am using the term "moral standing" in an idiosyncratic way. As the term is normally used, moral standing is a binary notion, and some entity has moral standing just in case it counts, morally, for its own sake, and, by contrast, *moral status* is a relative notion, so that while two entities can both have moral standing, they be of differential moral importance, which would mean they have differential moral status. See Buchanan, "Moral Status and Human Enhancement," p. 346. Strictly speaking, what I refer to as moral standing is really moral status. The reason why I will use moral standing in this idiosyncratic way is because I want to keep the idea of moral status especially distinct from the idea of social status. As I will make frequent reference throughout this dissertation to the idea of status, in order to avoid confusion regarding different kinds of status (social and moral), I reserve the term "moral standing" for what we typically call moral status.

[21] As Amartya Sen observes, no theory rejects that individuals are equals in at least some respect, even if there is considerable disagreement about what exactly the import of that fundamental equality might be. See his *Inequality Reexamined*, ch. 1.

equal moral standing of beings might be understood in terms of attributing to beings identical sets of basic moral rights. Or, on a utilitarian view, one can understand the equal moral standing in terms of weighing the welfare of beings equally in the utilitarian moral calculus. Put generally, if the interests of a being are to count, morally speaking, then the interests of the being must in some way be included in moral deliberation and decision-making, and the precise way in which such inclusion is to be achieved is to be spelled out by a complete moral theory.

Moral standing is quite distinct from social status. We have already covered a number of examples social status relations above. And, of course, we encounter behaviors influenced by social status in all corners of our social lives, as when someone buys and uses luxury goods, when individuals slip the name of their prestigious alma mater into conversation, or, to consider a case of greater moral urgency, when, a woman is passed up for a position at a law firm in favor of a man because the man, in a sense to be analyzed at much greater length shortly, is thought to be "more valuable." These behaviors all track something rather different from our fundamental moral equality.

While it may be clear that social status is distinct from moral standing, it will be worthwhile to pursue in greater detail where exactly the difference between these concepts lies so as to develop a more complete understanding of social status relations. There are four features of social status in particular that are worth drawing attention to. (i) Social status is constituted by individual attitudes, whereas moral standing is not. (ii) Social status is most closely related to attitudes of appraisal, whereas moral standing, in addition to not being constituted by attitudes, is also more closely related to the contrasting attitude of recognition respect. (iii) Social status is pluralistic, in the sense that there are many different kinds of status relations an individual may occupy at once, whereas there is only one kind of moral standing an individual can have. And, (iv) social status is rivalrous and zero-sum, in the sense that individuals may compete over it, and one's gains in social status comes at the expense of another, whereas moral standing is not rivalrous.

i. Both moral standing and social status concern a kind of fact. To say of some individual that they have equal fundamental moral standing is to acknowledge the fact that their interests count for their own sake within the context of moral deliberation and decision-making.

To say of some individual that they have some degree of social status is to acknowledge a very different kind of fact. Suppose, for instance, that some philosopher P has high-status within the philosophical community. Given this fact, we would normally infer that P is well-known and well-regarded among philosophers, or that P's teaching is especially excellent, or perhaps that P is thought to be a pleasant colleague. To claim that an individual has high-status within some community, then, is to say that

members of that community have certain kinds of positive attitudes toward that individual.

In being constituted by the attitudes of others, an individuals' social status within some group will change in response to changes in attitudes, whereas moral standing would never change in response to variance in individual attitudes. If, for example, it was to suddenly come to light that P has been plagiarizing work and was in fact a rather rude and nasty colleague, so that the attitudes of the philosophical community toward P became negative in response to these facts, then we would no longer think that P was high status. Suppose, instead, that P came to be ostracized by the community, no longer welcome at conferences, no longer invited to give talks, and generally ignored in social settings among philosophers. In this case, we would correctly say that P is low status among philosophers. One's moral standing, by contrast, depends only on the kind of being that one is, making independent from others' attitudes.

ii. While moral standing is not constituted by individual attitudes in the way one's social status is, it is nevertheless closely related to one attitude that will be especially important in arguments that follow, namely, that of *recognition respect*. On Stephen Darwall's well-known characterization, to "respect something in this way is just as to regard it as something to be reckoned with (in the appropriate way) and to act accordingly."[22] The appropriate object of recognition respect is a fact that one ought to take into consideration in their deliberation. Recognition respect for an individual qua moral person, then, consists of taking into consideration the interests of that individual in one's moral deliberation and decision-making, and to regulate one's subsequent conduct by the constraints derived from taking that individuals' interests into account.

The attitudes that make up social status, on the other hand, seem to be quite different from attitudes of recognition. Consider again P's status in the above example. When P is thought of as a high status philosopher, their work is thought of as relatively better than typical work in philosophy, or their collegiality is thought of as relatively better than the kind of collegiality normally encountered in philosophy, and so on. The kinds of attitudes involved in determining the status of individuals are not attitudes of recognition, but rather attitudes of *appraisal*. Appraisal respect, or esteem, consists in positive or negative evaluations of individuals grounded in good- or bad- making characteristics of the person.[23]

While a kind of appraisal seems to be involved in social status, we should be careful to keep the two ideas, social status and appraisal respect, distinct. Appraisal respect, as it is characterized by Darwall, is an attitude that is a *fitting* reply to the character or features of individuals.[24] The criterion of fittingness makes the idea of appraisal respect a

[22] Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," p. 40.

[23] Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect." See also Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, pp. 122-6.

[24] "Two Kinds of Respect," pp. 41-2.

normative one. But, as we have frequently seen at this point, social status concerns a social fact, and so is not itself a normative concept. Whether one is high or low status is simply a function of the kinds of evaluative attitudes others have towards her in the relevant community, regardless of whether the attitudes are fitting or not.

iii. Throughout the preceding discussion, mentions of social status have for the most part been accompanied with a description of the kind of group within which the kind of status under consideration was relevant. Such attention to context is needed because there are many different kinds of social status in a given society at once.

A junior associate at a law firm, for example, might occupy a middling position at her law firm but might be of very high status among her friends and family by virtue of being a successful lawyer. And even if she occupies a middling position within her firm, if she works at an especially well-regarded firm, she may be regarded as relatively more estimable with respect to many of her colleagues in the profession as a whole.

There are many different contexts that give rise to different kinds of status. Law firms, basketball leagues, hospitals, university departments, and military organizations, to name a few, have their own criteria for determining the social status of a given individual. Being high or low status in any one context need not carry implications for one's status in any other.

Individuals' fundamental moral standing, on the other hand, is invariable with regards to the particular social context they occupy. Since the kind of being one is does not change with social context, individuals' moral standing will clearly be invariable with social context.

It is natural at this point to ask what constitutes a social context within which there can be status relations? A simple survey of typical human experiences suggests that status relations can occur in just about any social setting. Social status relations are a phenomenon that occur within situations as varied as small-scale relatively isolated societies, basketball players, school children, gang members, and professional philosophers. Indeed, as I will discuss in the following section, there are even status relations that pertain to entire societies. Only Robinson Crusoe alone on his island seems to stand outside the scope of status relations. This robust presence of socials status relations leads me to conclude that such relations can obtain in the simplest building block of social contexts: groups. Hence, it will be important to keep in mind that when we speak about some relation of social status, we are speaking about a relation that obtains within a specific kind of group. To refer to the phenomenon of status relations among Anglophone philosopher is to pick out a different instance of the phenomenon than those relations that occur among gang members.

iv. The last way in which social status may be contrasted with moral standing concerns the fact that social status is a purely positional good, which makes it zero-sum. Social

status is zero-sum because the appraisals that make up assessments of social status are essentially comparative. Your status consists not only of how others appraise, but rather of how others appraise in comparison to some other party. If someone is to be a member of the high class, then there must be some group of individuals who occupy the low class against which the high class is defined.[25]

A prominent illustration of the zero-sum character of status is provided by the phenomenon of keeping up with the Jones'. When individuals seek to increase their status, their aim is not to make some kind of absolute improvement in one or more of their characteristics, but rather a relative improvement.[26] If the Jones' buy a more expensive car, one must buy an even more expensive car to keep up.

It may seem that there is an immediate challenge for this characterization of social status. One might reply, for instance, that there are clear cases where status is not zero-sum. Imagine you live in a large-scale society with several millions of people, and that society has two distinct classes, the High and the Low. Suppose then that one person advances from being Low to being High. Did the status of every other person society really decrease? It seems more plausible to say that our social climber has gained in status at no cost to others.

We can, however, develop a case where we will reach a judgment opposite that of what we just arrived at. Suppose, for instance, that we have a group of three persons divided into the High and the Low, with one person being High and two being Low. Suppose then that one of the Lows becomes a High. Now it seems that there is clearly a cost to the status of other members. The original member of the High class has gone from being the unequivocally highest-ranking member to having an equal, and the remaining Low member has gone from having an equal to being unequivocally the lowest. In this case, it is clear that an increase in status did come at a cost to the status of others.

If we are to reconcile the intuitions in these two cases, we must find a relevant difference between them. The obvious one being that the number of persons in the two examples varies dramatically. How would a changing population size alter the effects that gains or increases in one's status has on the status of others?

There are two differences that the change in numbers makes. First, marginal gains in status may have diminished value in larger groups. Increasing your status to improve over one person in a population of one million makes far less of a difference than doing so in a population of three; in the first case, one's overall position hardly changes, whereas in the latter one advances over a third of the population. So, if the value of status depends on how many people one is superior or inferior with respect to, then in very large groups

[25] For some discussion on this point, see Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 131.

[26] The phenomenon of keeping up with the Jones' is an arms-race dynamic that characterizes competition over any positional good. For some detailed examinations of status arms-races, see Frank, "The Demand for Unobservable and Other Nonpositional Goods;" McAdams, "Relative Preferences."

marginal gains in status may appear to make little difference, and so may be neglected for that reason.

Secondly, it may simply be far more difficult to discern marginal changes in the status of individuals in large populations. Since status is constituted by attitudes of relative appraisal, this may mean that status will, in large scale social contexts, function as though it were a positive-sum good some of the time. The reason for this is that individual attitudes may not keep track of all discrete social changes that may influence status assessments. This will only hold, however, when there it is difficult to discern marginal changes in status. Such difficulty of discernment can be removed by modifying the above examples, in which case it seems the zero-sum nature of social status is once again prominent. For instance, we might imagine a society of millions equally split between High and Low where half the Lows suddenly become High. It seems that in this case there is a discernable cost that the original Highs take on, as half of those they were superior to are now their peers. At the limit, where all Lows become Highs, it would seem that there would no longer be a relevant social distinction between the Highs and the Lows.

Hence, I believe that for all intents and purposes status can be regarded as a purely positional good, meaning that it is zero-sum. The claim must be qualified to account for the fact that in large number cases it may be difficult to discern marginal changes in status, so that it may behave like a positive-sum good at times.

That social status is zero-sum does not imply that individuals always compete over social status. If, for example, I prefer to be no worse than average and you prefer to be the best, then you and I need not enter into competition over status. My securing my acceptable position does not preclude you securing yours.[27] But, it remains the case that if you occupy the highest status in our social group, then I cannot.

The zero-sum character of social status is clearly absent in the case of moral standing. Since moral standing is an intrinsic property of individuals, it is not the kind of thing that can be competed over. Nor does recognition of moral standing give rise to inherently competitive interactions. My recognizing that you have equal fundamental moral standing in no way detracts from my recognizing the same of other individuals. This is to be expected, given that fundamental moral status is not essentially comparative in the way social status is.

We are now at a position to sum up the concept of social status.

[27] For a classic analysis of how different preferences over social status can influence the organization of social settings, and especially firms, see Frank, *Choosing the Right Pond*, ch. 2 and Frank, "Are Workers Paid their Marginal Products?"

> *Social status:* individual A's social status within some group G consists of the relative appraisals shared among other members of G which compare A to other members of G.

It is crucial to note that social status is dependent on *shared* relative appraisals. The mere occurrence of a relative appraisal is insufficient because some individuals may have idiosyncratic beliefs about how some compare to others. Just because I believe that I am higher status than the president will hardly make it the case that I do in fact have higher status than the president. Social status relations are more or less defined in accordance with how widely shared the relative appraisals that make up those relations are among the relevant group of individuals.

So, one's social status consists of the relative appraisals that others make of one compared to some third party within some group. It is, we might say, a kind of assessment of overall value of an individual, as compared to others within a given group, that is shared among other members of the group. The mention of overall value is meant to capture the fact that individuals will often have many different status-conferring characteristics, some of which weigh against others. Writing excellent philosophy might weigh in favor of one's status qua philosopher, whereas being a poor colleague would weigh against one's status qua philosopher. One's overall status qua philosopher would then be an overall assessment that takes into consideration the quality of their work and their collegiality, among other factors. And, of course the sources of perceived value will be quite different across social contexts. The characteristics that make one high status among philosophers will be different from those that make on high status among gang members.

There is one further important question remaining. What explains how certain characteristics becomes sources of status value? In the next section, I will review the best available account of how status characteristics are constructed. Before turning to that discussion, though, I would like to draw attention to an interesting feature of this account of social status.

Social status understood in terms of what relative appraisals others make of you within a certain social context bears some striking similarities to Bicchieri's account of social norms. On Bicchieri's view, social norms are coordinated sets of second order expectations.[28] Social norms are, roughly, what others expect of people in the relevant group or setting. Similarly, social status is what others think of one in comparison to others. Both properties depend (though not exclusively) on coordinated sets of individual psychological properties—expectations in the case of social norms and relative appraisals in the case of social status. Indeed, a prominent line of sociological theory called "expectation states theory" identifies expectations about group member competence at valued activities (or, more generally, expectations about the value one may contribute to

[28] Bicchieri develops this account at length in her *Grammar of Society*.

a group) to be important in shaping relations of social status and status interactions.[29] Moreover, like social norms, status relations can be distinct from my own first-order attitudes and beliefs. In the case of norms, it can often be the case that one thinks that certain things are ridiculous to expect, but nevertheless feel compelled to comply with the expectations that constitute a social norm. For example, I might think that tipping is a ridiculous social practice, while nevertheless still providing a tip at the end of a meal. Similarly, I might believe that you are not really worthy of being high status within a group but given that other groups members do converge on a relatively high comparative appraisal of you, my behaviors towards you may still conform to expectations of how the high status are to be treated. Lastly, status relations may be said to have a norm-like character to them, in that they coordinate individual expectations in a way that resembles how social norms do so. As I discuss below in chapter VII, this allows social status relations to play important roles in organizing and motivating social cooperation. The present conception of social status thus illuminates how it is that social status relations can play an important role in establishing and maintaining social order—they do so by virtue of sharing in an important feature of social norms.[30]

3. Constructing Social Status Characteristics

Within a given group, there are numerous different features that can contribute toward your being higher or lower status. Among lawyers, getting your J.D. at Harvard will be quite a boon to your status, whereas being caught embezzling funds will detract from your status (and may even lead to your being kicked out from the group). What characteristics are status-conferring clearly varies by group. What gives one high status among artists is different from what makes one a high status lawyer. How is it that certain characteristics become a ground for the kind of relative appraisals that make up one's social status within a given group?

This question is of clear interest if we are to morally assess social status relations, as our moral evaluations should surely take into consideration the grounds of status relations. For example, a status relation that was constituted by relative appraisals based on characteristics such as individuals' race or gender seems to be morally suspect, whereas a status relation based primarily in achievements or skills that all have opportunity to earn or develop appears far less suspect.

---

[29] Representative contributions from expectation states theory are: Berger et. al., "Status Characteristics and Social Interaction;" Berger et. al., "Status Inconsistency in Task Situations;" Berger et. al., "Status Organizing Processes;" Ridgeway and Berger, "Expectations, Legitimacy, and Dominance Behavior in Task Groups;" Ridgeway et. al., "Nonverbal Cues and Status."

[30] For a related account of the constitution of social hierarchy, see van Wietmarchen, "What is Social Hierarchy?"

We should take further note of the fact that the question "how does some characteristic become a ground for the kinds of relative appraisals that make up status relations?" is an empirical one. Since status is constituted by attitudes and beliefs about relative appraisal, this question asks how it is that certain traits or characteristics become the basis for relative appraisal. And this is a question about individual psychological tendencies. For it asks, in effect, what kinds of traits or characteristics of individuals will garner positive, or negative, relative appraisals. To answer this question, we must examine how it is individuals behave in contexts where status is salient. Yet again, we see the indispensability of empirically-informed analysis when it comes to studying this peculiar feature of our social orders.

Status construction theory, which has been developed among sociologists studying social status relations, is perhaps the most complete account of how certain features of persons become status characteristics in the first place. According to this theory, four conditions must be met in order for a status characteristic to obtain.[31] (1) Some desirable good or trait must be believed to be distributed unequally among members of some population.[32] (2) There is a modest tendency for individuals to interact with others who have a relatively similar amount of the desirable object or degree of the desirable trait. (3) There is some characteristic which members of the population possess in different states. A *characteristic* is a general kind of category (such as race or gender), while *states* of characteristics are particular instantiations of that category (such as being white or being a woman). States of characteristics may vary along a gradient; for example, income and education can be characteristics, with particular amounts of income or particular degrees of education are states of those characteristics. The characteristic mentioned in this condition of status construction is the characteristic that will become a status characteristic. (4) Greater amounts of the desirable good, or greater degrees of the desirable trait, are correlated with one of the states of the characteristic mentioned in condition (3). When these four conditions obtain, regular social interaction among members of the population will cause the characteristic mentioned in (3) to be a status characteristic.[33] The process, in effect, is a sort of hardwired failure of induction—

[31] These conditions are taken from Ridgeway, "The Social Construction of Status Value."

[32] In Ridgeway's first statement of status construction theory (*Ibid.*), the desirable quality was restricted to only resources. However, subsequent extensions of status construction theory have demonstrated that almost any desirable quality can be used to construct status characteristics. See Webster and Hysom, "Creating Status Characteristics."

[33] We must add that these beliefs must diffuse through the social group and come to be shared. Just because I have the idiosyncratic belief that I am higher status than, say, Bill Gates, does not imply that I really am higher status than Bill Gates. Nor will the fact that my friends share that belief, supportive though they may be, make it the case that I am higher status than Bill Gates. The beliefs and attitudes that comprise status relations, then, must come to be shared amongst a sufficient number of individuals within the social group that the status relations might obtain.

regularly perceiving correlations of desirable goods or traits with certain characteristics leads us to infer that those characteristics are desirable and appealing in their own right.[34]

Status construction theory, we should note, proposes a hypothesis of the conditions under which a *novel* status characteristic might *emerge*. Since this theory is predominantly concerned with explaining the origin of status characteristics, it does not exhaust the ways in which individuals come to internalize the beliefs and attitudes that contribute toward some characteristic being a status characteristic. Consider the fact that most individuals are born into societies or enter into associations with well-defined preexisting social status relations. Rather than having to construct (in the sense described above) the characteristics that shape the relative positions of individuals within such hierarchies, individuals need only to learn the distinctions that are already established. Observing and learning from the behaviors of others within social settings with established distinctions of social status can lead individuals to internalize those status distinctions themselves.[35] Since individuals can internalize status distinctions through social learning, status distinctions may persist long after the conditions for their construction no longer obtain. It may be, for example, that some difference in status among races was based in the fact that there was considerable inequality of resources between members of these races. In the future, that material inequality might be reduced or eliminated, and yet if the social learning process that leads to the internalization of status distinctions is sufficiently robust, individuals may continue to observe, internalize, and act on status relations based on individual race.

Such social learning can, of course, only occur after the status construction process has taken place at some earlier point in time. The status construction process is thus, in an important way, at the heart of status distinctions.

It may be helpful at this point to consider a more concrete example of how exactly the status construction process works. Suppose a group of students at some school choose to start a chess club. Suppose, further, that this is a group of individuals that did not know each other previously, such that they do not come into the group with preexisting beliefs or attitudes concerning the relative esteem of any other member of the group. They meet on a regular basis to play chess, and at times go to tournaments together. What kind of traits could we expect would be transformed into status characteristics within this group? One obvious characteristic is skill at chess. When members of the club play each other or in tournaments, only some of them will be able to win, and supposing all members have some interest in winning their games, condition (1) will be satisfied. Condition (2) will be satisfied if players tend to play others of relative

---

[34] For laboratory evidence regarding the status construction process, see Ridgeway, and Erickson, "Creating and Spreading Status Beliefs;" Ridgeway et. al., "How Do Status Beliefs Develop?;" Ridgeway et. al., "How Easily Does a Social Difference Become a Status Distinction?"

[35] Ridgeway and Balkwell, "Group Processes and the Diffusion of Status Beliefs;" Ridgeway et. al., "How do Status Beliefs Develop?"

skill, something that is also likely to occur both within the club (games are more interesting when the skills of players are relatively close) and at tournaments (better players will make it further, playing better players). The characteristic in question that will become a status characteristic is chess playing skill. Such skill is likely to be distributed unequally among members of the group, so (3) will be met. And, if we grant that skill in chess translates to winning chess games, (4) will be satisfied. Hence, among our chess club, we should expect skill at the game of chess to become a status characteristic among that group.[36]

We can generalize the simple model offered by the chess club to any kind of group that participates in a common activity or shares a common aim. Status construction theory provides a theoretical basis that explains why we normally see individuals participating in the same activity or profession develop a status hierarchy on the basis of relative ability. It is the best chess players, doctors, lawyers, and basketball players that are often most esteemed among their colleagues.[37]

There is one kind of status relation that will be especially important in subsequent chapters that warrants special attention. Suppose I asked you to rank the following professions in terms of status: schoolteacher; professional basketball player; university professor; and janitor. I suspect individual rankings will be the following, from least to greatest prestige:

janitor < schoolteacher < university professor < professional basketball player.

Within what group does this status ranking operate within? It cannot be the group of any particular profession, as the ranking has in mind some group more general than any of the specific professional ones. We must have some kind of more general group in mind when we arrive at the above ranking.

There are many kinds of characteristics that seem to contribute to one's status in this general sort of way. Consider, for instance, characteristics such as education, wealth

[36] This process, we should note, has only paid attention to one characteristic. However, as I am sure is familiar from social experience, many kinds of characteristics weigh both positively and negatively on one's status. A talented chess player might also often engage in unsportsmanlike conduct, and that could very well reduce her social status among chess players. When assessing the status of an individual in some context, in order to reach an overall assessment of their status, we must aggregate among the relevant status characteristics. While social psychologists and sociologists have investigated this aggregation procedure in some detail, the details of this complicated process will not be pertinent here. The crucial point is that individuals will often have many different kinds of status characteristics, some that weigh positively, and others that weight negatively, and one's net social status is a kind of sum of these characteristics. For details regarding this aggregation process, the classic work is Berger et. al. *Status Characteristics and Social Interaction*; for an accessible summary, see Bianchi, "Status Characteristics/Expectations States Theory,"

[37] Though, of course, not always, because skill at a commonly valued activity does not exhaust the kinds of characteristics that can obtain in particular status contexts.

and income, race, and gender.[38] The state of one's characteristic (that is, their particular race, gender, occupation, etc.) often shapes how others perceive and treat them even in anonymous social interactions. Imagine encountering a stranger; you know nothing about what she does, who she knows, and who she is, except that she has a degree from Harvard. Chances are, individuals put in this situation will come to think of the stranger as relatively high status, simply on account of her having a degree from Harvard.

Characteristics such as one's education, race, and gender are what sociologists refer to as *diffuse characteristics*.[39] These are characteristics that individuals treat as grounds for the formation of attitudes and beliefs about relative appraisal where that appraisal is independent of any particular group. People earning more income tend to be thought of as more estimable in almost any group they happen to be in.[40] Indeed, the effect that one's diffuse characteristics have on the relative estimations that others make of one permeates throughout social contexts, as when one's race or gender influences one's social status their profession. It would be too quick to say this kind of status-conferral operates outside of groups as such. Rather, it seems that diffuse characteristics confer status within the group of our society. This explains why we can understand such characteristics as status conferring outside of a despite not occurring within some particular kind of group, and why these characteristics seem to inform status evaluations in most any group context—the latter is explained by the fact that individuals interacting qua members of a particular group (musicians, say) are also always interacting qua members of society.

When one interacts anonymously in a public setting with other individuals, diffuse characteristics will be the only characteristics that are salient. No more particular group or association is salient within such a context. Riding on a bus, few individuals, if any, will know of a successful academic's publication record or contributions to her field. Strangers will, however, notice the academic's race, gender, that she has a briefcase, and whether the briefcase is from a firm specializing in luxury goods, and so on. All of these features will contribute to how individuals appraise the academic relative to others on the bus. There is a clear sense, then, in which status evaluations based on diffuse characteristics are *public*. Their publicity comes from the fact that the relevant group within which status relations based on diffuse characteristics obtain is society as a whole.

---

[38] In mentioning these as common contributors to one's social status, I do not mean to suggest that they are appropriate grounds for greater social status. Rather, these observations are meant to report the familiar insight from social experience that one's race, gender, income, etc. affects how others perceive and treat one. Indeed, as I will go on to argue in subsequent chapters, inequalities of social status grounded in these kinds of characteristics are precisely the sort that we have conclusive reason to oppose.

[39] For an extensive analysis, see Berger and Fisek, "Diffuse Status Characteristics and the Spread of Status Value."

[40] These are, of course, tendencies, not necessary truths. Many of these factors may admit of counterexamples. For instance, a group of radically egalitarian anarchists living in the woods are likely to think of greater relative income as a trait that counts against one's relative esteem, rather than as a trait that counts in favor of it.

Accordingly, any member of society will be able to appraise the social status of any other on the basis of diffuse status characteristics. I shall refer to the set of relations based on relative comparisons of persons in terms of their diffuse status characteristics *public social status*. Hence, one's public social status consists of how they are appraised by fellow members of society in comparison to other members of society. To assess someone in terms of public social status is to appraise them as a public person.[41]

Relations of public social status are perhaps the exemplary relations that we have in mind when we think about social status. Caste societies are an especially clear illustration of a public social status hierarchy. In these societies, the relative place of each individual within the public social status hierarchy is determined in accordance with heredity, and these distinctions are especially clear because they are codified within the legal system. And, while caste societies might serve as the starkest illustration of relations of public social status, such relations obtain in every large-scale society, and are based in characteristics such as race, gender, and wealth, among others.

The construction of status characteristics in the case of diffuse status characteristics may seem puzzling. In the case of particular social groups with common aims or activities, such as the chess club example, it is quite easy to identify certain kinds of goods or traits that are commonly valued among members of the group. But what could carry such common value in the case of diffuse status characteristics?

Appeal to commonly held aims, such as winning at chess matches, is not available in the case of diffuse characteristics. Instead, for such characteristics to obtain, the good mentioned in condition (1) of status construction must be such that individuals value the good in question regardless of what particular community or associations they might find themselves in. These goods must be valued by members of society as such. If those goods were not commonly valued, they could not serve as grounds for the construction of a status characteristic for society as a whole. Hence, the relevant kinds of goods can be compared to what John Rawls called primary goods, or goods that individuals desire regardless of their comprehensive plan of life.[42]

We must add one important qualification to the claim made in the preceding paragraph. While the goods that ground the construction of public social status characteristics will be similar to Rawls' primary goods, they will not be identical. On Rawls' account, primary goods are what would be valuable to one regardless of one's plan of life. On the present account, however, it is not so important that the goods be valuable but that individuals *believe* them to be of value. As such, it would be more precise to refer to such goods as *perceived* primary goods. If all members of a society come to value some good or trait which, strictly speaking, does not contribute towards advancing one's overarching aim, then that good might not be a primary good, but it will be a perceived primary good. Hence, differences in public social status will arise from inequalities in

[41] Ridgeway and Balkwell, "Group Processes and the Diffusion of Status Beliefs."

[42] *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 78-81.

perceived primary goods that are correlated with different states of a given characteristic, granting the modest social sorting assumption stated by condition (2).[43]

Public social status has a number of properties that make it especially interesting for closer moral examination. It is pervasive, in that any member of some society stands in relations of public social status with all other members of that society. It is also involuntary, for, unlike most status relations, one cannot choose to exit the group within which relations of public social status obtain without cutting all social ties they have with other members of their society. And, as I will now argue, it is also a kind of social status which we have compelling moral reason to structure in an egalitarian way because of the relationship between public social status and our moral standing.

[43] The qualification "perceived" makes the candidate grounds far more expansive than what Rawls would have called primary goods. For instance, popularity or attractiveness may serve as a perceived primary good. For a discussion of the many goods or traits that can serve as a ground for diffuse status characteristics, see Webster and Hysom, "Creating Status Characteristics."

III. The Status Principle

This chapter develops a moral framework for the assessment of relations of social status. I begin by examining what is perhaps the most developed existing framework for assessing relations of social status, relational egalitarianism. I consider an argument implicit in the relational egalitarian view, namely that equal status is required on account of equal fundamental moral standing. I reject this argument, both because it is unclear that certain kinds of status inequality are incompatible with recognition of our equal moral standing, and because the view this argument defends would require equality within certain relations of social status within which we find inequalities desirable or valuable. Despite the failure of the direct argument, I believe that relational egalitarians are correct to think that there is a close relationship between recognition of moral standing and individuals' *public* social status. I go on to argue that we can indeed justify a moral principle requiring equality of status in the case of public social status, because inequalities of this kind of status are incompatible with giving individuals the recognition respect they are owed. I conclude with some discussion how to assess non-public status relations.

1. Relational Egalitarianism and Social Status

In the previous chapter, I advanced the following analysis of the concept of social status:

> *Social status:* individual A's social status within some group G consists of the relative appraisals shared among other members of G which compare A to other members of G.

One's beliefs and attitudes that make up her comparative appraisals of others in some social context contributes to the fabric of status relations within that group. With a clearer conception of social status in mind, we may now turn to constructing a moral theory of status relations. As laid out in the introduction, such a theory should provide us with compelling grounds for moral principles that can guide our practical attitudes and decision-making with respect to social status relations. A natural place to start at this point is to consider available moral theories that might have something to say with regards to relations of social status.

Among contemporary Western philosophers, relational egalitarianism has become a prominent moral theory that may speak directly to this matter. "Relational egalitarians claim that inequality is unjust when it disadvantages people: when it reflects, embodies, or causes inequality of authority, status, or standing."[44] Clearly, inequalities of social status fall within the scope of the quoted claim, which would mean that relational egalitarianism would hold that we ought not have inequalities of social status.

[44] Anderson, "The Fundamental Disagreement between Luck Egalitarians and Relational Egalitarians," p. 2.

We should, of course, ask of relational egalitarians: *why* should we oppose such inequalities of status? The common rationale among relational egalitarians turns on an appeal to our equal fundamental moral standing. In her classic paper on the topic, Elizabeth Anderson writes that "the claim [of social equality] asserts that all competent adults are equally moral agents."[45] Samuel Scheffler follows suit, writing that the ideal of social equality "claims that human relations must be conducted on the basis of an assumption that everyone's life is equally important, and that all members of a society have equal standing."[46] The recurring theme of relational egalitarianism is "that relations of social inferiority and superiority are inappropriate among moral equals."[47] As T. M. Scanlon argues, inequalities of status are incompatible with the ideal of a society where individuals regard one another as equals.[48] The kinds of inferiority and superiority contained within inequalities of social status are taken to be incompatible as such with recognition of our equal moral standing.[49]

The relational egalitarian defense of the view that individuals ought to be equals within relations of social status thus turns on a straightforward claim that such inequalities of social status are incompatible with recognition of our equal fundamental moral status. Given that this argument turns on a direct inference of equality of social status from equality of fundamental moral standing, I shall refer to it as the *direct argument*.

In the section to follow, I will argue that the direct argument, as summarized above, should be rejected. However, I will later argue that the spirit of the direct argument can be saved, and that at least in the case of what I have called *public* social status we have compelling moral reason (based in our equal moral standing) to require equality among individuals.

Before I turn to these matters, I should like to make some remarks about the relationship between the present project and relational egalitarianism. As I see it, relational egalitarianism contains two broad kinds of projects. On the one hand, relational egalitarianism is billed as a distinctly conceptual enterprise. Relational egalitarians undertaking this conceptual project aim to establish that there is a fundamental norm of relational equality, and that through the normal methods of philosophical argumentation and inference we can ground further substantive moral principles in this basic norm of relational equality.[50] On the other hand, relational egalitarianism is sometimes presented a distinctly pragmatic view, in that it is meant to help diagnose existing injustices by appeal to the fact that we do not relate as equals within certain morally significant social

---

[45] Elizabeth Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality," p. 312.

[46] Samuel Scheffler, "What Is Egalitarianism?" p. 22.

[47] Kolodny, "Rule over None II," pp. 299-300. C.f. O'Neill, "What Should Egalitarians Believe?," p. 131.

[48] Scanlon, "The Diversity of Objections to Inequality," pp. 212-8. See also Scanlon, *Why Does Inequality Matter?*, pp. 26-30.

[49] Fourie, "What is Social Equality?"

[50] A paradigm example of this approach is offered in Kolodny, "Rule over None II."

spheres.[51] Insofar as the present project is relationally egalitarian, it is only in the latter sense. My aim is to establish that we have compelling moral grounds for equality of public social status, but those grounds will require appeal to facts about human psychology, rather than mere conceptual relations. Indeed, the moral ground that I will appeal to defend equality of public social status is a basic right possessed by agents to moral freedom, rather than a substantively egalitarian claim.

Moreover, I should like to make clear that the sense in which I will use social status may be quite different from how relational egalitarians sometimes use the term. As I discussed at length in the previous chapter, I understand social status as a distinct social phenomenon. I am using the term to pick out a feature of social reality that I think is of considerable moral significance. Whether relational egalitarians have this exact conception of social status in mind when they use the term is unclear, and oftentimes I believe they may have something more abstract in mind, such as objective moral relations (rather than contingent social ones).

All this being said, I nevertheless see the present project as one that is friendly to either strand of relational egalitarian thought. Moreover, as I hope will be clear throughout, the insights of relational egalitarians (both conceptual and pragmatic) will be quite valuable to thinking that I lay out here. So, I see the present project as friendly but orthogonal to the project taken on by thinkers participating in the nascent relational egalitarian tradition.

With these matters out of the way let us examine why borrowing the direct argument from relational egalitarians will be insufficient as a basis for an egalitarian principle of social status.

2. Rejecting the Direct Argument

There are at least three reasons for rejecting the direct argument for equality of social status. (i) First, it is not clear that the relationship between fundamental moral standing and social status is so close that inequalities of the latter are immediately incompatible with equality of the former. (ii) Second, I believe that we have compelling moral convictions which hold that there are certain relations of social status that are both inherently inegalitarian, but which are nevertheless valuable or desirable. (iii) Third, there are some relations of social status that are not inherently inegalitarian, but inequalities of which are instrumental to securing other desirable goods. These three reasons for rejecting the direct argument turn on the same fact, namely that the direct argument takes for granted that any and all kinds of social status are in some way related to fundamental moral standing, and this claim is false.

[51] Anderson as the exemplar pragmatic relational egalitarian. For some further discussion of the pragmatic bent of relational egalitarianism, see section 7 of my "Relational Egalitarianism and Democracy."

i. My first objection denies that there is a direct relationship between all kinds of social status and fundamental moral standing. Some inequalities of social status are perfectly compatible with recognizing equality of individuals' fundamental moral status.

Several examples serve to show that the relationship between social status and fundamental moral status is more complicated than relational egalitarians assume. Consider first the example of the chess club sketched in the previous chapter. Suppose that, as the case describes, the status of members of the chess club is determined by their relative skill at the game of chess. Some members thus come to be regarded as superior qua chess player, and others inferior. We would be hard pressed, I think, to conclude that the members regarded as superior chess players are also regarded as *moral* superiors. They may very well be thought of as better in the context of chess while also being regarded as moral equals. Or, consider my (and the commonly held) belief that Michael Jordan is the greatest basketball player of all time. When it comes to basketball players, no one is MJ's superior. Though I may think this, I am not committed to thinking that MJ thereby has superior moral standing relative to the rest of us. MJ might be the greatest basketball player of all time, but he still has the same moral standing that any other individual has, and his interests carry the same kind of weight in moral deliberation, and so on.[52]

The preceding examples illustrate a basic fact shown by status construction theory, namely that the goods that cause some characteristic to become a status characteristic (that is, the goods mentioned in condition (1) stated in section 3 of the previous chapter) can be valued for reasons that have nothing to do with our fundamental moral standing. Skill at chess, success in basketball, a doctor's tenure at a hospital, or an academic's number of publications all have nothing to do with moral standing. Thinking of individuals as superiors or inferiors in the relevant context on the basis of any of the preceding characteristics does not commit one to thinking that these individuals are morally superior or inferior.

We thus cannot make the direct inference from the mere fact that there is an inequality of social status to the conclusion that there is a failure to recognize or respect the equal fundamental moral standing of individuals, since the inequality of social status may be based in characteristics that have no bearing on moral standing whatsoever.

ii. Since the direct argument holds that inequalities of social status as such are incompatible with recognition of our equal fundamental moral standing, it leads to the

[52] Relatedly, I think we need not take issue with relative advantages or disadvantages that come with being high or low status respectively. While some advantages certainly might be the basis of a justified claim for correction (consider, for instance, the common criticism that the earnings of professional athletes are unjustly large), there is often a class of advantages that comes with being high status that seem warranted. The highest status chess player, for instance, will earn more respect qua chess player, win more prizes in tournaments, play in higher leverage games, be seeded higher in future tournaments, and so on. There is no doubt that the highest status players enjoy significant advantages relative to inferior chess players, but many such advantages are not of moral concern.

demanding conclusion that individuals ought to be equals within *all* relations of social status. This demanding conclusion is incompatible with any moral conviction which holds that certain kinds of status relations that are inherently inegalitarian are also valuable or desirable. And it would seem that we do indeed have such convictions.[53]

Consider first certain kinds of relations that involve clear distinctions between individuals who occupy superior and inferior positions respectively. Examples include the relationships between a mentor and mentee, a teacher and a student, a coach and a player, and the like. Such relationships consist of (in part) a difference in status. Not only does the superior generally have greater expertise in a relevant skill, but they often have some kind of authority over the inferior, such as the ability to make demands and impose sanctions.

These kinds of relationships clearly involve an inequality of social status, and yet I believe many of us would find them to be valuable for at least two reasons. In the first place, we might value these kinds of intrinsically inegalitarian relationships for the simple instrumental reason that they lead to the development of valuable skills and abilities. Secondly, I believe many of us will also find such relationships to be intrinsically valuable. The relationships that one cultivates with their teachers and students can be especially fulfilling and meaningful, an experience that I am sure is familiar to many of us in academia. The direct argument is objectionable because it would deem such relationships morally impermissible on account of involving inequalities of social status. This demanding conclusion is at odds with a widely held conviction about the value of relationships that many persons have the pleasure of experiencing for themselves.

iii. In addition to intrinsically inegalitarian relations of social status that we might find valuable, there also seem to be many relations that are not intrinsically inegalitarian, but within which we might find inequality of status to be valuable for a number of reasons. There might be various instrumental benefits to regarding certain individuals as superiors in some context, or we might find it right or fitting that certain individuals are rewarded with positive relative appraisal when they display excellence in certain kinds of activities.

Consider, for instance, status relations among basketball players. Suppose that the players in question rely on characteristics such as talent at basketball, the possession of various skills relevant to basketball, and accomplishments within the sport as grounds for status distinctions. The most skilled and successful players will have greater status, and the less skilled and successful lesser status. Though surely no player would desire to be low status, they may nevertheless have compelling reason for accepting inequalities of social status. Players might think the fitting response to some individual possessing greater skills or abilities, or reaching certain heights of achievements, is to appraise those skills and achievements for what they are—excellence in a commonly valued activity.

[53] This objection is a familiar one made to relational egalitarian views. See Arneson, "Luck Egalitarianism Interpreted and Defended," p. 14; Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism*, ch. 5.

Players might also have compelling instrumental reasons to reward excellence with positive relative appraisals. Social recognition is a powerful motive, and individuals may push the development of their abilities to new heights in the aim of earning prestige. The game of basketball as a whole might then develop on account of prestige-based incentives. And, lastly, prestige-based incentives might lead to positive externalities. When the game of basketball is pushed to new limits, spectators benefit along with expert players, and insofar as players stand to benefit from greater spectator interest, players have further reason to accept hierarchies of status among basketball players. Hence, hierarchies amongst basketball players based in abilities relevant to the game are appear to be justified, as players may have compelling reasons to accept such distinctions. Furthermore, those reasons are not incompatible with the fundamental moral equality of the players. Comparable reasoning, *mutatis mutandis*, can obtain in the case of hierarchies among various communities with shared values, such as academics, artists, doctors, and many others.[54]

If we accept the direct argument, we are left with the conclusion that we must forego all of the benefits identified by the above examples. Such a conclusion, I submit, seems far too demanding. Many of the goods that can be secured by permitting inequalities of social status seem to be quite desirable, and a categorical prohibition on securing such goods is too demanding. Hence, even in the case of relations of social status that are not inherently inegalitarian, we may have compelling reason to permit of inequalities of social status. Those reasons then weigh against the direct argument and its demanding conclusion that inequalities of social status are impermissible.

The preceding objections reveal an important flaw in the direct argument. In the previous chapter, it was established that social status is a social property that obtains within groups. There can be as many different kinds of social status as there are groups. The direct argument for equality of social status, however, seems to presuppose that all kinds of social status bear the same, direct relationship to fundamental moral standing. Such a presupposition simply neglects the fact that many different kinds of social status exist within many different kinds of groups. The failure of the direct argument illustrates how a moral theory concerning social status must attend to the pluralistic nature of social status—we cannot assume that social status as such is related to our moral standing.

So, taking the lesson that we learn from the direct argument into consideration, if we are to determine whether an egalitarian principle with respect to social status is defensible, then we will have to first distinguish a particular kind of social status that bears the appropriate relationship to our basic moral standing. I believe that public social status bears this kind of relationship.

3. The Status Principle

[54] For a more extensive discussion of the role of status incentives in shaping cooperation, see chapter VII.

The key normative principle around which the moral theory of social status will be organized is the *principle of equal public social status*, or "status principle" for short, which holds, as the name suggests, individuals ought to be equals in terms of public social status. One's public social status, recall, is determined solely be by comparative appraisal of diffuse characteristics, or characteristics that are status conferring within a specific society as a whole. Public social status is the kind of social status that is salient when one interacts with others anonymously in a large-scale society, and it remains salient in most any interactions.[55] To be more precise, in the following section I will provide an argument for the

status principle: inequalities of public social status ought to be reduced and eliminated.

Before I may offer a justification of the status principle, several points about the status principle warrant elaboration.

First, that justification will only establish that unequal relations of public social status are incompatible with recognizing the equal fundamental moral status of individuals. This conclusion is strictly negative—the principle only prohibits inequalities of public social status. Such a prohibition does not, however, on its own establish the positive requirement that there ought to be equal relations of public social status. One way in which we could satisfy the demands of the status principle as stated is by simply eliminating or removing relations of public social status as such, rather than making such relations equal.

The status principle will, however, entail positive duties to bring about egalitarian relations of public social status if we grant the plausible assumption that some relations of public social status are inevitable in the course of our social lives. More precisely, we must grant that the psychological processes that give rise to distinctions of social status, public or otherwise, are sufficiently robust that it is effectively impossible for us to preempt the development of status relations within any society. Distinctions of public social status seem far too ubiquitous in human social settings to ever be conclusively eliminated.

Further support for this assumption has been identified by social psychologists studying status relations. Take a random assortment of people, place them together in some social setting, and you will almost certainly see the development of a well-defined

[55] The mention of large scale is meant to contrast public social status with reputation. As I shall understand it, one's reputation is a function of others' particular beliefs about oneself. The beliefs are particular in the sense that they are based on past actions done by the individual in question. Status is distinct from reputation in that it is not responsive to personal history in the way reputation is. Within large-scale societies, there are simply too many individuals and too much separation of social groups for any one person to have accurate information about the reputation of most anyone else (though one could certainly know about the reputation of those nearby in their social network, as with friends or colleagues).

status hierarchy among them.[56] Laboratory experiments testing hypotheses generated by status construction theory have found that as few as two interactions under conditions that satisfy the requirements for status construction result in individuals possessing the beliefs and attitudes constitutive of inequalities of social status.[57] Evaluating the social status of others and comparing them against other members of the group (including oneself) is a near automatic psychological response among human beings.[58] Individual behavior is so robustly shaped and driven by social status relations that our desire for status is thought to be a fundamental motive.[59] We have good reason to hold that distinctions of public social status will persist in most any human social group. If that is right, then the status principle will imply positive duties to bring about equality of public social status in most any human society.

On to the second point of elaboration concerning the status principle. Recall that one's public social status consists of commonly held attitudes and beliefs concerning one's relative appraisal (based in diffuse characteristics) compared to other individuals. Such attitudes and beliefs, it would seem, are involuntary outcomes of automatic or near automatic social-psychological processes. Indeed, if the assumption of the inevitability of status relations is correct, we have compelling reason to regard those attitudes and beliefs as, at least in large part, involuntary. Now, if moral principles can only regulate those features of the world that we have control over—if one accepts the "ought-implies-can" principle in some form—then it would seem that the beliefs and attitudes that constitute social status relations (public or otherwise) cannot themselves be the object of moral duties. Granting this, the duties entailed by the status principle should be understood as applying not to the beliefs and attitudes that constitute relations of public social status themselves, but rather to the *social conditions* that give rise to those beliefs and attitudes. Hence, discussion of the entailments of the status principle in subsequent chapters will be predominantly concerned with features of our social world that give rise to inequalities of public social status, rather than with the beliefs or attitudes that constitute such inequalities themselves.

That being said, the status principle will also provide us with a basis for evaluating individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and other dispositions as they relate to social status, even if those beliefs, attitudes, and other dispositions are not themselves subject to the demands

---

[56] Fiske, *Envy Up, Scorn Down*, pp. 29 f. reviews the relevant experimental literature and provides discussion.

[57] Ridgeway, and Erickson, "Creating and Spreading Status Beliefs;" Ridgeway et. al., "How Do Status Beliefs Develop?;" Ridgeway et. al., "How Easily Does a Social Difference Become a Status Distinction?" Among the striking features of these experimental results is not just that status distinctions can develop rather quickly, but that they can be based in completely arbitrary features of individuals. In some of the experiments just cited, for instance, individuals formed novel status distinctions over preferences for fine art. Individuals preferring a painting by a certain artist to another would then be appraised as relatively inferior.

[58] Fiske, *Envy up, Scorn Down*, pp. 38 f.; Stapel and Blanton, "From Seeing to Being."

[59] Anderson et. al., "Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive?"

of the status principle. In other words, the status principle will also provide us with a conception of the *virtue* of relational equality.

A characterization of the virtue of relational equality can be developed by considering the different ways in which individuals could satisfy the status principle. Individuals could satisfy the demands of relational equality while doing so in a way that is deficient with respect to the status principle. Even if individuals' beliefs and attitudes are not under their full voluntary control, it seems reasonable, on the present view, to judge those beliefs and attitudes that fit with the end of the status principle as being better than those beliefs and attitudes that are opposed to, or a poor fit with, the status principle. Though these evaluations may not give rise to enforceable claims, it nevertheless fills out the moral theory of social status by accompanying demands for equality of public social status with a basis for evaluating individual character as it pertains to relating as equals. A simple case can illustrate the value of such evaluations.

Consider some person who complies with demands generated by the status principle, but only on account of fear for social sanctions. By hypothesis, the demands of the status principle are satisfied, so our reluctant egalitarian certainly has no further duties concerning the status principle, but her conduct nevertheless seems to fall short of that principle. To express that deficiency, we must assess her character as it relates to the status principle, which requires relying on some conception of the virtue of relating as equals. The idea here is that it would be better if the reluctant egalitarian complied with the status principle because they valued public social status equality with others or thought that others are owed equal social standing. Even if the letter of the status principle is satisfied by the reluctant egalitarian's conduct, her compliance is nevertheless deficient in an important way.

To bring these thoughts together, we can say that someone displays the *virtue of social equality* when she regards others as being equal in terms of public social status and as being entitled to being equal within those relations. The first conjunct requires that one holds the first-order beliefs and attitudes that lead one to appraise some other individual as one's equal in terms of public social status. This does not mean that virtue requires that one hold the false belief that the other in fact is an equal in terms of public social status. The latter may not be true, and the person displaying the virtue of social equality may recognize it to be untrue, because a person's public social status is a function of convergent relative appraisals in society that one's own evaluations will generally have little influence over. The person of social virtue may recognize that those convergent evaluations mark some other person as her inferior; the virtue lies in not sharing in those evaluations and conceiving of the other as one's fellow public equal despite how the public evaluates her. The second claim in the characterization of the virtue of social equality—that I think of you as being entitled to being my equal in terms of public social status—is needed because the first claim can be satisfied in a way that would still seem to fall short of spirit of the status principle. I might think of you as my equal by mistake,

and if I were made aware of the difference in our accomplishments, then I would change my appraisal of you. Or, I might reluctantly acknowledge you as my equal because convergent social evaluations deem you so, but I may resent that fact, and take every opportunity to enhance my status so that I may be above you. In order to have the virtue of relational equality, I must not only happen to regard you as an equal incidentally, I must also regard you as being entitled to being regarded as an equal. Hence, we have the second condition of the virtue of social equality.

We may also characterize the vices of social equality. One displays correlative social vices when their motivational constitution is contrary to the spirit of the status principle. One such vice can be termed the vice of *social ambition*. A person displaying this vices eagerly seeks advancement in the public social status hierarchy. They will insist that others "know their place," and will resent attempts by others to advance their public social status. A corollary vice would be the vice of *social subservience*. Whereas the socially ambitious person is eager to advance their standing and seeks to be superior, the subservient person embraces an inferior position. Behaviors like kowtowing and boot-licking are expressions of the vice of subservience. Either vice is directly opposed to the virtue of social equality, for a person in possession of either vice will act in ways that maintain or exacerbate inequalities of public social status.

This aside on the virtues and vices concerning public social status has, I hope, illustrated how the moral theory of social status organized around the status principle is indeed a comprehensive and coherent framework for orienting our practical attitudes towards relations of social status. The status principle may not only suffice to provide us with a concrete basis for determining what we should think and do with respect to our status relations. It also provides us with the moral grounds needed to interpret and evaluate the behavior of others with respect to public social status. Furthermore, I believe that the evaluations that we are led to make of others' character as it concerns public social status cohere with pre-theoretical convictions about such matters. I think it is quite natural to think of persons who display social ambition or subservience as in some sense having defective characters. Both the social climber and the toady are often evaluated as being disgraceful in some sense. The moral theory of social status provides us with a sound moral ground that vindicates our pre-theoretic evaluations.

Let us turn to a third point of elaboration concerning the status principle. We must take note that the status principle as stated is an implausible moral principle. It must be qualified by conditions that would serve to justify some inequalities of public social status. Even if we have compelling moral reason to reduce inequalities in relations of public social status, demands to do so may in some cases come at too great a cost. There are other compelling goods and values that we have reason to promote as well, and a status principle that required subordination of all other goods and values for the sake of equality of public social status would simply be implausible. So, the argument to follow should be taken as justifying only a presumption in favor of equality of public social, and

that such a presumption may be defeated when one is offered a justification of inequalities of public social status. The subsequent chapter will be concerned with developing the conditions under which inequalities of public social status are justified.

An important and related observation that we should take note of at this point is that public social status lacks some of the properties that make other social status relations instrumentally valuable. Accordingly, certain important instrumental grounds that might justify inequalities within other kinds of status relations will not obtain in the case of public social status.

For some kind of status relation to serve desirable instrumental ends, it must incentivize or coordinate contributions to public goods,[60] or it must range over a proper subset of the population and generate positive externalities for individuals outside the subset.[61] Since public social status ranges over entire societies, it will not range over a proper subset of the population. Moreover, gains in public social status will normally fail to act as incentives for contributions to public goods for the following reasons. First, for some kind of status to serve as a reward for public good contributions, individuals must be able to effectively monitor contributions to public goods. But, in the kinds of large-scale societies within which relations of public social status are operative, rarely, if ever, will individuals be in a position to engage in that kind of monitoring.[62] Second, if we grant that there is evaluative diversity among individuals in these kinds of large-scale societies, then individuals may often disagree about what constitutes a public good. If individuals disagree about public goods, then they will disagree about when a given kind of action makes for a contribution to the public good, and so will not agree on when individuals have earned greater relative appraisal. In these cases, status beliefs will be unshared, and we should expect status relations to be ambiguous and ill-defined. Public social status, then, will generally lack the formal properties that a status relation must have in order for it to serve as an instrument for certain kinds of cooperation.

That being said, it may still be the case that public social status is parasitic on other kinds of status that *do* satisfy the above criteria and so serve as instruments for realizing some good or value.[63] While public social status concerns one's relative appraisal as a public person, being high status within some particular community or association may at times result in greater public social status as well. My hypothesis is that this will be the case whenever membership in the community or association is itself a characteristic that confers public social status. Being a doctor, for instance, seems to lead one to be appraised as relatively better qua public person. Consider, then, how a highly successful medical research who, say, cures some debilitating disease may come to have

---

[60] Gintis et. al.; "Costly Signaling and Cooperation;" Whitmeyer, "Prestige from the Provision of Collective Goods;" Willer, "Groups Reward Individual Sacrifice."

[61] Congleton, "Efficient Status Seeking."

[62] Gaus, *The Order of Public Reason*, pp. 90-6.

[63] For theoretical discussion to this effect, see Berger and Fisek, "Diffuse Status Characteristics."

greater public social status *because* of her greater status in the medical community. Or, to mention another example, consider how winning the Nobel prize not only earns a researcher esteem among her colleagues, it also earns her esteem among the public as a whole. Not only are doctors, medical professionals, and scientists often held in higher regard qua public person, but those who are held in high regard within that community are held in even higher regard qua public persons. The thought, then, is that having a high degree of some particular kind of non-public social status can in some cases itself be a public social status characteristic. In such cases, we may have compelling reasons that justify the inequality of public social status, but not because public social status itself serves an important instrumental role, but because it is derivative of a kind of social status that does. Chapter IV discusses such cases at length and establishes a principled way for setting constraints on the degree of public social status inequality that can be justified in such cases.

Lastly, before turning to the argument for the status principle, I wish to emphasize that, as I understand it, the principle builds upon a core insight made by relational egalitarians. Certain kinds of status relations *are* closely related to our moral standing, and therefore inequalities of certain kinds of status relations are impermissible on account of requirements to respect our equal basic moral standing. I believe the status principle provides a precise and systematic development of the basic commitments that lead theorists to accept relational egalitarianism, and because of that I conceive of the following argument as friendly to the project of relational egalitarianism.

4. Justifying the Status Principle

With some preliminary points of clarification out of the way, I will now turn to developing the argument for the status principle.

I begin with a premise which I take to be uncontroversial, namely that adult human beings have equal fundamental moral standing, and that individuals are owed recognition respect by virtue of their equal fundamental moral standing. Recognition respect, recall, is respect owed to something simply by virtue of the kind of thing that object is. Recognition respect for persons consists in treating individuals as morally considerable as such.

This leads us to the second premise of the argument, which holds that recognition respect for persons is incompatible with actions that would undermine a person's capacity to pursue a conception of the good. The thought here is that one distinctive feature of persons that contributes to their being appropriate objects of recognition respect is this capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good. This second premise expresses the idea that however else it is that we must take account of the interests of others to whom we owe recognition respect, one kind of conduct that is prohibited is conduct that would serve to undermine individuals' capacities to pursue a conception of the good. Persons as such are understood to have a right to the free development of their

basic moral capacity. On this view, persons are conceived of as enjoying moral freedom in two senses. First, they have the freedom to determine a conception of the good for themselves, at least within some reasonable boundaries (e.g. the conception of the good must be compatible with recognition respect for others). Persons are not taken to be inextricably tied to any particular conception of the good; we have a freedom to choose for ourselves (again, within some reasonable bounds) what is worthy or pursuit within our lives. Second, persons are understood to a have a freedom from others' interference with the development of the basic capacities by virtue of which they enjoy the freedom to determine a conception of the good for themselves. Others may not take measures that would undercut your ability to reflect on and revise your conception of the good. The idea, then, is that all agents have a moral right to the free development of their basic moral capacities, and that this right protects against others acting in ways that would undermine or preempt the development of those basic capacities.

The basic normative capacity to pursue a conception of the good includes the ability to have, revise, and pursue aims or final ends that one holds makes life valuable or worth living.[64] This involves certain deliberative capacities, such as the ability to critically reflect upon the kinds of ends or values that are worthy of one's allegiance, or the ability to reason from one's ends to effective means for securing one's ends; and it involves certain practical abilities, such as the capacity to actively engage in the pursuit of one's conception of the good and to carry out the determinate plans that they formulate for the advancement of the end that they set for themselves.

There are two reasons why respect for persons requires recognition of the right to the free development of one's basic normative capacities. In the first place, we might think, as Rawls did, that our capacity to pursue a conception of the good is in part constitutive of our moral standing. To view persons in this way is to view them as a "self-authenticating sources of valid claims," that is, "as being entitled to make claims on their institutions [and other moral agents, presumably] so as to advance their conceptions of the good."[65] If the capacity to pursue a conception of the good just is constitutive of our moral standing, then it would follow that in order to respect the latter we must respect the former, which would mean refraining from taking courses of action that would threaten, undermine, or destroy individuals' capacities to pursue a conception of the good.

In the second place, there is an instrumental ground that would explain why respect for persons prohibits undermining their capacity to pursue a conception of the good. Expressing recognition respect for persons requires taking account of their interests (in some way to be specified by a comprehensive moral theory) in our deliberation and conduct. Since individual humans are separate beings who can set and pursue different ends for themselves, it will normally be the case that an individual is in the best position

[64] *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 19 and 23-4.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 23

to ascertain both what her interests are and what plans are most conducive to her pursuit of her interests. Undermining one's capacity to pursue a conception of the good would amount to eroding or destroying one of the most reliable means we have available for determining and promoting a person's interests. And if respect for persons requires that we take account of their interests for their own sake, then, we ought not undermine the most reliable means for determining and promoting the interests of persons.

Both these rationales concern the fact that the right to the free development of one's basic moral capacities is intimately tied with one's agency. The first rationale identifies one's basic normative capacities as partially constitutive of one's agency, and the second holds that agents have a considerable interest in the free development of their basic normative capacities. Taken together, we have it that persons have a right to the free development of their basic normative capacities, that they have this right simply by virtue of being agents, and consequently that all other persons bear correlative duties to not undermine, threaten, or stunt the development of others' basic normative capacities.

The above remarks, it should be noted, concern only the *capacity* to pursue a conception of the good. We may acknowledge the above and still hold that in certain cases we may justifiably set back the interests of individuals or frustrate their pursuit of their ends—indeed, one of the defining features of justified moral principles is that they require individuals to concede the promotion of their interests in certain circumstances for the sake valuable moral ends.[66]

The third premise of the argument for the status principle is the claim that if individuals are to adequately develop and exercise their capacity to pursue a conception of the good, then they must have an adequate sense of self-esteem. Rawls elaborates on the relationship between self-esteem and our capacity to pursue a conception of the good more eloquently than I could:

> We may desire self-respect (or self-esteem) as having two aspects. First of all…it includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions. When we feel that our plans are of little value, we cannot pursue them with pleasure or take delight in their execution. Nor plagued by failure and self-doubt can we continue in our endeavors…Without [self-esteem] nothing may seem worth doing or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them. All desire and activity becomes empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism.[67]

According to Rawls, a sufficient degree of self-esteem is a necessary condition for the adequate development and exercise of one's capacity to pursue a conception of the good.

---

[66] Gaus, *The Order of Public Reason*, pp. 301-3.

[67] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 386.

As I understand it, self-esteem is a sound evaluation of one's own value,[68] and it influences the capacity to pursue a conception of the good in two ways. First, it enables one to be confident that the conception of the good they arrive at is a worthwhile one warranting pursuit. The idea here is that if one does not recognize that they have at least some rudimentary degree of worth, then one will not be able to regard the ends they set for themselves as being worthy of pursuit in turn. If the source that sets our ends is not regarded as being worthy of value, then we will be hard pressed to regard what flows from that source as possessing any value in turn.[69] Second, self-esteem provides one with the necessary confidence to pursue that settled conception of the good. Possessing practical abilities alone is not enough, as one must also regard one's abilities as adequately suited for the pursuit of the ends that they set for themselves. When one lacks an adequate sense of self-esteem, one will not recognize their abilities as appropriate instruments for the pursuit of one's ends. Hence, without an adequate sense of self-esteem we will be unable to exercise our capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good because we will be unable to conceive of our settled ends as valuable and worthy of our endeavors, or because we will lack the confidence in our ability to pursue the satisfaction of our ends. In either case, our exercise of their capacity to pursue a conception of the good is stunted.

This leads us to the final premise of the argument for the status principle, which holds that inequalities of public social status are incompatible with recognition respect for two reasons. First, inequalities of public social status may erode or undermine one's sense of self-esteem. Second, inequalities of public social status may give rise to direct failures to recognize the moral standing of low-status individuals.

This first claim expresses the idea that one of the social conditions for the development of an adequate sense of self-esteem includes public recognition that one is worthy of esteem. Since public social status is constituted by widely held beliefs and attitudes of relative appraisal, if one is deemed to be an inferior within the context of public social status, then they are appraised as relatively worse than others qua public person. The claim, then, is that individuals will find it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain a sense of self-esteem when they are publicly recognized as inferiors relative to others. Who could be expected to maintain a sense of self-esteem when they are regularly, and publicly, reminded of their inferiority relative to others?[70]

---

[68] We need to include the qualification "sound" in order to distinguish self-esteem from hubristic over-evaluations of one's self-worth, or what Hobbes called vainglory. See *Leviathan*, 8.18.

[69] Darwall, "Self-Interest and Self-Concern."

[70] This step of the argument turns on the conjecture that being publicly regarded as a social inferior has a deleterious on one's sense of self-esteem. I wish to make explicit that this claim is a conjecture, for, so far as I am aware, there has been no empirical study of the relationship between one's social status and their sense of self-esteem. That is not to say that this conjecture is without support. In the first place, I think it finds support from familiar social experience. Think for a moment on how individuals normally react to public pronouncements that they have inferior worth compared to others. It seems natural to think the self-esteem of

Matin Luther King Jr.'s political thought provides a clear articulation of the harms of public social status inequality to one's sense of worth as a person. It is unsurprising that King should have this awareness because his practical political commitments in the Civil Rights movement, and indeed his experience as a black man in the United States in the Jim Crow era, would have made him closely acquainted with the moral harms of social inequality. In his "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," King summarizes these harms as an answer to why he can wait no longer to advocate for social equality by means of civil disobedience:

> when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she cannot go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, *and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people;* when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son asking in agonizing pathos, "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"... *when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodyness"* --then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.[71]

Among the tally of the harms that racial segregation has imposed on black Americans are some that undermine their basic moral capacities. King is acutely aware of how the public inferiority of black Americans leads his children to develop a sense of themselves as inferiors. It distorts their moral psychology and breeds debilitating dispositions of shame, humiliation, and resentment toward those who impose such inferiority on them. It leads to the very degeneration of one's self-conception of oneself as a person. A mere nobody does not share in the value of persons, and lacking in that value, a nobody cannot set valuable ends for themselves to pursue. A nobody does not matter. A nobody is good

---

persons in that position would suffer. The sting of scorn seems to carry with us for some time after it is dealt. In the second place, there is some experimental evidence which suggests that inferior public social status, and awareness of that inferior status, stunts the development of individual capacities, which could have a debilitating effect on self-esteem. Hoff and Pandey, "Discrimination, Social Identity, and Durable Inequalities," observe that when young boys in India are primed to think about caste, low caste boys perform worse on cognitive tasks than when caste is unmentioned. See also Hoff and Pandey, "Making Up People: The Effect of Identity on Performance in a Modernizing Society." In a similar vein, Pasquier-Doumer and Brandon, "Aspiration failure: a poverty trap for indigenous children in Peru?" found that the low socio-economic status of Peruvian indigenous children contributed to worse educational performance which resulted in worse educational outcomes. These cases illustrate how the capacities of the low status can suffer just because of their being low status. For further review of these kinds of phenomena, see Wuepper and Lybbert, "Perceived Self-Efficacy, Poverty, and Economic Development."

[71] Paragraph 11 of the "Letter from Birmingham City Jail." Emphasis has been added.

for nothing. Persons cannot develop their moral capacities that are necessary for the formation and pursuit of a conception of the good under these social conditions because they will not recognize themselves as the kinds of beings that are in possession of those capacities or of possessing any kind of value at all.

I would like to make it especially clear that the present claim is only that social conditions where some persons are made to think of themselves as public inferiors undermine the prospect of an adequate sense of self-esteem. It follows that we should not give rise to such social conditions that ultimately undermine the basic moral capacities of persons. I do not mean to make the stronger claim that we have a duty to others to guarantee that they develop an adequate of self-esteem. Such a positive requirement absent some further qualification would be too demanding to be plausible. There are sure to be idiosyncratic cases where individuals, by the misfortune of their nature, are unable to develop an adequate sense of self-esteem.[72] The present claim is only that individuals will be unable to form the sense of self-esteem needed to develop and exercise their moral powers if they are publicly deemed to be inferior to others. The claim does not hold that we owe it to persons to guarantee that they develop an adequate sense of self-esteem, it only requires asserting that we owe it to persons to not create or maintain conditions that would undermine the development the sense of self-esteem.

The second ground for the incompatibility between inequalities of public social status and recognition respect for persons turns on the fact that not only are low-status individuals themselves put in a position where they will lack a sense of self-esteem, but that when differences in status become too severe, other members of the society will begin to neglect the moral standing of the low-status. Consider, for instance how many groups of low-status individuals throughout human history have been compared to and identified with animals.[73] In equating these individuals with animals, other members of the social group are denying them recognition of the moral standing that any adult human has.[74] In a similar vein, the very mode of address used for those deemed to have low public social status is one that denies their standing as full equal persons. In a part left out of the quoted passage above, King takes note of this harm when he recognizes the various ways in which black Americans were dehumanized: "your first name becomes 'n*****' and your middle name becomes 'boy' (however old you are) and your last name becomes 'John,' and when your wife and mother are never given the respected title 'Mrs.'" King's insights on the derogatory modes of address toward the low status and the common depiction and characterization of the low status as mere animals all point toward

[72] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 60.

[73] See Fiske, *Envy Up; Scorn Down*, p. 21. For a more concrete set of examples see Gates, *Stony the Road*, which provides a history of American representation of black people post reconstruction in excruciating detail.

[74] On gender see Ridgeway and Dikema, "Are Gender Differences Status Differences?" On race see Ridgeway, "Why Status Matters for Inequality," and the citations therein.

the same broad pattern of conduct: the low status are not treated as humans sharing in the community of moral equals.

Social psychologists have developed neurological foundations for this unfortunately common tendency to think of the low status as subhuman. Susan T. Fiske and colleagues found that low status individuals tend to be conceived of as less than human by participants in a survey experiment.[75] In follow up neuroimaging studies, Lasana T. Harris and Fiske found that brain scans supported these earlier observations.[76] Presenting subjects with images of individuals typically thought of as low-status (ranging from the extreme case of homeless people and drug addicts to poor Black people and disabled persons) it was found that in many cases, the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) of subjects did not activate. The mPFC is the part of our brain associated with identifying agents; when we encounter other people, the mPFC normally activates, and this activation can be observed in brain scans. The fact that subject brain scans showed no activity in the mPFC on being presented with stimuli of low status individuals suggests that the subjects did not register the agency of the low status at a neurological level. There thus seems to be reason to think that the very makeup of our neural mechanisms is conducive to regarding the low status as subhuman, and in being conceived of such inferior beings they are not given the recognition respect that they are owed as our moral equals.

These observations lend further support to the claim that low-status individuals will be unable to develop an adequate sense of self-esteem. If one is to have a sense of self-esteem, they must, at the very least, have a sense of themselves as being the kind of being that could be worthy of esteem in the first place. If individuals are publicly denied moral standing as such, then they may find it difficult to sustain a sense of self-esteem, for they are regularly and publicly told that they are not even the kind of being that is worthy of esteem in the first place. Confronted with an unending stream of public reminders that they are a nobody, the low status may acquiesce and conceive of themselves in those terms as well.

Hence, we see that inequalities of public social status are incompatible with recognition respect for persons in two ways. First, inequalities of public social status create conditions where one of the bases for the development of an adequate sense of self-esteem is absent for low-status individuals. An adequate sense of self-esteem is necessary if individuals are to develop their capacity to pursue a conception of a good, which means that inequalities of public social status undermine low-status individuals'

---

[75] Fiske et. al., "A Model of (Often Mixed) Stereotype Content." The experimenters presented subjects with stimuli of individuals of variable status and group members, and asked subjects to rate how pertinent various adjectives were for the individuals depicted in different stimuli. Members of groups often thought to be low status tended to be rated the least competent, and least fitting of attitudes of warmth or concern.

[76] "Dehumanizing the Lowest of the Low;" "Social Groups That Elicit Disgust Are Differentially Processed in mPFC;" "Dehumanized Perception."

capacities to pursue a conception of the good. Second, inequalities of public social status may lead to direct failures of recognition respect, for individuals may fail to regard low-status persons as having moral standing when inequalities of public social status are too great. Hence, recognition respect for persons requires that there not be inequalities of public social status. And so, we have the grounds leading to the status principle.

In sum, the justification of the status principles consists of the following argument:

1. Individuals have equal fundamental moral standing, and this moral standing warrants recognition respect.
2. Recognition respect for persons requires respecting the basic right of all persons to the free development of their basic moral capacities, and this basic right protects against conduct that would threaten, undermine, or stunt the development of their basic normative capacities.
3. A necessary condition of the development of one's capacity to pursue a conception of the good is the development of an adequate sense of self-esteem.
4. Inequalities of public social status are social conditions that (a) undermine the development of low-status individuals' sense of self-esteem, and (b) lead to failures to recognize the moral standing of low-status individuals.
5. Therefore, inequalities of public social status are incompatible with according individuals the recognition respect they are owed by virtue of their equal fundamental moral standing.

Notice first that this argument contains a reformulation of the direct argument. Premises 1 and 4b together are sufficient to reach the conclusion. This provides further support for the diagnosis of the failure of the direct argument—it is incorrect to attribute a close moral relationship between social status *as such* and our basic moral standing. The direct argument is vindicated by focusing on public social status in particular. The relationship between recognition respect and public social status is grounded by the fact that public social status can bring about the erosion of one's sense of self-esteem, and, by the fact that inequalities of public social status can cause failures of recognition respect. These facts do not obtain in the case of other kinds of relations of social status.

Notice further that the conjuncts of premise 4 mutually support the egalitarian conclusion. Each conjunct taken alone can admit of some exceptions. It could be, for instance, some persons may have a robust enough sense of self-esteem that they can tolerate being publicly regarded as the inferior of some other persons. Sub-premise (b) acts as a supplement in this case, for even if an individual might sustain a self-esteem despite being deemed a public inferior, the risk remains that others will be unable to accord her the recognition respect she is owed, so her public inferiority would remain objectionable on grounds of recognition respect despite the fact that she is able to maintain a sense of self-esteem. Conversely, it could be the case that people are able to

continue to recognize the moral standing of low status despite their public inferiority. In such cases, sub-premise (a) acts as the supplement. Even if others might be able to accord recognition respect toward the low status, we still owe it to the low status that we do not bring about social conditions that would threaten to undermine their sense of self-esteem.

Another appealing feature of the argument for the status principle is that it provides us with a reply that one might make in support of tolerating inequalities of public social. This reply would hold that some persons find a great deal of value in achieving a high degree of public social status, such that they organize their project and commitments around doing so. Wouldn't it be unfair, the reply continues, to foreclose this way of life? The argument for the status principle provides an answer to this reply by identifying that treating inequalities of public social status as valuable or desirable is perverse. Valuing something that undermines recognition respect in the way that inequalities of public social status do is perverse in the same way that valuing harming people for its own sake is. Persons who orient their practical plans around the achievement of greater public social status are making either a factual mistake or a moral mistake. They are making a factual mistake if they think that they can secure greater public social status without a cost to others because they would thereby fail to recognize the inherently zero-sum nature of status relations. They are making a moral mistake if they value inequalities of public social despite knowing about their zero-sum character because such inequalities are not valuable.

This preceding point sets the stage for a further valuable insight that can be gained from the argument for the status principle, namely, that equality of public social status is a good. It is natural, I think, in discussions of social status to attribute to individuals a basic disposition to value social status. The attribution of such a disposition is well-grounded enough in familiar social experience—a desire for status seems to be among the most ubiquitous motives in individuals, hence why relations of social status, and competition over relative places within those relations, are so prominent in almost every social group. The attribution of a brute valuing of status might be correct, but to this attribution we can add the observation that there is a rational basis for valuing social status, over and above any brute disposition and, moreover, that equality of public social status is a good.

The above argument provides rational grounds for individuals to value public social status which parallel the claims made in the fourth premise. In the first place, public social status is instrumental in individuals' development of their capacity to pursue a conception of the good. Individuals have good reason to value public social status, because it is instrumental, and perhaps even necessary, for their pursuit of their good. Moreover, an adequate sense of self-esteem would seem to be a natural part of a good life. Who could claim to live their life well when they spend it in constant doubt and uncertainty of the worthiness of what it is spent on? Some confidence and assurance in one's projects would seem to be a natural part of a good life, and to the extent that public

social status contributes to one's sense of self-esteem, public social status may thus be an important part of living a good life.

In the second place, public social status is valuable to individuals because without it they might no longer be recognized as persons. Recognition of one's moral standing is not only a basic moral requirement; it also a considerable good for individuals. Being recognized as equal members of the moral community protects us from having our rights violated, it enables to us maintain promises and agreements, it allows us to stand in valuable relations such as those of trust or friendship, and, more generally, it allows us to hold others accountable. When one's moral standing is not recognized, they are excluded from these moral relations. This not only excludes them from valuable relations such as those instantiated by trust, friendship, promise-keeping, etc., but it also introduces a greater risk of their rights being violated. The perpetrators of many of history's greatest atrocities did not persecute what they would call human beings, but rather mere things or animals. These atrocities are an extreme case to be sure, but they illustrate clearly the ills that can befall individuals when their moral standing is not recognized. Since a lack of public social status can result in a failure to recognize a person's moral standing, individuals have good reason to value public social status insofar as it contributes to the recognition of their moral standing.

The preceding points establish why public social status is good for individuals, and hence why individuals have a rational basis for valuing public social status. We can now move the stronger claim that equality of public social status is as such a good. The reason why we may treat equality of public social status (rather than just public social status) as a good is because only under conditions of equality can all persons enjoy the good of public social status. Because of the intrinsically comparative character of status relations, for one person to enjoy a greater degree of public social status requires that another enjoy less. Public inferiority of others is a necessary consequence of possessing superior public social status. The argument for the status principle provides us with conclusive reason to treat inferiority of public social status as something that not only lacks value, but that has disvalue. Hence, it is equality of public social status that is distinctly valuable, because only under such conditions of equality do all members of society enjoy the good of social status without burdening some with the unacceptable ills of public inferiority. We may thus righty say that relating as equals is not only required as a matter of justice, but that it is good as well.

The fact that the present theory provides us with an explanation of why equality of public social status is not only required by also a good is further evidence that this is a comprehensive and coherent moral theory of social status relations. What makes the theory comprehensive is that it makes clear to us various evaluative dimensions along which we can reason about relations of public social status. We can see why equality of such relations is required, why such equality is a good, and indeed we are even furnished with normative resources that allow us to articulate evaluations of the character of others

as it relates to relations of public social status in terms of the virtue of relational equality and the correlative vices of subservience and social ambition. These features are shown to cohere because they share a common ground in the fundamental norm of recognition respect and the right of all persons to the free development of their basic normative capacities. I thus take the resulting evaluative framework to express what form an order of public social status relations must take in a community of moral equals.

5. Non-public Status Relations

According to the status principle, we ought to bring about equality within relations of public social status. Public social status relations may be an especially important kind of status due to the profound effects they have on our social lives, but they are hardly the only kind of status relation. What can be said of other, non-public, relations of social status?

In this section, I will develop a framework for assessing non-public relations of social status. Because these relations vary dramatically in their scope and effects, I will not be able to articulate any particular principle concerning non-public social status relations. These relations occur in too many different kinds of groups and social contexts for there to be a unified principle for all of them. Indeed, it would be remarkable if there were a unified moral principle for the organization of relations as diverse as those among churchgoers, gang members, and scientists, among many others. So, my aim will be to identify the relevant features of non-public social status relations that we should take into consideration when evaluating some specific case of non-public status relations. I will survey reasons that weigh in favor of permitting non-public social status inequality and reasons that way against the permission of such inequality.

I will start with reasons that weigh in favor of permitting inequality. Several points mentioned earlier in this chapter can be relied on to support the claim that certain inequalities of non-public social status are permissible, and indeed desirable. Recall the formal properties that a kind of status relation must have in order to serve as an instrument for securing other goods (stated in section 3 above). These properties were (a) incentivizing or coordinating contributions to some good, or (b) ranging over a subset of the population and generating positive externalities for members outside the subset.

Non-public social status will, by definition, range over only a subset of the population, so if it gives rise to positive externalities then this will be a reason that speaks in favor of permitting status inequalities (to take one salient example at the time of writing this, consider biotech companies racing for the prestige of producing a new vaccine for COVID-19). While some of those who stand in the status relations will take on the costs of being low status, those who are outside the status relation stand to gain a great deal.

Status can also motivate persons to contribute to public goods. Improving one's status can be a powerful motive, and when it is harnessed to the aim of promoting public goods. Indeed, in this kind of case the zero-sum nature of status can give rise to an

appealing kind of social dynamic. Recall that because of the zero-sum nature of status individuals can often enter into a kind of status "arms-race." Keeping up with the Jones' is a simple illustration of this kind of arms-race dynamic. In that case, however, we generally have in mind a situation where persons must increase their consumption of luxury goods to maintain their status. If, however, status is a reward for contribution to public goods, then this arms-race dynamic will lead persons maker greater and greater contributions. So, to mention one example, charities with a ranking of top donors have been observed to receive greater funds from their top donors.[77] Individuals seeking to improve their status might make sizable contributions to a notable charity so as to secure a relatively high place on that charity's donor list. If others do the same, the amount that individuals must donate in order to secure greater status increases. Individuals would then enter an arms-race of escalating charitable contributions. So, when the arms-race dynamic is harnessed for a prosocial end, status relations can be a powerful motive for helping others where one otherwise might not have.

I took note above that public social status will normally fail to incentivize contributions to public or shared goods. I mentioned two reasons in support of this claim. First, within large-scale societies individuals will not be in effective positions to reliably monitor contributions. Second, within large-scale societies disagreement about what constitutes the relevant sort of good will lead to disagreement about when individuals should be rewarded with greater status. Both these reasons are less likely to be pertinent in the case of non-public status relations. Such relations are normally operative within groups that have some kind of shared aim or end, so we can suppose far less evaluative diversity than we would expect in the case of public social status. And since the non-public status relations range over proper subsets of the population, the scale at which the relations operate is much smaller than that of public social status, making the prospect of effective monitoring and assessment much more realistic.

A second kind of consideration that weighs in favor of permitting inequalities of non-public social status concerns the fact that participants of non-public social status relations may simply find it to be right or fitting that individuals who display certain kinds of excellence should be regarded with greater relative esteem. It seems natural to think that a scientist that wins the Nobel prize in her field deserves the prestige that comes with her accomplishments. Individuals that find intrinsic value in some common aim or end would, would, presumably, also find reason to positively appraise individuals who display excellence with regards to those aims or ends. Philosophers have good reason to value good philosophy, and it seems natural to think that this gives philosophers reason to think favorably of philosophers who produce good philosophy. Individuals might deserve status as a consequence of their excellence, and this is a further consideration that weighs in favor of permitting status inequality.

[77] For some discussion of this example, see McAdams, "Relative Preferences," pp. 60 f.

The above discussion suggests two standards which speak in favor of permitting inequalities of public social status. First, we have the standard of *value promotion*. According to this standard, the fact that some kind of status inequality leads to the promotion of some value or good is a reason that weighs in favor of permitting that status inequality. Second, we have the standard of *participant acceptance*. If individuals who are party to the status relation find have reason to accept the status inequality, then this weighs in favor of permitting status inequality. Notice that the standard of participant acceptance makes reference solely to participants of the relevant kind of status. We might think that underwater basket weaving is a valueless activity and a waste of time, but insofar as underwater basket weavers value the activity, they might still have reason to think that skill at underwater basket weaving warrants greater status within that group.

Value promotion and participant acceptance are standards that weigh in favor of permitting status inequality and so are not decisive reasons to accept an inequality of social status. Nor are they reasons to accept any particular degree of status inequality. Conclusive acceptance of some kind of inequality of non-public social status (or some particular degree of such status) must surely consider all pertinent reasons, which means taking account of considerations that speak against permitting inequalities of public social status as well.

One kind of consideration that speaks against permitting inequalities of some kind of status is well illustrated by the possibility of the arms-race dynamic. If status-seeking behavior is socially costly, then status-seeking behavior will lead to waste. If you and I don't value luxury cars except to show up the other, then we will overinvest in luxury cars for the sole sake of winning out in that status competition. At the end of the day, we will have cars that are much more expensive than what we wanted. This kind of overinvestment also seems to occur in workplaces, with individuals over investing in productivity and underinvesting in "unobservables" such as safety or quality of life improvements,[78] and in individual consumption, with individuals overinvesting in conspicuous consumption, and underinvesting in goods that would make for greater improvements in welfare, such as savings.[79] When status inequality leads to behavior that is suboptimal from the perspective of status-seekers, then there is reason to restrict the degree of permissible status inequality, or perhaps to set restrictions on status seeking behavior by requiring certain kinds of conduct (e.g. with mandatory safety regulations or mandatory savings contributions). Hence, we have the standard of *social cost*, which speaks against permitting inequalities of a given kind of non-public social status when they lead to negative externalities or make parties to those status relations worse off than they otherwise need be. Reasons of social cost support measures that constrain status-seeking behavior or support rules that would require behavior that may otherwise be neglected because of a status arms-race.

---

[78] Frank, "The Demand for Unobservable and Other Nonpositional Goods."

[79] Frank et. al., "Expenditure Cascades."

A second kind of consideration speaking against permitting inequalities of non-public social status is the same that speaks against inequalities of public social status, namely that inequalities might undermine the adequate development of individuals' sense of self-esteem. If individuals value the community or activity they participate in, then being marked as an inferior in that community or activity may come at the expense of their sense of self-esteem.

There is, however, an important difference between non-public and public social status that we must keep in mind. Participation in relations of non-public social status, unlike in the case of public social status, will often be voluntary, and individuals will have the ability to exit relations of non-public social status. Because of the greater degree of voluntariness involved in relations of non-public social status (as compared to public social status) inequalities of status will pose a considerably lesser threat to individuals' sense of self-esteem. The voluntariness of such relations introduces the possibility, which was absent in the case of public social status, that individuals can exit the community within which they have low status.

The ameliorative effect of these kinds of voluntary status relations has been a frequently acknowledged feature of non-public status relations among philosophers. Rawls is aware of this when addresses the phenomenon of non-comparing groups:

> The various associations in a well-ordered society [or a not-so-well-ordered society, for that matter] tend to divide it into so many noncomparing groups, the discrepancies these divisions not attracting the kind of attention which unsettles the lives of those less well placed.[80]

It is a familiar feature of our social world that we divide into many distinct groups and associations, with individuals showing concern only for their status within the groups that they have chosen. The prototypical concern for status involves comparisons to one's colleagues or neighbors, rather than to the wealthiest or most successful in society. If there is a plurality of different associations and that individuals free to move between different groups and association will be able to exert some influence over who they compare to, which thus shapes *how* they compare to others.[81] If an individual finds herself within some group or association where she is low-status, and that low-status has a debilitating effect on her self-esteem, she may still have the option of exiting and finding a new group or association where her sense of self-esteem is not so threatened.

The diversity of social groups with their distinct kinds of non-public social status plays a second kind of ameliorative role. According to Robert Nozick, the

> most promising way for a society to avoid widespread differences in self-esteem would be to have no common weightings of dimensions; instead it would have a diversity of different lists of dimensions and of weightings. This would enhance each person's chance of finding

[80] *A Theory of Justice*, p. 470

[81] For an especially clear illustration of this point, see Frank, "Are Workers Paid their Marginal Products?"

> dimensions that *some* others also think important, along which he does reasonably well, and so to make a nonidiosyncratic favorable estimate of himself.[82]

When there is a diversity of kinds of status, there is a greater likelihood that an individual can find some kind of status along which they perform to a degree that is sufficient to secure an adequate sense of self-esteem for themselves.[83] We philosophers are a relatively sedentary bunch, given all the reading and writing that we do. This sedentary life means that most of us cannot run as fast or jump as high as professional athletes can, but that we can do neither of things as well as athletes does not normally shake our sense of self-esteem. This is, of course, because as philosophers we tend to care more about doing philosophy, and so appraise ourselves on the basis of the quality of our work and teaching, rather than on the basis of our athletic accomplishments. When there are many different groups each with their own kind of social status, individuals in a free society will be in a position to choose which kinds of characteristics should serve as the basis of their non-public status, and so will be able to shape, to some extent, the social bases of their self-esteem.

This point serves to further illustrate the profound difference between public and non-public social status. One of the distinctive features of public social status is that it obtains within society as a whole. Unlike in the case of non-public status relations, individuals are not free to choose between groups to form status relations with, barring the extreme option of exiting society altogether. Because of this, inequalities of public social status make for a far more pervasive threat to individuals' sense of self-esteem. When one is publicly thought of as an inferior, there are no other groups that they can escape to. The inescapability of public social status makes the fact that it can undermine individuals' sense of self-esteem all the more morally urgent.

In sum, the fact that inequalities of some non-public social status can pose a threat to individuals developing an adequate sense of self-esteem is a reason that speaks against permitting inequalities of non-public social status. But that reason must be qualified by taking into consideration the fact that individuals' attachment to a given kind of non-public social status will often be voluntary. Within a free society where individuals may associate as they please, individuals will be a in a position to preserve their sense of self-esteem by choosing the kinds of groups and association they will be members of. These points taken together suggest the standard of *threat to self-esteem* as one which speaks against permitting inequalities of non-public social status, but this standard must be qualified by the *degree of voluntariness* of the social relations within which the given kind of status is relevant.[84]

---

[82] *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 245-6. Emphasis original.

[83] A related point is made by Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, ch. 1.

[84] The "degree" of voluntariness is meant to make reference to the degree of difficulty one would experience in exiting the relationship in question in normal circumstances. The more difficult it would be to exit a given

Taking all these points together, we have a moral framework for the assessment of relations of non-public social status. On the one hand, the degree to which a given kind of status contributes to the promotion of some good or value, and the degree to which individuals party to the status relation find grounds for accepting inequalities of that kind of status, are both reasons that weigh in favor of permitting inequalities of non-public social status. On the other, the social cost of allowing inequalities of the given non-public social status, and the threat to self-esteem qualified by the degree of voluntariness of the relations in question, are reasons that speak against permitting inequalities of the given non-public social status.

As I have mentioned, this is only a moral framework for the assessment of non-public status relations. It does not on its own tell us how we ought to arrange any particular kind of non-public social status. To do that, we must attend to the particular features of the kind of social status we have in question and determine how the different standards enumerated above weigh for and against permitting inequalities of that kind of status (and the degree of inequalities that are permitted).

That being said, I believe that this analysis provides us with a presumption in favor of permitting inequalities of non-public social status, on the assumption that individuals live within a free society. The principle source of this presumption is the fact that in a free society individuals will be able to choose for themselves what groups and associations to be members of. Generally, the groups we identify with are tied to some activity or end that we find value. So, in a free society we can expect for there to be a great deal of voluntariness in joining specific groups and participant acceptance of the status relations within those groups. The presumption will principally be defeated, I think, by considerations of social cost. So, perhaps only in special cases of non-public social status relations that motivate especially socially costly behavior will we have reason to deem inequalities of status (of some degree) impermissible and to take measures to keep such inequalities in check. Otherwise, it would seem that we have compelling reason to be permissive with respect to inequalities of social status.

These observations are, of course, only tentative suggestions based on familiar features of non-public social status. The above standards for the assessment of non-public social status are meant to order our moral reasoning such relations, rather than offer a definitive statement of they should be regulated. Given the variety of non-public status relations that can obtain, conclusive judgments must be reserved until we take into considerations the details of a particular case.

We thus have the foundations for a moral theory of social status. Relations of public social status are to be regulated by the status principle, which holds that those status

relationship, the lower the degree of voluntariness. So, it would normally be far more difficult for an individual to, say, exit their extended family than it would be for them to exit their hobby group.

relations must be arranged such that individuals are equals within them (so far as such relations obtain). Relations of non-public social status, on the other hand, must be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and inequalities of those kinds of status relations may generally be presumed to be permissible within a society where individuals exercise a right to freedom of association.

The remainder of this dissertation will be concerned with assessing the implications of the status principle. I shall argue that the status principle has substantive egalitarian consequences for the organization of economic and political life. In chapter V, I will argue that the status principle grounds a consequent (and qualified) principle of resource egalitarianism. And, in chapters VI and VII I will argue that the status principle provides grounds for the justification of democratic institutions, and, in conjunction with a closely related principle of reciprocity, grounds for the authority of democratic institutions.

Before I can turn to developing these implications, there is still an important deficiency in the status principle that must be addressed. As I took note of in section 3 of this chapter, the status principle as stated is implausibly demanding. To resolve this problem we will need to determine whether there is some basis for the justification of some inequalities of public social status. I turn to this task in the following chapter, where I will argue that there are grounds internal to the theory developed here for the justification of some inequalities of public social status.

IV. Justifying Status Inequality[85]

I now turn to addressing the objection that the status principle, as stated in the preceding chapter, is implausibly demanding. I start by elaborating on the demandingness objection. In reply to it, I argue that there are resources internal to the theory developed so far to establish principled limits on the demands of the status principle. I first argue that there are certain features of persons, which I call *irrelevant characteristics*, which cannot be treated as sources of public social status while maintaining recognition respect for persons. Consequently, status inequalities based in irrelevant characteristics can never be justified. I then go on to argue that the right of persons to the free development of their basic moral capacities requires leaving space for them to pursue goods and values other than equality of public social status. From this argument it follows that inequalities of public social status can be justified when pursuing further equality of public social status comes at too great a cost to other goods and values. I conclude the chapter by addressing the fact that persons will generally disagree a great deal about what goods and values matter and to what extent they are at stake when considering the pursuit of greater equality of public social status. I defend an institutional solution to this problem of disagreement, and in later chapters I defend democratic institutions as being especially appropriate ways for achieving moral coordination in spite of such disagreement.

1. The Demandingness of the Unqualified Status Principle

In the previous chapter, I provided an argument which aimed to justify the

status principle: inequalities of public social status ought to be reduced and eliminated.

The principle, in its present, provisional form, holds that inequalities of public social status are *never* justified. A complete defense of the status principle must provide a principled account which explains when, and why, an inequality of public social status is justified, as otherwise the principle will be implausibly demanding.

The focus of this chapter will be that of examining the demandingness objection in detail and providing an answer to it. Answering the demandingness objection will also preempt a common kind of objection made by theorists who misunderstand egalitarian moral principles. As the common objection goes, egalitarian moral principles (should they concern status, welfare, opportunity, etc.) are implausible because they make a fetish of equality. Equality is taken as the value of sole concern, while all other values are neglected.

[85] As I mentioned in the introduction, the development of the complete status principle pursued in this chapter is revised quite substantially in the appendix, where I introduce some relevant distinctions between different kinds of public social status and offer a revised account of the complete status principle.

These kinds of objections misunderstand egalitarian moral principles because, so far as I am aware, no plausible egalitarian view holds that equality is the only moral value worthy of consideration, nor does any plausible egalitarian view suggest that equality should be prioritized over all other values. Rather, these accounts articulate the reasons we have for bringing about greater equality of the relevant sort, while taking into account that these reasons may be overridden or defeated by competing evaluative considerations.[86] On any plausible egalitarian view, then, equality of the relevant sort should not be regarded as the only value in the moral universe, and examination of the implausibility of the unqualified status principle serves to show how the present account of the status principle joins this family of plausible egalitarian views.

Let us consider, then, why exactly the unqualified status principle is implausible. That implausibility rests on the fact that the unqualified principle is susceptible to what I will call *the demandingness objection*. According to this objection, the unqualified principle is too demanding because it requires that all other goods and values be subordinated for the sake of equality of public social status.

To start, it may be useful to recapitulate the concept of public social status. One's public social status is the convergent relative appraisal that fellow members of society make of them in comparison to other members of society. In brief, it is one's relative goodness as a public person. Or, in slightly more technical terms, one's public social status is the overall status assessment of a person based only in their diffuse status characteristics, which are characteristics that are status conferring within society as such. Equality of public social status, then, is a condition that obtains when all are regarded as equally good qua public person.

Achieving equality of public social status will be quite demanding in most any society, and it will likely be the case that equality of public social status will conflict with other goods and values in at least two ways. First, the pursuit of other goods or values may naturally lead to some status inequality. An individual pursuing excellence within some field may naturally come to be esteemed and well-rewarded for their accomplishments, and their prestige in that field may "scale" and result in status gains in the context of public social status (Nobel prize winners, after all, are well-regarded not just by their peers, but the public as well). Unqualified demands for equality of public social status in such a case would require interference with valuable projects and the pursuit of other compelling goods.

Second, scarcity of time and resources makes it the case that time and resources dedicated to bringing about equality of public social status come with the opportunity cost of advancing other compelling goods and values. An example from recent memory involves a trade-off between the value of public health and advancement of equality of public social status. When confronted with a public health emergency, political officials and citizens may need to make difficult choices about what values to promote. Indeed, it

[86] For one example of such egalitarian pluralism, see Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality,* p. 31.

is not rare for values to conflict in some cases, as, for instance, demonstrations in support of social equality for black persons in response to the murder of George Floyd come with setbacks to public health when such demonstrations took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though perhaps less dramatic, many such cases arise in the normal course of social and political life in an unjust world of limited resources. In its unqualified form, the status principle would require giving lexical priority to the good of social equality in each and every case where social equality conflicts with some other good or value, regardless of the importance of or the extent to which other values that are setback.

Related to this second reason is the fact that pursuit of equality of public social status is sure to confront diminishing marginal returns at some point. As more equality of public social status is achieved, the marginal costs of pursuing greater equality of public social status will (likely) increase. At the margins, pursuing equality of public social status will not only come at a cost (opportunity or otherwise) to other goods and values, but as more equality of public social status is achieved, its pursuit will come at a greater and greater cost to other goods and values.

So, according to the demandingness objection, the unqualified status principle is implausible because it simply asks too much of us. Public social status inequalities may be a natural consequence of pursuits of certain appealing goods and values. Pursuit of equality of public social status comes at an ever-increasing opportunity cost to the pursuit of other goods and values. The unqualified principle would have us subordinate all other aims and ends for the sake of promoting status equality, and that simply asks too much of individuals. A common desideratum of moral principles is that they are not excessively demanding. Now, this does not mean that moral principles cannot make demands of us, nor does it mean that moral principles cannot require that we make concessions. Just about any moral principle require that individuals sometimes make concessions, even some rather great ones, for moral ends. The concern here is that the unqualified status principle asks for too many concessions.

We may clarify this notion of excessive demandingness by examining the well-known critique of unconstrained maximizing utilitarianism made by Bernard Williams. According to Williams, this utilitarian doctrine (in its unconstrained, maximizing form) is an implausible moral theory because it requires individuals to prioritize the impartial good over their own meaningful commitments and life projects, which amounts to a compromise of individual integrity.[87] Personal integrity consists of, at least in part, an individual's ability to pursue and dedicate themselves to ends of their choosing. Utilitarianism violates integrity on account of subordinating all individual personal projects to the demands of the impartial good, understood in terms of maximizing aggregate well-being.[88] As it applies to the unqualified status principle, the claim is that the unqualified version of the principle is excessively demanding because being obliged

[87] Smart and Williams, *Utilitarianism For and Against*, pp. 108-17.

[88] Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, pp. 7-9.

to subordinate our conduct solely for the sake of achieving equal public social status precludes us from having opportunity to pursue ends of our own choosing. Left unqualified, the status principle would make us slaves to equality of public social status.

One other way to understand the claim that individuals are entitled to some integrity is in terms of individuals being entitled to exercise some discretion over what values to pursue or promote. There seem to be many appealing goods and values in the world, and it is an unfortunate fact that we must sometimes choose between them. Part of respecting individual integrity consists in leaving it to individuals, within some reasonable bounds, to choose for themselves what values are most worthy of their allegiance.

Hence, the fact that equality of public social status will conflict with other goods and values coupled with the fact that the unqualified status principle would have us prioritize equality of public social status over all other goods and values jointly make the unqualified principle objectionably demanding. If we are to provide a complete defense of the status principle, we must provide an account of the limits of its demands. It would, of course, be unsatisfying if we were to simply stipulate that whenever a demand to reduce or remove some status inequality was objectionably demanding, then that status inequality is justified. The aim of developing a moral theory is precisely that of providing principled explanations in place of such *ad hoc* restrictions. We should want an explanation of when and why an inequality of public social status is morally justified, despite the fact that such inequalities come at some setback to other basic moral concerns. I turn now to developing such a principled explanation.

2. The Limits of the Status Principle

I will argue that the reason that explains why we need not make excessive concessions in other goods or values for the sake of equality of public social status is the same reason that grounds requirements for greater equality of public social status in the first place. Limits on the status principle obtain by virtue of individuals' rights to the free development of their basic normative capacities.

I think that there is considerable appeal in relying on the relatively thin standard of a right to the free development of one's basic normative capacities. We can contrast this relatively thin right with a more substantial one, say a right to an adequate degree of development of one's basic normative capacities. What makes this latter conception of the right more substantive is that it entails positive duties to assist others such that they develop their basic normative capacities to an adequate degree. To be clear, relying on the thin conception is compatible with holding that individuals' rights concerning the development of their basic, and indeed if one accepts a stronger conception of the right that will entail the weaker one because taking measures to avoid creating social conditions that undermine the development of one's basic normative capacities will be a necessary condition of promoting the development of those capacities to an adequate degree.

The appeal of relying on a relatively thin conception of the right is that it makes the arguments developed in this and the preceding chapter available to a wider array of moral perspectives. I do not think that a more substantive claim is needed to develop a moral theory of social status than the claim that persons have a right to the free development of their basic normative capacities. This reveals an important fact about inequalities of public social status: public social hierarchies are in a deep way opposed to individuals' moral freedom. By showing that inequalities of public social status are conditions that undermine the development of our basic moral capacities, we establish that one of the social conditions of realizing our moral freedom is an egalitarian order of public social status. Since the key premise here is quite thin, I think that it is available to most moral perspectives. Most any moral theory will conceive of persons as moral agents with an interest in developing the requisite normative capacities. Anyone who recognizes that persons have a distinctive standing in the moral community and that persons are in possession of normative capacities the development and exercise of which we ought to respect is committed to the basic premise of my argument. The availability of this argument to a diverse array of points of view is of considerable appeal in the context of the democratic framework that I will lay out in later chapters because it provides us with grounds to hold that any citizen who is willing to participate in democratic society in good faith is thus committed to recognizing the grounds for the status principle. My thinking here is that good faith participation in democratic politics requires a basic attitude of respect towards others, and that attitude of respect is based in recognition of the fact that despite deep and profound disagreement, one's fellow citizens are equal members of the moral community who are in possession of the same normative capacities for the determination of a conception of the good as oneself. If these ideas are correct, then even within the context of a diverse society marked by substantive moral disagreement, individuals will have common grounds for accepting the ideal of social equality as a condition for the mutual respect of one another's basic moral freedom.

The preceding reasons are why I choose to rely on individual's right to the free development of their normative capacities as the ground for not only the status principle but for the limits of the principle as well. Furthermore, I think that relying on a common premise in both these cases lends the moral theory of social status an appealing unity. The ultimate reason that weights in support of the status principle will also serve as the ultimate reason for the limits that apply to the demands of that principle. A basic concern for individuals' moral freedom leads us to a preliminary conception of the status principle. And, the fact that an unrelenting demand that persons advance equality of public social status no matter the cost to other goods or values would amount to a profound transgression of individuals' moral freedom establishes the limits to the demands for public social status equality.

Let us turn, then, to developing an account of those limits. I will argue for two conclusion, one positive and one negative. (i) Negatively, I will argue that inequalities of

public social status are never morally justified when they are based in characteristics which if treated as a basis for appraisal make for a failure of recognition respect. (ii) Positively, I will argue that inequalities of public social status are justified when those inequalities are a consequence of promoting or preserving a sufficient degree of other goods or values.

i. The first claim that I will defend is that there are certain features of persons which are never appropriate grounds for inequalities of public social status. Treating certain features of fellow members of society as good- or bad-making features of them may, in some cases, be a failure of recognition respect, in which case resulting inequalities of public social status would be incompatible with giving them the respect that they deserve.

Paradigm examples of features that I think will never be appropriate grounds for status distinctions are race and gender. Race and gender are not the kind of features of individuals that can be good- or bad-making of them qua public persons, such that treating race or gender as grounds for appraisal of one's public social worth would make for a failure of recognition respect.

There are two crucial questions to address here. What kinds of characteristics are inappropriate bases for assessments of public social status? And, why are they incompatible with recognition respect for persons?

The kinds of characteristics that are never an appropriate ground for public social status appraisals are those that are entirely *irrelevant* to the appraisal of a person's public social worth. There are many characteristics for which there might at the very least be *pro tanto* considerations for treating as a basis of public social status. Perhaps society needs more doctors and engineers and holding individuals who occupy these positions in high esteem will incentive more persons to occupy those professions and meet that need. In such a case, there would be an instrumental rationale for justifying some degree of status inequality, which mean that, in the present example, the occupations in question would not be irrelevant to the appraisal of one's public social worth in the way that race and gender seem to be.

Irrelevant features, then, are those features of individuals for which we do not have even a *pro tanto* rationale for relying on as a ground of public social status inequality. Such features serve no instrumental purpose, nor is there any compelling moral reason for providing appraisal on the basis of those characteristics. Irrelevant characteristics are not the kinds of things that are representative of any kind of individual excellence. Characteristics such as one's race and gender re features of persons that are descriptive facts about them, and so do not reflect anything like the dedication of sustained effort to developing a socially valuable skill or the possession of a socially valuable talent.

There might be no reason for treating features like race or gender as sources of public social status, but would treating them as such a source amount to a failure of recognition respect? The answer lies in the relationship between justification and

recognition respect. According to Darwall, the "dignity of persons [which is the object of recognition respect]…is the second-personal authority of an equal: the standing to make claims and demands of one another as equal free and rational agents, including as a member of a community of mutually accountable equals."[89] When we accord individuals recognition respect, we recognize their authority and standing as a mutually accountable moral equal.[90] This is because among the basic normative capacities that make us equal members of the moral community are those that allow us to stand in relations of accountability. In being so situated, equal members of the moral community may call on one another to give account of their reasons to justify conduct that is of some significance to fellow members.

The inappropriateness of treating irrelevant characteristics as grounds for public social status can be understood when we consider how we might reply to a moral equal when they call on us to account for why they should be thought of as a public inferior simply because they possess certain irrelevant characteristics. Since public social status is a good, and since it can have profound effects on one's life prospects, the standing of persons to call on us to account for inequalities of public social status is warranted.[91] If the characteristics that would be the source of public social status are irrelevant feature of public persons—if there are not even any *pro tanto* considerations that might speak in favor of permitting public social status inequality based in such characteristics—then we will be unable to offer any justification. Lacking reasons to justify such a social order, we will be denying individuals a moral good of great importance for no reason at all.[92]

---

[89] Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, p. 121.

[90] We may accept that mutual justification is a consequence of recognition respect while maintaining neutrality between substantive moral theories. Substantive moral theories, after all, provide an account of *how* justification ought to proceed or what kinds of reasons can factor into justification. My claim is that regardless of how we conceive of justification proceeding, it will never be the case that certain characteristics will be deemed morally relevant. On any plausible substantive moral theory, such irrelevant characteristics are taken to have no morally significant implications. Consider some prominent moral theories. Deontologists do not hold that the content or scope of moral rules changes in response to irrelevant characteristics, consequentialists do not allow for such irrelevant character to influence the assessment of consequences, and virtue theorists do not hold that virtuous behavior would be responsive to such irrelevant characteristics. One would be hard pressed, I think, to defend a utilitarian view which, say, weighed individual utility differentially in accordance with their race and gender.

[91] I should like to draw attention to what might be a familiar experience to some of us, which is that when individuals who seek to ground status differences in irrelevant characteristics are called upon to justify such status distinction, those individuals will present their justification such that it relies on what could be conceived of as relevant characteristics. Consider, for example, a person who believes that members of a certain race are socially inferior. When this person is challenged about their beliefs concerning members of this race, rather than double down on the inferiority being a direct consequence of race, they might instead begin appealing to other characteristics, such as higher rates of committing crimes, lower average income or education, alleged widespread defects in character, or the like. I believe that in such a case, we see that even those who would like to hold that irrelevant characteristics influence status will seek new, more relevant grounds for status evaluations when pressed to justify the status distinction.

[92] C.f. Scanlon, *Why Does Inequality Matter?*, pp. 26-30.

We must be careful to distinguish the irrelevance of a characteristic as it concerns public social status from the *arbitrariness* of a characteristic. By the above account, some characteristics is irrelevant to the public appraisal of a person's social worth when there is not even a *pro tanto* reason to think that the characteristic should be the basis of positive or negative appraisal. Whereas, I take an arbitrary characteristic to be one that persons possess on grounds of brute luck. Arbitrary characteristics can be relevant, and non-arbitrary characteristics can be irrelevant. An arbitrary characteristic, such as an unearned talent, might be relevant insofar as contributes to some valuable public social good (in which case there would be a *pro tanto* instrumental rationale for positive appraisal). And, a non-arbitrary characteristic, such as a deliberately cultivated talent, can be irrelevant, if the talent makes little to no contribution to any public social good. There could be good reason for holding in high regard naturally talented doctors who contribute a social necessary good, and there will likely be no good reason for holding in high regard an individual who has become especially adept at juggling through her own effort and commitment.

Now, there is bound to be some disagreement as to what characteristics really are irrelevant. I will mention one difficult case shortly, but I should like to start with some simpler cases that can be dealt with more straightforwardly. The simpler case concerns any instance where some person thinks that individuals who are members of certain groups, historically speaking groups like racial minorities or women, have inferior normative capacities, and that consequently lower status for such persons is fitting. The idea behind these kinds of views is that some groups of persons are moral inferiors and because of this it is right to treat them as social inferiors.

We can dismiss this kind of argument because it requires abandoning the basic premise that serves as the starting point of the present theory, namely that individuals have equal fundamental moral standing. Views attributing basic moral inferiority to certain groups of persons do not present an objection within the context of the present view, but rather reject it outright. It is my belief that the (rather rare) philosophical convergence on the idea that persons have equal fundamental moral standing provides us with adequate grounds for setting aside such views as unreasonable. While reasonableness is often a vague concept, perhaps deployed with suspicious convenience at times, it is nevertheless the case that any moral theory that takes normative disagreement seriously must draw some boundaries as to what counts as a reasonable disagreement and what does not. And I believe that widespread confidence in the conception of persons as possessing equal fundamental moral standing warrants the claim that it is unreasonable to regard some persons as being inherently morally inferior.

So, we can handle the simple case of disagreement concerning what features of persons are irrelevant with ease because they are incompatible with the conception of persons as equal members of the moral community. I will now turn to a more complicated kind of case that does not admit of so quick a response. The more difficult

kind of cases that I have in mind are those where individuals disagree about whether some feature of persons is chosen or not. Consider an example from public debate in the United States concerning the sexual preferences of gay persons. Many hold that sexual preferences are unchosen dispositions of individuals, such that whether one is gay or not is irrelevant in the same way that one's race or gender is. Those holding certain religious views, however, disagree. On their view, one's sexual preferences are to some extent within one's control, such that one can be held responsible for their sexual desires and conduct. Moreover, individuals hold that there is reason to regard the sexual preferences of gay people as immoral, perhaps because they make for a violation of divine commands. So, on this kind of religious perspective, having sexual preferences for members of the same gender is a voluntary, immoral choice. These persons might then think that these features of gay sexual preference can make them a relevant ground for justifying status inequality, perhaps because they believe it fitting that wrongdoers have lower social status, or perhaps because they believe that lower social status may be an effective mechanism for deterrence.

What makes this case more challenging is that, as described, it need not commit any party to the view that members of certain groups are inherently morally inferior. Indeed, those holding the religious view just described may insist that they do in fact regard persons with gay sexual preferences as moral equals—this is why they hold them accountable to the same moral standards that these religious persons hold themselves accountable to. The conflict in this case is a disagreement over the metaphysical status of certain characteristics within a background of deep moral disagreement. One group holds that sexual preferences are unchosen and irrelevant, whereas the religious group holds that the preferences reflect an act of voluntary choice to do wrong and can therefore be the basis of an assessment of social status. What are we to make of such a disagreement?

I will shortly lay out what I think is a useful framework for thinking through this kind case. That framework will rely on the justificatory test for irrelevance developed earlier in this section. I should also like to make clear that I do not mean to suggest that all parties to this dispute in the United States provide the kind of reflective reasons that I have just surveyed. Some of those to whom I attribute the religious view may simply carry certain biases or prejudices against gay persons, and we should be clear that these are not grounds to regard gay persons as socially inferior, any more than a bias or prejudice against any group is a reason to regard its members as morally inferior. Nor do I mean to suggest that the availability of a refined religious rationale excuses these kinds of biased or prejudicial views. The issue, rather, concerns the more developed religious rationale that some persons might come to hold as a matter of considered reflection, and it is this religious rationale which leads to a reasoned dispute about the (ir)relevance of persons' sexual preferences in assessments of public social status. The point of addressing this more developed rationale is that it provides us with an opportunity to study an especially difficult kind of case for the present framework, and the value of engaging with

the case may obtain even if few, if any, parties to the public debate really hold the reflective rational.

Moving on to my proposal, then, I believe that we can resolve this issue by returning to the justificatory test developed earlier in this section. According to this test, some characteristic C is irrelevant when we are unable to offer any reason as to why C should be a source of public social status. The complication we have encountered is that there can be disagreement about whether there is any reason to justify inequality on the basis of some characteristic, such as sexual preference. At first pass, it would seem that there are such reasons, namely those relied on in the religious rationale for treating gay sexual preferences as a basis for lesser public social status. However, I do not believe that these kinds of reasons will be adequate. While such religious reasons may be reasons for some, they will not, I think be reasons for those who would be made lower status. These reasons carry force only for those who take for granted certain metaphysical and moral claims that will not be commonly shared among members of a diverse society. As Darwall identifies, it is a normative felicity condition[93] of second-personal address that we take for granted that the object of the address can understand and be guided by the content of the address.[94] "A putatively authoritative [issuing of a reason] whose validity someone cannot possibly recognize and act on is guaranteed to be infelicitous."[95] We cannot even begin to make sense of the act of exchanging reasons unless we presuppose that the recipients of the reason can appreciate the reason being offered as a consideration that can guide how they should act. If the normative felicity condition is not satisfied, the exchange of reasons would be a mere exercise in goading the other party under a moral pretense.

As it applies to the present case, I do not believe that the religious basis for treating sexual preferences as a status characteristic satisfies the normative felicity conditions of reason giving. These reasons require the presupposition of a comprehensive normative and metaphysical doctrine that will not be held among some

---

[93] Following Austin, Darwall understands felicity conditions as those presuppositions that must be taken for granted in order for a conventionally defined act to count as a successful instance of some illocutionary act. To take a simple example, I might say to you: "Careful, there's ice under the snow." The illocutionary act is my providing you with a warning about the risk of slipping on some ice. In order to provide you with such a warning, I must take a number of things for granted, such as the fact that it is common knowledge that ice is slippery, that people do not normally desire to slip and fall, and so on. Those presumptions are the felicity conditions for my warning you about ice under the snow. *Normative* felicity conditions are presumptions that must be taken for granted if some conventionally defined act is to be an instance successful of a successful normative illocutionary act. So, some felicity conditions for my conventional utterance of "I promise" include presumptions that you appreciate that promises generate moral duties, that the duty takes precedence over your immediate desire for gratification of some preferences, and so on. Without such presumptions, we could not even begin to make sense of the illocutionary act of promise-making. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, pp. 52-5.

[94] *Ibid.* pp. 74-6

[95] *Ibid.* p. 76.

of those who would suffer lesser public social status if sexual preferences were treated as a status characteristic. Consequently, these reasons will not be reasons *for* the would-be low status. From this, it follows that there is no reason (that satisfies the felicity conditions of reason-giving) that can be offered to the would-be low status that would justify their inferior position that would be a consequence of treating sexual preferences as status characteristics. This means that the justificatory test is unsatisfied, and so sexual preferences should be regarded as irrelevant characteristics.

Do note that this analysis does not hold that reasons based in a comprehensive religious doctrine are never reasons for justifying *any kind* status inequality. They are simply a kind of reason that is inappropriate for justifying inequalities of *public* social status. If we were to consider a different social context, and ask, say, whether treating sexual preferences as a status characteristic within the church was justified, we may very well arrive at a different conclusion. This is because within the context of the church, it could be that all participants share a common and comprehensive religious doctrine, and so the felicity conditions for issuing religious reasons to justify status inequality are satisfied. A consequence of this framework, then, is that distinctly *private* reasons, meaning those reasons that must presuppose acceptance of some comprehensive metaphysical, religious, or normative doctrine, are never a basis for justifying inequalities of *public* social status. Justification of inequalities of public social status, if they are to be felicitous, must rely only on those reasons accessible to public persons as such, which is to say public reasons.[96] This precludes relying on private justifications which must take

[96] There is some debate within the tradition of public reason liberalism concerning what reasons count as public reasons. On the one hand are consensus theorists, who hold that public reasons must be reasons that are shared by all members of the relevant social group. See, for example, Quong, *Liberalism without Perfection*, ch. 6. On the other hand, there are convergence theorists, according to whom public reasons are reasons that are available to any member of the relevant social group. See, for example, Gaus and Vallier, "The Role of Religious Convictions in a Publicly Justified Polity;" Gaus, "A Tale of Two Sets." What these views disagree on is when justification on the basis of public reasons is achieved. On the consensus view, some conclusion is publicly justified if, and only if, every relevant person has conclusive reason which they share with all others to accept the conclusion. On the convergence view, some conclusion is publicly justified if, and only if, every individual has conclusive reason to accept the conclusion, regardless of whether they can share it or not. One way to understand this disagreement is as a dispute about whether the normative felicity conditions for reason giving include something like a condition of reflexivity. That is, these views disagree about whether to offer someone else a reason R to accept some claim, the person offering R must themselves accept R. To make matters concrete, we might ask whether an atheist is abusing normative discourse when they tell their religious friend, say, that they ought to regard other persons as moral equals because all persons are made in God's image. It bears noting that while these questions have spurred a rich dispute among theorists of public reason, we need not provide a definitive answer here. As such, I leave it to the reader to rely on the conception of public reasons that they find most appealing. My own view is that the convergence account is most appealing, on account of the fact that the kinds of disagreement that make public justification appealing in the first place would seem to preclude agreement on what reasons count as public reasons on the consensus view. See my "The Epistemic Limits of Shared Reasons," on this point.

for granted comprehensive doctrines that will not be shared among individuals who stand in relations of public social status.

An important qualification to the preceding analysis is that it is only preliminary. In order to determine whether some characteristic is irrelevant or not assessments of public social status, we must consider whether there is any public justification for treating that characteristic as a basis for public status. While we might take for granted that some reasons will always be public, such as reasons based merely in the agency of persons,[97] whether other reasons are public within the relevant social group or not may be a matter of contingency. If some comprehensive doctrine was held universally within some society, then appeals to reasons based in that comprehensive doctrine would satisfy the normative felicity conditions of reason-giving in the context of justifying inequalities of public social status. So, while this framework provides us with some basis for assessing whether some characteristic is irrelevant to appraisals of public social status or not, a determinate judgment will need to consider the contingent features of the particular social-moral community under evaluation.

To sum up the present point, I have argued that it is always a failure of recognition respect to treat irrelevant characteristics as the basis of appraisals of individuals qua public persons. Recognition respect for persons requires that we be able to justify ourselves to one another when called upon to do so. In the case of irrelevant characteristics, we will be unable to answer the call for justification. This justificatory test also provides us with a useful way of proceeding in cases where individuals disagree about whether some characteristic is irrelevant or not. The consequence of the justificatory test was that the reasons offered in support of some characteristic's relevance for public social status assessment must be distinctly public reasons. Insofar as one relies on non-public reasons to justify treating others as either social inferiors or social superiors, they contribute to bringing about unjustified inequalities of public social status.

ii. I will now turn to developing a direct answer to the demandingness objection by developing a principled explanation of when, and why, inequalities of public social status are morally justified. The key to answering this objection is the fact that an unqualified status principle would compromise individuals' moral freedom.

More precisely, then, I believe that inequalities of public social status may be justified because unqualified demands for equality of public social status will threaten to undermine individuals' capacities to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good in at least two ways. First, a status principle with overriding priority relative to all other evaluative commitments would undermine individuals' motivation to form and revise a conception of the good. If an individual anticipates conflict between the status principle and other values, and if they know that the demands of the status principle will always win out over whatever evaluative commitments they might form, then they will have little

[97] Gaus, *The Order of Public Reason*, pp. 334-41.

reason to even begin to deliberate and reflect about what goods or values are worthy of their commitment. What point would there be in exercising the time and effort needed to arrive at a conception of the good if one knows that it will simply be subordinated and overridden by the status principle? One may as well save the effort and defer to the status principle from the outset. In this case, the unqualified status principle would crowd out the motivational basis for individuals to reflect on their conception of the good, an activity which is constitutive of individuals' capacity to pursue a conception of the good.[98]

Second, the unqualified status principle will preclude individuals from generally having the opportunity to pursue their conception of the good. The thought here is that permissions to pursue one's settled conception of the good will not obtain because persons can generally act in service of greater equality of public social status, however, little they might advance that end. In order for individuals to be able to exercise their capacity to pursue a conception of the good, they will naturally require opportunities to pursue their conception of the good. The unqualified status principle would deny individuals such opportunities.

In addition to a lack of opportunity to exercise one's capacity to pursue a conception of good being a cause for concern as such, it may also be a cause of concern on account of stunting individuals' development of that capacity. If we take for granted that the adequate development of one's capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good, like the development of most any capacity, requires exercise, then the unqualified status principle would pose the risk of undermining individuals' capacity to pursue a conception of the good by denying individuals the opportunity to exercise that capacity.[99]

The basic problem with the unqualified status principle, then, is that an overriding commitment to equality of public social status leads to the exclusion of the conditions for the development and exercise of one's capacities to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good. We see, then, that the unqualified status principle not only falls to the demandingness objection, but that the principle is unacceptable on account of the same reasons that justify the status principle in the first place. By denying persons the

[98] There is a more general point here, which is that granting moral principles lexical priority seems to be at odds with the open-endedness of moral reasoning. This suggests there is a further reason in support of rejecting lexical priority because of the fallibility of our moral reasoning. We humans often make errors in our moral reasoning, and it is important to recognize the possibility of such errors and the possibility that past decisions may have been influenced by error. One way to achieve moral progress is to reduce the frequency of these errors, but doing so may require revisiting decisions, or approaching moral problems from different, novel perspectives. Being in a position to do this requires leaving the opportunity for open-ended moral reasoning. So, even if we did have some reason to regard some moral principle as lexically prior to others, it may be prudent to treat the principle as though it did not have such priority, so as to preserve opportunity for open-ended moral reasoning which in turn creates opportunities for moral progress. I owe these points to Allen Buchanan.

[99] A point made familiar to us by Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, book 2 ch. 1.

opportunity to develop their capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good, the unqualified status principle becomes a source of excessive restrictions on the moral freedom of individuals. The very same reason that leads us to accept the status principle thus also ultimately sets limits on the demands of the status principle.

Taking these considerations together, we arrive at the

> *Complete Status Principle:* inequalities of public social status ought to be reduced and eliminated such that (a) there are no inequalities of public social status based in irrelevant characteristics, and remaining inequalities are to be reduced up to the point that (b) realizing equality of public social status any further would come at a disproportionate cost to other goods and values which are not grounded in irrelevant characteristics.

The complete status principle identifies the social conditions under which all members of society may enjoy the fullest extent of moral freedom compatible with reciprocal recognition of the moral freedom of others. In its complete form, the status principle captures the idea that a balance must be struck between the need to advance equality of public social status on the one hand, and the need for opportunities to pursue other goods and values a byproduct of which will be some inequality of public social status. An appropriate balance is achieved under social conditions where equality of public social status is advanced to such a degree that the low status do not suffer from excessive impediments to the development of their basic normative capacities while all citizens are afforded adequate opportunity to pursue other goods and values that they settle on through the exercise of their normative capacities.

Some points about the complete status principle naturally warrant elaboration. The first, and perhaps most pressing, concerns providing a more precise characterization of when exactly greater status equality would come at "too great a cost" to other goods and values. I shall address this point in the following section, where I will argue that disagreement and ambiguity about whether gains in status equality are too costly can be addressed by institutional means.

Secondly, it may be helpful to consider the relationship between the complete status principle and the idea of a personal prerogative which has had some prominence in egalitarian philosophy.[100] In the context of consequentialist moral theory, Samuel Scheffler introduced the personal prerogative as a means of responding to the integrity objection to consequentialism.[101] A personal prerogative grants individuals permission to deviate from the demands of some moral principle for the sake of pursuing or promoting some other ends of their choosing. G. A. Cohen makes frequent use of the idea of a personal prerogative in his egalitarian philosophy, writing that a personal "prerogative

[100] For some discussion, see Estlund, "Liberalism, Equality, and Fraternity in Cohen's Critique of Rawls."
[101] *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, pp. 7-9. See also pp. 20, 56, and 60.

grants each person the right to be something other than an engine for the welfare of other people [or public social status, in our case]: we are not nothing but slaves to social justice."[102] A personal prerogative is a permission for individuals to take temporary leave from the demands of some moral principle.

The reasoning leading to the complete status principle is clearly related to the idea of a personal prerogative, in that it too is meant to establish limits on the demands that a moral principle can make on individuals. But we should not think of the complete status principle as consisting of simply the unqualified principled with an accompanying personal prerogative for individuals. The complete status principle goes further than the mere addition of a personal prerogative.

A personal prerogative is a permission for individuals to deviate from the demands of some moral principle. In being such an individualized permission, it would serve to justify all and only those inequalities of public social status that are a consequence of legitimate exercise of the personal prerogative. The complete status principle certainly implies that individuals have a personal prerogative with respect to the status principle, but it also implies that certain inequalities of public social status can be justified which are not the product of legitimate exercises of a personal prerogative. For instance, if there were some inequalities of public social status the elimination of which would come at an excessive burden to other goods and values, then even if those inequalities were not the consequence of legitimate exercises of the personal prerogative, they would nevertheless be justified. So, the conditions permitting inequalities of public social status contained in the status principle may be related to the idea of personal prerogative, and indeed they imply that individuals enjoy a personal prerogative with respect to the status principle, but those conditions are, nevertheless, more expansive than a personal prerogative taken alone.

3. Institutionalizing the Status Principle

According to the complete status principle, an inequality of public social status is justified when further reducing the inequality would come at a disproportionate cost to other goods and values (and the status inequality is not based in irrelevant characteristics). Such disproportionate cost can obtain in a number of ways. Status inequality might be a byproduct of an activity that is instrumental in securing some other good or value. Actions meant to reduce or remove status inequality may require compromises with respect to other goods or values. Or, because of scarcity of time and resources, a choice to reduce or remove inequalities of public social status may come at too great an opportunity cost of promoting other goods and values. In each of these cases, courses of action meant to reduce inequality of public social status would come at some expense to other goods and values. If that cost is too high, then the inequality of public social status

[102] *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, p. 10.

in question is justified. My aim in this section is to specify how we are to reach judgments about whether the cost of pursuing equality of public social status is too great.

Before we can take account of the moral costs of pursuing equality of public social status in any given case, there are some preliminary questions that must be settled. In particular, we must determine: first, what other goods or values are at stake in a given case; second, the degree to which the other goods or values could be advanced by different courses of action; third, the degree of inequality of public social status that presently obtains and the degree to which we might advance equality of public social status; and fourth, the weight of gains in the competing goods and values relative to the weight of gains in equality of public social status.

In any society where evaluative diversity is present, all of these considerations will be the object of considerable disagreement. First, since diverse persons hold different and conflicting evaluative commitments, they will often disagree about what evaluative considerations are salient within a given case. Persons will disagree about whether there are other values at stake in a given case because they hold different values to be important or salient in various contexts. Second, persons will disagree in their assessments of the degree to which both equality of public social status and other evaluative commitments will be advanced or setback respectively by a given course of action. Determining the degree to which a given value is realized within the world is, after all, a complex matter that requires individuals to attend to various empirical facts accompanied by making complicated inferences about the degree to which a given value has been realized (or might be realized). Diverse individuals will attend to different facts, be in possession of different bodies of evidence, and draw different inferences, which would result in different estimates of the degree to which equality of public social status and other goods and values would be (or have been) advanced or set back respectively. Lastly, evaluative disagreements among diverse individuals are sure to carry forward to their relative weightings of different goods and values, such that individuals will assign different weights to the values at stake in a given case. All this leads to substantive disagreement among individuals in their judgments of whether the proportionality condition will be satisfied within the complete status principle because individuals will normally disagree about what goods and values are stake, the degree to which various goods and values would be advanced or set back by some course of action, and the relative importance of different goods and values.[103]

So, we should expect that individuals will normally disagree about whether a given inequality of public social status is justified or not. Note that this is a claim about individual judgments, and not about the status principle itself. Perhaps the status principle is determinate in any given case, and our limited epistemic positions and abilities put such determinate judgments beyond our epistemic reach. Be that as it may, the fact that

[103] Such disagreement will only be compounded if we grant, as I think is plausible, that the very idea of "too great a cost" is vague.

individuals will normally disagree about the implications of the status principle is surely of some significance for the moral theory of social status. If we should hope to rely on the moral theory of social status as a guide in the organization of our social order, we will naturally need to take into consideration how the status principle could be implemented in our social practice. Supposing that deep disagreement about social and moral matters is a normal feature of our social practice, the challenge posed by disagreement is one that the moral theory of social status should be able to address if it is to be successful in one of its aims.

The discussion so far has been rather abstract, and it may be valuable to consider a concrete case of evaluative disagreement that is of some significance for the moral theory of social status. In the following chapter, I will consider an argument made by Elizabeth Anderson which holds that relational equality requires social integration in otherwise segregated communities.[104] The empirical hypothesis that informs this view and the justification for the claim to integration will be surveyed later. For the sake of example, let us simply take for granted that the status principle weighs in favor of a policy of social integration. The question we confront is: to what extent, and how, ought we to go about integrating an otherwise segregated society? Evaluative disagreement will be prominent among the answers to this questions. For, even if it is true that segregation contributes to *prima facie* unjust social inequality, measures that would undue segregation may come at considerable costs to other important goods and values. Tommie Shelby argues, for instance, that segregation by black people in the United States allows them to "close ranks," and to offer support to one another in a social setting of mutual acceptance, which allows the already disadvantaged to avoid the perils and psychological costs of interacting with outgroup members in a racially divided society.[105] Accordingly, individuals might disagree about the best means for integrating. Some might think that busing students is sufficient, while others hold that more comprehensive neighborhood integration is needed. Some might think that certain integrative policies will come at too great a cost to solidarity among black persons, while others might think that anything short of comprehensive integration will be unjust. How are we to strike a balance between the costs and benefits and arrive at a determinate course of action in such a case?

The fact of such pervasive disagreement might lead us to the pessimistic conclusion that implementing the status principle is a lost cause. We might think that individuals will simply disagree about far too much to ever acknowledge and comply with common demands of the status principle.

I do not think that these are adequate grounds for accepting the pessimistic conclusion. At most, the fact of pervasive disagreement establishes that implementing the status principle cannot be achieved by a system of interpersonal accountability. That is, we cannot realize the ends set by the status principle by relying on individuals to hold

[104] This thesis is argued for at length in Anderson's *The Imperative of Integration*.

[105] See Shelby, "Integration, Inequality, and Imperatives of Justice," pp. 268-72.

one another accountable to the directives generated by the status principle. Such individual relations of accountability will be unsustainable because persons will too often disagree about what the status principle requires. A system of mutual accountability naturally requires some degree of convergence on what individuals believe they ought to be held accountable to. But a system of interpersonal accountability is just one way to implement a moral principle, and it is hardly exhaustive of the means by which we might achieve morally important ends. We might instead rely on institutions to realize those ends.

Institutions are the "rules of the game," or systems of constraints that shape the way in which individuals interact with one another within certain contexts.[106] They are comprised of recognized rules, functions, procedures, processes, and roles, and normally involve well-defined relations of authority among those acting within the institution. Institutions can both be formal, meaning that the rules, roles, procedures, etc. that make up the institution are codified and stated explicitly, or they can be informal, meaning that the rules, roles, procedures, etc. that make up the institution are simply common knowledge among those who participate within the institution.

A critical function of institutions, formal or informal, is that of eliminating uncertainty in individual decision-making and providing order to our social world. When there are well-defined rules for how individuals will behave, and well-defined roles establishing who can do what, one's process of decision-making is simplified considerably. Perhaps the central way in which institutions can eliminate such uncertainty by serving to establish points of coordinating among individuals.[107]

The standard example is the institution (or convention, depending on how the rules are stated) of rules of the road. Driving on the road without assurance as to how other drivers will behave is a risky business. All drivers will, in such a case, have reason to reduce the degree of uncertainty that would characterize driving. They might then codify rules that individuals are to drive on the right-hand side of the road, and they might create roles, such as traffic police, which designate individuals who have authority to direct traffic in certain settings and to penalize individuals for breaking the rules of the road. Such a common set of rules benefits all drivers, even if some drivers might have preferred to drive on the left-hand side of the road, and even if in the future some drivers are penalized by traffic police.

We can understand the challenge of disagreement about the application of the status principle as a kind of moral coordination problem.[108] The challenge posed by

---

[106] For a classic analysis of institutions, see North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance.*

[107] Lewis, *Convention*, provides an analysis of conventions in terms of solutions to coordination problems. I take for granted that a similar analysis applies to formal institutions as well. For recent discussion in a similar vein, see Guala, *Understanding Institutions.*

[108] For further discussion of moral coordination problems, see Gaus, "Self-Organizing Moral Systems;" Gaus, *The Order of Public Reason*, pp. 391-400

evaluative disagreement is that even if persons accept the status principle, they may nevertheless disagree about what the upshot of such acceptance is. Even so, disagreement about the upshot does not undermine the prior acceptance of the status principle. Persons, we might say, have sufficient reason to implement the status principle in *some* form, and they simply disagree about how it is that the principle should be implemented. To return to the controversy of social integration in racially segregated societies, this would mean that individuals have some compelling grounds to favor lesser social inequality, and this is a reason weighing favor of policies of integration, but there is disagreement about whether there are countervailing reasons that ultimately win out. Despite such disagreement, there may be some range of laws or policies that all might agree strike a tolerable balance between social equality and competing values. The challenge is that individuals disagree about what law or policy should be chosen from within that range.

An analogy may be found in liberal arguments for property rights. On liberal views, individuals are normally taken to have compelling reason to accept *some* regime of property rights. The assurance and security offered by a stable regime of property rights is preferred by all to a system where no shared rules govern the use and ownership of property. Individuals, however, will disagree about the nuances of how a regime of property rights is to be organized. Any complete scheme of property rights includes many rules regulating marginal cases, conflicts, and details that individuals are sure to disagree about.

Nevertheless, even if individuals disagree about the particulars of property rights, they have sufficient reason to accept *some* regime of property rights. If individuals were left to their own devices, their conduct would jeopardize the stability of a scheme of property rights, for each individual is likely to act in accordance with what they believe to be the correct understanding of property rights, and individual judgments in this case will often conflict. Hence, to ensure the stability of a common scheme of property rights, individuals have conclusive reason to institutionalize a system of property rights, and to implement roles and procedures, such as judges and courts, in order to definitively resolve disputes and maintain the stability of the system of property rights.[109] Where individuals disagree about how basic moral claims are to be resolved, they may defer to a common body of rules as a kind of umpire.[110]

The status principle, then, is the analogue of property rights. Individuals have sufficient moral reason to accept the status principle, they will simply disagree about the implications of that principle in many of the particular cases that we encounter in our complex social world. Left to their own devices, individuals will be unable to hold one another accountable with regards to the status principle on account of pervasive

[109] On many readings, this is Locke's view of the role of the state with respect to natural property rights. See the *Second Treatise of Government*, chapters V and VII.

[110] Gaus, "Public Reason and the Rule of Law."

disagreement concerning the upshot of the principle. Thus, in order to avoid abandoning the status principle altogether, individuals have reason to institutionalize the status principle and to implement an authoritative scheme of rules which would determine the demands of the status principle and the resulting constraints on individual conduct.[111] Where the judgment of individuals bottoms out in irreconcilable conflict, mutual deference to authoritative institutions can serve as a way forward.

Institutionalization of the status principle would not imply that institutions are the *sole* subject of the status principle.[112] Individuals will still be subject to the negative requirements of the status principle, which is to say that individuals will still have duties to abstain from perpetuating inequalities of public social status or acting in ways that exacerbate inequalities of public social status. There will, of course, be disputes as to whether certain kinds of behavior that do so are exempt on the grounds of the personal prerogative, and so there will be limits to the degree to which individuals can hold one another accountable to the status principle in interpersonal conduct. Nevertheless, there are sure to be easy cases as well, where individual conduct only serves to contribute to status inequality. Behavior meant to humiliate, denigrate, or marginalize certain kinds of individuals, for instance, or other kinds of obvious status-seeking behavior, can be rightly objected to on the grounds of the status principle. One kind of conduct for which the status principle will set clear prohibitions concerns individual conduct that would treat irrelevant characteristics as grounds for appraisal of individuals. Treating one as an inferior based on her race or gender, for example, will never be permissible according to the status principle, and individuals are always under a duty to abstain from such conduct. And, we should not forget that the status principle furnishes us with the resources for evaluating the character of others in terms of the virtue of social equality and the vices of subservience and social ambition.

Institutionalizing the status principle thus provides a way forward when pervasive disagreement makes it unlikely that a system of interpersonal accountability could serve to realize the status principle. Relying on institutions allows us to overcome a moral coordination problem that persons acting on their own would be unable to resolve. It bears emphasizing that this is a *moral* coordination problem, and not a coordination problem in the standard sense, where the difficulty of coordination arises from differences in individual preferences or conflict of self-interest. The difficulty of coordination in this case arises on account of differences in moral judgment. The institutionalization of the status principle is thus meant to resolve the distinctly normative difficulty posed by this moral coordination problem, and not as a means to resolve more

---

111 C.f. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 266-9.

112 Whether institutions are the sole object of certain moral principles has been a prominent point of contention in the literature on Rawls' political philosophy. See: Rawls, "The Basic Structure as Subject;" Cohen, "Where the Action Is;" Murphy, "Institutions and the Demands of Justice;" Williams, "Incentives, Inequality, and Publicity."

traditional coordination problems that arise on account of conflict among individuals' preferences.

At this point, we should wonder how exactly the status principle is to be institutionalized. I reserve this discussion for the following two chapters, where I will argue that democratic institutions provide the most appealing means for resolving disagreement about the application of the status principle. The reasoning that leads to democratic institutions, put briefly, holds that because democratic institutions are both themselves authoritative on grounds of the status principle, and because such institutions provide a fair means for resolving disputes about the status principle, they ought to be relied on to determine how to proceed with discharging positive duties stemming from the status principle.

We thus have the complete conception of the status principle. We have seen that status inequality can never be justified on the basis of irrelevant characteristics, but that limits to the status principle obtain whenever social equality comes at too great a cost to other goods and values. Because this latter clause is likely to be the subject of considerable disagreement, I believe that the status principle must be institutionalized if it is to be meaningfully implemented in practice. For the remainder of this dissertation, I will be concerned with exploring the implications of the status principle in two contexts. Chapters V and VI argue that the status principle provides a justification of democratic institutions and, with the addition of another moral principle, a justification of democratic authority. Chapter VII then examines the implications of the status principle for the organization of economic production and distribution.

V. Social Status and Democracy

This chapter begins to develop a more complete account of how the status principle is to be institutionalized. My key claim is that the status principle can ground a justification of democratic institutions. This makes democratic institutions uniquely appealing as a means of resolving social and political disagreement about whether the status principle is satisfied, and indeed it makes democratic institutions appealing as a means for adjudicating disagreements of all sorts among persons conceived of as moral equals. After developing the argument for the justification of democratic institutions, I consider and reply to two objections. The first objection holds that even democracies admit of inequalities of power, and so the status principle should regard democracy as unjustified as well. The second objection holds that other, non-democratic arrangements can incorporate mechanisms that render resulting status inequalities morally unobjectionable.

1. The Problem of Disagreement Revisited

The justification of democratic institutions that I develop here is meant to identify a set of institutions that are an especially appealing means of institutionalizing the status principle. As such, I will begin with a brief review of the problem of disagreement that we encountered in the final section of the last chapter.

The problem of disagreement is a challenge for the complete status principle, which is distinct from the preliminary status principle in that only the former provides conditions for the justification of public social status inequality. Such conditions are needed because without them the status principle is an objectionably demanding moral principle. I argued that public social status inequalities are justified when bringing about greater equality of public social status comes at too great a cost to other goods and values, on the condition that the public social status inequality is not grounded in irrelevant characteristics.

The conditions for the justification of public social status inequality flow from the same source as the status principle itself. Such inequalities are justified when they play an important role in individuals' exercises of their capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good. So, we must qualify the status principle so as to allow inequalities of public social status on the same grounds that justify the status principle itself. The social order that satisfies the complete status principle is one where individuals' rights to the free development of their basic normative capacities are in equilibrium. In this kind of state of affairs, public social status inequality will not be so great that the development of basic normative capacities on the part of the low status is harmed, but a degree of inequality will still be permitted insofar as that inequality is a consequence of individuals' pursuit of a conception of the good.

The problem of disagreement arises when we consider whether any specific instance of inequality of public social status is justified or not. The fact that individuals

will normally exercise their capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good in such a way that does not result in anything close to a consensus on what goods or values are most valuable or worthy of pursuit will in turn produce a state of affairs where persons will generally disagree about whether some inequality of public social status is justified or not.

Disagreement of judgments concerning the justification of public social status inequality can occur for a number of reasons. Persons who hold diverse conceptions of the good will disagree about what values are salient in a given case. Individuals' appraisal of the degree to which status equality and other goods and values are presently advanced will diverge. Individuals will also weigh values differently, such that even if they were to agree on what values were salient and on the degree to which those values have been advanced, they may nevertheless disagree about the relative important of various goods and values, especially as they compare to equality of public social status.

We should expect, then, that individuals who are free to develop and exercise their capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good will disagree about when inequalities of public social status are justified. I proposed institutionalization of the status principle as a way of resolving this problem. The problem of disagreement may be characterized as a moral coordination problem. Individuals have compelling reason to favor some kind of advancement of the status principle to none at all, they simply disagree as to the way it should be advanced. Institutions can resolve coordination problems by establishing rules which, if followed, will lead individuals to coordinate their behavior.

Hence, institutions can resolve the problem of disagreement by implementing some mechanism or procedure which individuals will defer to in the case of conflicting moral judgments. I will now argue, first, that the status principle justifies the use of democratic institutions for this end. Then, in the following chapter I complete the resolution of the problem of disagreement by showing that democratic institutions are authoritative.

Lastly, before I turn to the substance of my argument, I would like to make some points about it clear. First, the argument that I will offer for democratic institutions is an egalitarian instrumental argument. This kind of justification may sound incoherent to many political philosophers and democratic theorists because, generally speaking, egalitarian justifications of democracy are not instrumental ones. Typically, egalitarian arguments for democracy aim to show that there is something substantively appealing about democratic institutions and their procedures on grounds of basic egalitarian moral principles. My argument, by contrast, will be that the implementation of democratic institutions will predictably be a highly effective means for achieving greater equality of public social status. The moral theory of social status, I argue, identifies democratic institutions as a uniquely appropriate scheme of political institutions for a society of public social equals. We might put the point in terms of democratic political equality putting "pressure" on public social status relations to be more equal. Since my argument is an instrumental one, it does not presuppose that substantive egalitarian arguments for

the justification of democracy are unsuccessful. Rather, I understand the present argument as complementary to more typical non-instrumentally egalitarian accounts of democracy as it identifies another strand of egalitarian thought that ways in favor of democratic institutions. Moreover, a further aim of the present argument is to resolve a problem within the moral theory of social status by appeal to theoretical resources internal to the theory. This furthers the case for the moral theory of social status by showing that the theory is sufficiently robust to offer a coherent reply to pressing internal challenges. Hence, I take the argument in the present chapter to further illustrate what a society of public social equals will look like by specify what political relations in such a society will look like.

2. Power, Status, and Democracy[113]

I will argue that the status principle provides sufficient reason to justify democratic institutions as a means of making collective decisions. Notice that this claim is much stronger than the one needed to resolve the problem of disagreement. In order to resolve the problem of disagreement, we need to only justify *some* means of collective decision-making for just those cases where individuals' judgments about the justification of status inequality conflict. The claim in this section, by contrast, is that the status principle serves as a ground for making collective decisions generally in a democratic way. Naturally, if the stronger thesis holds, then the weaker one follows.

The key claim in my argument is the causal hypothesis that inequalities of political power will cause inequalities of public social status. As a hypothesis, the strength and robustness of this claim will naturally depend on various contingencies. So, there is sure to be some variability in how exactly power affects relations of public social status in concrete social contexts. My aim is to show that there is a robust relationship between power and public social status, and to show that such a relationship obtains we will need to draw on scientific theories of social status. I believe that that status construction theory provides us with grounds that warrant a relatively high degree of confidence in the claim that inequalities of political will cause inequalities of public social status.

Status construction theory, recall, provides an account of how status characteristics are created and contribute to status inequality. Status characteristics are those features of individuals that are salient for the appraisal of their status within some group. Roughly put, the conditions for the construction of a public social status characteristic obtain when different states of some characteristic correlate with perceived primary goods, and there is some modest social sorting.[114]

We have reason to be confident in the hypothesis that inequalities of power will cause inequalities of status because inequalities of power will normally give rise to the conditions for the construction of public social status characteristics. Status

[113] The remainder of this chapter draws extensively from my "Relational Egalitarianism and Democracy."

[114] For a far more detailed discussion of status construction theory, see section 3 of chapter II.

characteristics can be constructed whenever certain goods are distributed unequally, and the distribution of those goods is correlated with different states of some characteristic (and there is modest social sorting). The kind of status characteristic that is constructed depends on the kind of group and the kind of good in question. Non-public status characteristics are constructed whenever the goods in question are particular to some group. Public social status characteristics particular are constructed when perceived primary goods are distributed unequally and in correlation with distinct states of some characteristics. The characteristics that ground appraisals of public social status are what sociologists call diffuse characteristics, as they are the kinds of status characteristics that range over an entire social group, can be appraised by any member of the social group, and tend to influence status assessments in more local settings. My claim, then, is that political power can play an important role in the construction of public social status characteristics and the creation of consequent conditions of public social status inequality.

One way in which power can have this effect is if power is treated as a perceived primary good. I think that power is a perceived primary good for precisely the reason that things like resources are perceived primary goods, namely, both are actual primary goods, or all-purpose means for advancing one's ends. When one wields power, they are afforded opportunities to shape the world to better reflect their aims and ends. Political power would allow individuals to rely on institutional apparatus to better enact realize their will in the world. So far as individuals recognize this fact about power, they will regard power as a (perceived) primary good.

Supposing, then, that power is a perceived primary good inequalities of power can be shown to contribute to the construction of status characteristics, and thus to consequent inequality of social status, in two ways. First, power may be the perceived primary good which, when correlated with states of some characteristic, transform that characteristic into a status characteristic.[115] Insofar as power is a desirable good in its own right, unequal distributions of power can give rise to other status characteristics. The resulting status characteristic will in turn play a role in the construction of inequalities of public social status that are objectionable on relational egalitarian grounds.

Second, the possession of power may itself be treated as a status characteristic. For this to be the case, there must be some perceived primary goods the distribution of which is correlated with the distribution of power. With few exceptions, this will be true under non-democratic arrangements. When political arrangements distribute power on the basis of education, lineage, or wealth, certain states of those characteristics will clearly be correlated with the possession of greater relative power. That is, if one is given greater power *because* they have certain states of particular characteristics (e.g. descending from a certain lineage or having a certain kind of education) then it follows that the possession of greater relative power will be correlated with those states of relevant characteristics.

[115] That is, inequalities of power may satisfy condition (1) stated in section 3 of chapter II.

When such a correlation obtains, the conditions for the construction of a status characteristic, and the ensuing inequality of status, are in place.

Notice too that the conditions for the construction of a status characteristic do not hold that the (non-status) characteristic and perceived primary good must be different things. That is to say, power can be both the perceived primary good and the characteristic that will be transformed into a status characteristic. Clearly, possession of power will naturally be correlated with itself, and so inequalities of political power can readily give rise to further status inequality.[116]

Since inequalities of political power will cause inequalities of public social status, we have grounds to require equality of political power. Democratic institutions are those political institutions that distribute political power equally, and so the status principle provides grounds for the justification of democratic institutions.

Now, one might take issue with the contingent nature of this justification. Daniel Viehoff has raised the challenge that an appeal to principles of relational egalitarianism—which you might understand the status principle to be an instance of—is insufficient to justify democratic institutions because of the contingent nature of the relationship between inequalities of power and inequalities of status.[117] On Viehoff's view, a successful justification of democracy requires conceptual necessity. In order to show that relational equality requires democracy, we must establish that inequalities of power *entail* inequalities of public social status. In support of his claim, Viehoff sketches a number of cases which show that inequalities of power do not entail inequalities of social status.

Considering one case will suffice to illustrate Viehoff's conceptual argument. Imagine a pair of egalitarian nomadic tribes that have conflicting claims over a hunting ground.[118] On account of the nomadic character of the tribes, it is exceedingly difficult to coordinate sending emissaries between them. A member of one tribe, named R, happens to encounter a member of the other tribe. In this encounter, R forms an agreement with the other individual on how to divide up hunting grounds in way that is acceptable for all members of both tribes. In doing so, R exercised unequal political power relative to her fellow tribe-members, but the unequal exercise of power in those conditions, Viehoff contends, does not amount to inequality of status.[119]

It is undeniable, I think, that inequalities of power do not entail inequalities of public social status. Indeed, any one case that shows inequalities of political power coexisting equality of social status suffices to refute the conceptual claim that inequalities

---

[116] For some discussion of the theory that leads to this last point, see Berger and Fisek, "Diffuse Status Characteristics."

[117] Viehoff, "Power and Equality."

[118] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[119] I set aide, for the sake of argument, the complications that would arise in Viehoff's case if tribe members disagreed with one another.

of power do not entail inequalities of social status. What, then, are we to make of the present justification of democracy?

I believe that Viehoff's argument, sound as it is, raises no challenge for the present account because the standard of success for the justification of democratic institutions on the present account is not as demanding as conceptual necessity. Viehoff seems to hold that a justification of democracy must show that democratic institutions are conceptually required as a consequence of some basic moral convictions. The justification I offered above, by contrast, relied on a causal relationship between power and status. Such a causal relation is sufficient for our present purposes, I think, because the fundamental normative commitment that has served as the ground of the present theory does not require conceptual necessity in the justification of normative claims.

That fundamental normative commitment is, of course, the norm of recognition respect. Recognition respect is an inherently relational norm—it is a norm that specifies what I owe to you.[120] I mentioned previously that recognition respect is closely related to interpersonal justification.[121] Individuals who are moral equals may call upon one another to justify their conduct towards one another. Part of according recognition respect to others involves recognizing their authority and standing as a mutually accountable equals.

The inherently relational character of this fundamental norm is important. The fact that you owe me recognition respect entitles me to call on *you* to justify your conduct towards me. This justification takes place within a relationship that you and I stand in, and so you are entitled to rely on salient features of our relationship in your justification, even if there are features of our relationship that contingent. A sergeant's rank is a salient reason that justifies her authority to issue commands to her squad.[122] Similarly, partners in a romantic relationship may appeal to the special features or the contingent history of their relationship as reasons to justify their conduct. So, in the context of relationships of public social status that might obtain between you and me, it does not matter that our social psychology is a contingent fact about us. So long as it we have compelling reason to believe that our psychology is such that inequalities of power will normally cause inequalities of public social status, then that fact provides grounds for you and me to demand equality of political power within our relations of public social status. We may conclude, then, that the status principle indeed provides compelling grounds for justifying democratic institutions, even though those grounds are contingent.

3. The Self-Defeat Objection

One might challenge the preceding justification of democratic institutions by raising what I will call the *self-defeat objection*. This objection begins with the observation that even

---

[120] Darwall, *Second-Person Standpoint*, pp. 49-61. Though note that the inherently relational character of recognition respect is a theme that is prominent throughout the entirety of Darwall's book.

[121] See section 2.i of chapter IV.

[122] Darwall, *Second-Person Standpoint*, p. 125.

democracies normally allow for some inequalities of political power. Most democratic regimes require certain individuals to occupy positions where they wield power over ordinary citizens, such as legislators or judges. Since individuals occupying these positions will enjoy greater relative power over others, if the preceding account was correct, then we should expect democratic political officials to have greater public social status than those over whom they wield power. It thus appears that even democratic institutions should be objectionable on the basis of the status principle because such institutions will give rise to some inequalities of power which in turn result in inequalities of public social status.

There is a preliminary argument that we can offer in reply to the self-defeat objection which, I think, we can also readily set aside. We might agree that the inequality of power among democratically elected representatives and citizens gives rise to objectionable inequalities of status, and consequently hold that only a radical form of direct democracy is permissible. Only those democratic arrangements which admit of no inequalities of power whatsoever would be permissible on this approach. While perhaps a valid way of replying, I think there is appeal in justifying more moderate forms of democracy.

This is not to say that we have decisive grounds to favor more moderate forms of democracy than direct democracy. The idea, rather, is that there are a number of reasons that weigh in favor of at least leaving open the prospect of more moderate forms of democracy. The first kind of reasons are conservative. At this point in human history, we simply do not know how stable or well-functioning radically direct democratic institutions would be because political communities have yet to implement and rely on radically direct democratic institutions at a large scale within modern societies. More moderate representative democratic institutions, by contrast, have been observed to be stable and enduring in many societies, and this may give us some reason to favor such comparatively moderate institutions.

Secondly, we might think that more moderate representative democratic allow for an appealing division of political labor. It would be quite demanding to expect all citizens to be informed on all relevant political issues and to be prepared to participate in the democratic decision-making process. Relying on representatives allows us to designate individuals who may specialize in political decision-making, freeing others to pursue their own projects and ends.

I will not argue for any one particular kind of democratic institutional arrangement here. My primary contention is that democratic institutions of some kind are justified. The choice of some particular democratic arrangement is a practical task, as considerations such as perceived legitimacy, stability, and other local conditions will surely be relevant in the choice of particular democratic arrangements.[123]

[123] For some discussion along these lines, see my "Democratic Public Justification." There, I argue that the selection of representatives by lottery will provide representative bodies that most accurately reflect the reasons

Let us suppose, then, that we have good reason to attempt to justify more moderate representative democratic arrangements. How can we defend this kind of arrangement from the self-defeat objection?

In reply, I believe that we can show that the pedigree of democratically-licensed inequalities of political power is such that participants are already assured of their equal fundamental moral standing. This assurance provides individuals with grounds to answer the complaint that some wrongly have greater or lesser social status because they have greater power. Public assurance of individuals' equal fundamental moral standing preempts individuals from regarding themselves as less worthy of esteem and keeps salient to others the fact that they are persons with equal moral standing.

The key claim of this reply is that democratic institutions provide public assurance to individuals that they have equal moral standing. There are two ways in which democratic institutions do this. First, such a public assurance is simply built into the design of democratic arrangements. Second, those granted democratically-licensed power are held accountable to those over whom they wield power.

The first reason holds that the structure of democratic institutions is itself meant to express respect for the equal basic moral standing of individuals by according them equal opportunity to influence the outcome of collective decision-making, and by making that equality public. Thomas Christiano has argued that democratic institutions, and the attending inequalities of power, satisfies a condition of public equality.[124] Public equality requires that individuals not only be treated equally, but that individuals can *see* that they are treated equally.[125] Democratic institutions meet the condition of public equality because they take seriously the diverse judgments of all concerning how to organize society in a public manner by granting all an equal say.[126] Hence, democratically-licensed inequalities of power do not fail to publicly express respect for the equal basic standing of all because the institutions leading to that inequality are justified on precisely those grounds. And if the inequality of power in question does not constitute a failure of recognition respect, then resulting inequalities of status are accordingly exempt from the charge of being failures to publicly respect the equal moral status of all.

The idea here is that the democratic process has already assured citizens of their equal public status by satisfying the value of public equality. While the public social status of individuals may indeed be unequal as a consequence of democratically-licensed inequalities of power, it does not express that any individual has an inferior moral standing relative to anyone else. Indeed, the exact opposite is expressed by the democratic

---

of the broader public. This, of course, only establishes that according to the criterion of accuracy of representation, we should expect lotteries to perform the best. This does not mean that lottocratic representation is all things considered the best institutional implementation of democracy, since it may be that other values, such as stability or perceived legitimacy, will weigh against the use of lotteries.

[124] Thomas Christiano *The Constitution of Equality,* ch. 3.

[125] *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

[126] *Ibid.*, pp. 88-95.

process. To put the point more generally, if you and I participate in some procedure *P* which publicly expresses respect for our equal basic standing, and participation in *P* results in some inequality *E* along some dimension, then the fact that *E* is a consequence of *P* provides us with a reason to hold that *E* does not speak against our having equal moral standing. The publicity of procedure *P* provides us with a commonly held reason to answer complaints about perceived inferiority. In other words, we can provide the low status with suitable grounds to assure the low status that they are worthy of esteem and recognized as moral equals despite the presence of democratically-licensed inequalities of political power by appealing to the public egalitarian features of democratic institutions.

The second reason for holding that democratic institutions provide individuals assurance of their equal fundamental moral standing is that those wielding democratically licensed inequalities of power are held accountable by those over whom the power is exercised. This reason holds that if A has power over B, but A's power is delegated or entrusted to her by B, then any resulting status inequality, if it obtains, would not constitute a failure of recognition respect.[127] In the case of democracy, there is a sense in which the power of democratic representatives is not *their* power to begin with. Rather, it is the power of citizens entrusted or delegated to the representative. A representative will have more power than a constituent in the same way that you might have more money than me after I give you a loan. While you might be in possession of more power or money, I would not infer from that face that you have greater status, and even if I did, the difference in status seems to hardly constitute a failure of recognition respect.

Now, as in finances, in the case of democratic politics there is some risk of abuse of trust or delegation. Despite the presence of accountability mechanisms, such as the regular threat of removal from office in electoral democracies, representatives might abuse their power for greater gains in power and status, just as I might swindle you under the pretense of a loan. This abuse might then result in gains of power or status that is not subject to democratic control in the way legitimate democratic power is, and so may then give rise to objectionable status inequality. But, while there might result an objectionable inequality of status, that objectionable inequality is *not* a product of democratic institutions, but rather of the wrongdoing of the representative. Were the representative not to commit wrongdoing, then I believe we would find no objectionable inequality of status present. We should naturally be concerned with reducing the risk of abuse by instituting effective accountability mechanisms, but the point still stands that the democratic institutions themselves do not give rise to objectionable inequalities of status, rather it is the wrongdoing of representatives that does so in this case. Moreover, insofar as there is a risk of abuse of power (which leads to objectionable inequalities of status), it is likely that democratic arrangements will minimize the risk relative to other

[127] Assuming that the institutions operate appropriately, meaning that all have a fair opportunity to run and hold office, or participate in democratic politics more generally.

institutional arrangements, since democratic arrangements dilute the power of officials and introduce a greater range of accountability than less democratic alternatives.

To sum up this second reason, democratically licensed inequalities of power do not give rise to objectionable inequalities of public social status because those possessing greater power are given that power by those over whom they exercise that power. Officials might abuse their position to secure more permanent gains in power (or other perceived primary goods, for that matter), which would thereby result in objectionable inequalities of status. The objectionable inequality in that case is not inherent to democratic institutions, but rather is a product of the wrongdoing of representatives. And, even though democratic institutions will create some opportunity for such wrongdoing, this need not mean that democratic institutions will be objectionable on grounds of the status principle since democratic institutions may still be the best available means for advancing equality of public social status.

These two reasons serve as grounds for holding that citizens are provided with sufficient assurance of their equal fundamental moral standing under democratic institutions, such that any inequalities of public social status that might be a consequence of democratically-licensed inequalities do not amount to creating social conditions for the failure of mutual recognition of one another's moral equality. There is also one further reply to the self-defeat objection, which does not rely on the claim that the democratic pedigree of inequalities of political power ameliorates the objectionability of any resulting status inequality. This final reply relies on appeal to the complete status principle. Even if democratic institutions give rise to inequalities of public social status, those inequalities of status may be justified because alternative arrangements will come at too great a cost to other goods and values. Social and political communities do, after all, need *some* tractable way of making collective decisions. Democratic institutions provide such a mechanism of collective decision-making, and moreover, relatively moderate representative variants of democracy allow for an appealing division of political labor. Hence, we might reply to the self-defeat objection with the claim that some mechanisms for collective decision-making is needed, and that democratic institutions provide such a mechanism while minimizing status inequality. Democratic institutions distribute power as equally as possible while still being an appealing means for collective decision-making. A tractable means of collective decision-making is socially valuable, so we may justify some status inequality to that end.

We thus have our reply to the self-defeat objection. The status principle does not require that we reject democratic institutions, despite the fact that such institutions may give rise to some inequalities of public social status, because, in the first place, the pedigree of such status inequality is such that individuals are already assured of their equal moral standing. Secondly the value of a tractable mechanism for collective decision-making may justify status inequalities that are a consequence of democratically-licensed inequalities of power. While providing what I think is a compelling reply to the self-defeat

objection, these reasons give rise to a novel objection to the justification of democratic institutions, which I will turn to now.

4. The Non-Democratic Alternatives Objection

The aim of the preceding argument was to establish that democratic institutions have certain ameliorative mechanisms which make any status inequalities that are a consequence of democratically-licensed inequalities of power unobjectionable on the present account. This argument might, however, be used to develop a new challenge to the justification of democratic institutions based in the status principle. One might argue that there may be other, non-democratic institutional arrangements which could also implement various ameliorative mechanisms, such that they too do not give rise to morally objectionable inequalities of public social status. In that case, we may no longer have conclusive reason to favor democratic institutions over non-democratic alternatives. Call this the *non-democratic alternative objection*.

The non-democratic alternative objection relies on precisely this fact to challenge the claim that social equality requires political equality. If there are certain political mechanisms which ameliorate the objectionability of status inequalities that are a consequence of power inequalities, could other political arrangements not rely on such mechanisms to ameliorate the objectionability of resulting status inequalities? Advocates of non-democratic alternatives may very well accept both that their view licenses greater degrees of inequality of political power, and consequently greater degrees of status inequality, and that the status principle is a justified moral principle. They need only hold that available to their view are the various ameliorative mechanisms that preempt the objectionability of status inequality.

In reply, I believe that we may show that the status principle provides reason to favor democratic institutions over non-democratic ones. We can expect democratic institutions to be the best at ameliorating the objectionability of status inequality and that therefore the status principle provides us with *prima facie* grounds to favor democratic institutions. There are two reasons that we can appeal to in support of this claim. First, the ameliorative mechanism of publicly recognizing the basic moral equality of persons is likely to be most effective under democratic arrangements because egalitarian distributions of power make such public recognition more sincere. Second, we can expect non-democratic institutions to facilitate the emergence of status inequality to a greater degree than democratic arrangements, and insofar as they give rise to greater degrees of status inequality, there is a greater risk that they give rise to unjustified status inequality. Both these reasons provide some grounds to hold that democratic arrangements are to be preferred to non-democratic ones on the basis of the status principle, even if ameliorative mechanisms are available to non-democratic arrangements.

According to the first reason, distributing power in accordance with the possession of certain characteristics marks a departure from one of democracy's

ameliorative mechanisms, namely, the public recognition of individuals' equality. Since democratic institutions publicly acknowledge the equal moral standing of persons by distributing power equally at the outset (and providing equal opportunity to hold office, and so on), any status inequalities that result from the democratic process are ameliorated of their objectionability because they are a product of an institutional arrangement which has already assured individuals of their equal moral standing. When power is distributed in accordance with the possession of certain personal characteristics, as in an epistocracy (where power would be distributed on the basis of possessing certain credentials and performance on certain tests of expertise, say), it will not be distributed equally, and this erodes that mechanism for the amelioration of status inequality. This does not imply that non-democratic arrangements will decisively fail to publicly acknowledge the equal moral standing of persons. There could still be various points within non-democratic institutions which are meant to assure persons of their equal standing. The problem is that such assurances face a greater risk of being regarded as cheap talk.

The key idea here is that, under democratic arrangements, we can expect the ameliorative mechanism of public recognition of equality to be more successful than it would be in non-democratic alternatives because the egalitarian distribution of power under democracy makes the public recognition of individuals' equal moral standing more credible. Any political arrangement could pay lip service to the moral equality of persons; even an absolute despot could publicly purport to recognize the moral equality of persons. The subjects of such an absolute despot would simply be in a position where they would be hard-pressed to regard such proclamations as sincere. Hence, we can expect democracy to most effectively ameliorate public social status inequality because democratic institutions provide individuals with the sincerest assurance of their basic moral equality. Insofar as alternatives deviate from an egalitarian distribution of power, they are at a greater risk of having any public recognition of individuals' moral equality be dismissed as insincere.

The second reason why we should expect democratic arrangements to be better at ameliorating the objectionability of public social status inequality relative to non-democratic alternatives is that the latter run an increased risk of creating unjustified status inequality. Inequalities of social status are a consequence of certain goods or desirable objects being correlated with the possession of certain characteristics. Since non-democratic arrangements will distribute power in accordance with the possession of certain characteristics, we can expect that non-democratic institutions will give rise to greater degrees of status inequality than democratic arrangements.

There are two important points to note about this last claim. First, it does not concern the fact that power will likely be a status characteristic, and that as a consequence, those wielding greater power will generally have greater status. This will be true of most any political arrangement. The claim, rather, is that since the distribution of power in non-democratic societies will be correlated with certain characteristics, social conditions

will be such that *those* characteristics may become markers of status, which would then contribute to status inequality. Since democracy distributes power equally, there will be less risk of constructing novel status distinctions (there might still be some risk, since, for example, those who come to hold power may have certain commonalities).

Secondly, even if the construction of novel status distinctions is more likely under non-democratic arrangements, we cannot conclude that those novel differences in status *must* be unjustified, for it could be that some ameliorative mechanism serves to justify the status inequality. My claim is that since non-democratic institutions create social conditions that facilitate the construction of status characteristics, we can expect them to result in a far greater degree of status inequality. And if there is a greater degree of status inequality, there is a greater risk that some of the occurrent status inequalities are morally unjustified. The more status inequality some institutional arrangement gives rise to, the greater the risk that some of the resulting status inequality is unjustified.

These two reasons weigh in support of the claim that democratic institutions will be better at ameliorating the objectionability of status inequalities. It bears noting that this claim should be understood as a comparative, rather than a categorical, one. I am not defending the categorical claim that only democratic arrangements can ameliorate the objectionability of status inequality. It seems to me that alternative political arrangements could very well rely on ameliorative mechanisms to reduce the objectionability of the status inequality that they produce. The point, rather, is the comparative one that democratic institutions will have more effective ameliorative mechanisms than non-democratic alternatives.

A further important feature of the two reasons offered to favor democratic institutions is that these reasons only offer *prima facie* support for democratic institutions because they are speculative in an important way. The reasons just offered require taking for granted that individuals' social psychology, and how individuals perceive and regard power, will be relatively fixed across different political institutions. There is, however, a hypothesis that would raise a challenge for this assumption. We might think that the kinds of social psychologies, and attitudes towards power, that individuals have will vary with the kinds of political institutions they are raised and live under. It could be that the kind of society where the ideal form of a non-democratic alternative functions effectively is one where individuals' social psychology is quite different from ours. For example, in an ideal epistocratic society, perhaps power comes to be regarded as a burden borne for the sake of society, rather than as a kind of primary good. At this stage, I do not see how we can disqualify the possibility that radically different institutional arrangements could engender in individuals radically different attitudes towards themselves and fellow citizens, hence why we must qualify the preceding remarks.

Despite being *prima facie* in this way, I do not think that this reply to non-democratic alternative objection should trouble those of us who accept the status principle. Even if our social psychology is contingent on institutional arrangements, we

may, as we saw above, rely on contingencies in our justification. This is the same reason I relied on above to answer the challenge that a justification of democracy must succeed at a conceptual level. The inherently relational character of justification on the present account makes it permissible to appeal to our social psychology as ground for justification. Even if our social psychology would change in dramatically different circumstances, the character of our psychology here and now is an admissible ground for justification, which entitles us to appeal to the above reasons in the defense of democracy. On the present account of justification, then, the reasons I have offered here should suffice for the justification of democracy.

We have it, then, that the status principle provides us with grounds to rely on democratic institutions to implement the status principle. Recall now the example case of social segregation addressed in chapter IV. In this example, I took note of two countervailing claims that were relevant for the issue of segregation. In the first place, we have the claim that social segregation contributes to inequality of public social status, and that as a consequence we have reason to favor policies that would bring about a relatively greater degree of social integration. Secondly, we have the claim that segregation by oppressed minorities can be an important source of goods in an unjust society, such as a sense of social solidarity and mutual support. The pertinent question for the complete status principle was: what degree of inequality of public social status can be justified by appeal to the values of social solidarity and support engender by segregation on the part of minorities? The conclusion of this present section tells us that the answer ought to be reached democratically. Individuals should rely on democratic institutions to determine what kinds of policies are appropriate in the case of segregation. Notice, however, that this does not complete our reply to the problem of disagreement. For, even if some policy concerning segregation were passed by a democratic assembly, there may be some, perhaps many, within the relevant society who regarded the policy as unjust or inadequate. This raises the question: why should they comply with a decision that they believe to be morally defective in considerable ways? To answer this question, we shall turn to the following chapter, which addresses the justification of democratic authority.

VI. Reciprocity, Democratic Authority, and the Rule of Law

In addition to providing a justification of democracy, a complete reply to the problem of disagreement must also explain why individuals who have good reason to disagree with democratic decisions should nevertheless comply with those decisions. This requires developing a theory of democratic authority, which is my aim in this chapter. I will first consider an argument that the status principle itself suffices as a ground for democratic authority. I reject this argument because it fails to establish the authority of a democratic resolution of disagreements about whether inequalities of public social status are justified or not. The status principle must be supplemented with some other principle in order to provide an adequate theory of democratic authority. I argue that an appealing supplement is a principle of reciprocity. I show that the principle of reciprocity, like the status principle itself, is grounded in recognition respect for our equal moral standing. I then go on to show how the status principle conjoined with a principle of reciprocity provides an appealing theory of political authority that suffices to resolve the problem of disagreement.

1. Disagreement and Democratic Authority

In the previous chapter, I argued that the status principle justifies democracy, in the sense that it provides us with reasons to institute and rely on democratic institutions as mechanisms for collective decision-making. This provides us with an important but incomplete answer to the problem of disagreement.

The problem of disagreement obtains because individuals will normally disagree about whether some inequality of public social status is justified or not. Such disagreement will persist even after we have provided an adjudication of our dispute by use of democratic institutions. This means that individuals will normally dispute whether democratically-enacted laws and policies come at too great a cost to other values, are an appropriate use of scarce time and resources, or whether laws and policies do enough to advance equality of public social status. Even if we can show that there is good reason for such individuals to rely on democratic institutions to resolve disagreement, we must still explain why individuals should comply with the outcomes of democratic decision-making. We thus confront the question: "When the outcome of democratic decision-making conflicts with a citizen's best judgment about what justice [or the status principle, in our case] requires in substantive law and policy, what is the citizen required to do?"[128]

If democratic institutions are to be a stable way of implementing the status principle in light of deep disagreement, then we will need to answer this question by arguing that citizens ought to obey democratic decisions. To do this, we need an explanation of why democratic decisions are authoritative. That is, we must explain why in the normal course

[128] Christiano, *The Constitution of Equality*, p. 231. C.f. Christiano, "The Authority of Democracy," p. 284.

of democratic politics, individuals have an obligation to comply with the outcomes of democratic decision-making. Some limits will surely be in place, such as constitutional protection of certain basic rights, and in certain limiting cases individuals may be entitled to disobey the law, as with justified civil disobedience. But, in the normal course of democratic decision-making, it is because democratic institutions are authoritative that individuals ought to comply with democratic laws and policies, even if they have reason to regard those laws or policies as deficient in some important way.

It is important to be clear on what exactly is needed for a democratic conception of political authority on the present account. I will understand some political institutions as being authoritative just when individuals have an obligation to comply with a normal range of decisions reached by those institutions. Authority is often understood in terms of being a power to generate obligations to do, or not do, some action.[129] Note that insofar as this description of authority is apt, the conception of "power" being used is not the Hohfeldian one.[130] Someone has a Hohfeldian power if, and only if, they have the ability to alter some privileges, claims, and immunities of others (i.e. if others have a liability). I will understand democratic authority in different terms, namely as a Hohfeldian claim, rather than a power. In Hohfeldian terms, Alfie has a claim that Beatrice *F* if, and only if Beatrice has a duty to Alfie to *F*.

Notice that in order to resolve the problem of disagreement, we need not even establish that democratic institutions in particular enjoy a Hohfeldian claim to compliance. Rather, we need to only establish that individuals have a duty which requires them to comply with the laws and policies promulgated by democratic institutions, but that duty need not be owed *to* the institutions. What we need to is just that individuals are subject to a claim that requires compliance with democratic decisions, but we do not need to add that the claim is held by democratic institutions. Establishing that institutions are authoritative in the sense that individuals have a duty to comply with them is, I think, a less daunting task than establishing that institutions enjoy Hohfeldian power over subjects. This is because Hohfeldian powers are quite remarkable normative abilities—if institutions enjoy a Hohfeldian power over subjects, they not only can demand compliance with promulgated laws and policies, but can also alter and transform the claims, immunities, privileges, and so on, of subjects as well. The thesis that institutions have authority in this way is much stronger than the claim we need to establish to resolve the problem of disagreement. We need only to establish that in a minimally just democratic societies individuals have a duty to obey the law.

2. The Status Principle and Democratic Authority

An appealing starting point for a justification of democratic authority appears to be the status principle. Ultimately, I do not think the argumentative strategy starting with the

[129] E.g. Estlund, *Democratic Authority*, p. 2.

[130] For detailed discussion of the Hohfeldian analysis of rights, see Wenar, "The Nature of Rights."

status principle alone will be successful, but considering this line of argument will nevertheless be instructive.

Let us begin, then, by considering an argument for democratic authority which aims to establish that citizens have duties to comply with the outcomes of democratic procedures because it is required by the status principle. To develop this argument, I will draw on Niko Kolodny's theory of relational egalitarianism as he has relied on that theory to argue for the authority of democratic institutions. I should like to make clear, however, that though Kolodny's argument is a promising model in the present context, I do not mean to attribute the reasoning that follows to Kolodny himself. Kolodny's relational egalitarian theory is different in kind from the moral theory of social status that I have been developing in this dissertation. Kolodny is engaging in what I called the conceptual approach to relational egalitarianism.[131] The aim of his project is that of showing that there is a fundamental normative principle of relational equality, and that we can show that this principle entails other substantive moral principles, like a principle of democratic authority. The present project is distinct in that it does not aim to offer a unified moral theory based in a fundamental relational egalitarian premise, but rather aims to develop a moral framework for evaluating relations of social status understood as a constituent of most human social orders and to determine the content and grounds of our duties concerning social status relations. As such, it is important to note that in drawing on Kolodny's insights and objecting to them I do not mean to argue against his view, but rather the application of certain features of his view to the present theoretical context.

Let us turn, then, to the Kolodny's argument for democratic authority applied to the present case. His starting point is comparable to ours here: according to Kolodny, equal opportunity to influence collective decision-making is an important component of creating and maintaining relational equality.[132] The requirement that individuals have equal opportunity to influence collective decisions, Kolodny goes on to say, supports the claim that individuals ought to comply with the outcomes of democratic decision-making.

Individuals ought to comply with the outcomes of democratic decision-making because their failing to do so will deprive others the opportunity to influence precisely the decision that they are making in spite of the democratic outcome.[133] For,

> influence over the decision, in the sense relevant in this context, is not simply influence over what gets engraved on tablets or printed in registers; it is influence over what is actually done. Insofar as relations of social equality are partly constituted by precisely that equal

[131] See Chapter III, section 1.

[132] "Rule over None II," p. 308.

[133] Kolodny, "Rule over None II," p. 315.

> opportunity for influence, I would be, by depriving others of that equal influence, relating to them as a social superior, at least in that instance.[134]

We have compelling reason, stemming from grounds of relational equality, to have equal opportunity to influence collective decisions. If you disregard the outcome of democratic decision-making, you deprive me of the opportunity to influence the outcome in that particular case.[135] Accordingly, the value of relational equality provides you with compelling reason to comply with the outcomes of democratic decision-making.

I think there is much that is appealing about trying to apply Kolodny's account of democratic authority within the present theoretical framework. The argument seems to be readily amenable to the present view, as we can substitute the status principle in for Kolodny's basic norm of relational equality and still reach many of the same inferences. For instance, we are able to arrive at a justification of democratic institutions on the basis of the status principle in much the same way that Kolodny is able to arrive at such a justification on the basis of his fundamental norm of relational equality. Furthermore, Kolodny's account identifies reasons that straightforwardly weigh in favor of individuals' complying with democratic outcomes, and it does so by relying solely on the evaluative framework already on hand. Despite such appeal, however, I do not think that importing Kolodny's argument into the present framework will lead to a successful justification of democratic authority.

One problem for this argumentative strategy is that it will be unable to establish grounds for obeying democratic decisions when individuals' reasons for disobedience are that they believe that those decisions are unjust from the perspective of the status principle.

Consider an example of such a case. Suppose that we have Alfie, who participates in a democratic society. Alfie accepts the status principle. The democratically chosen legislature in Alfie's society then passes a law that Alfie believes is unjust. Suppose, for instance, that the legislature passes a policy where all citizens interested in pursuing higher education would have all educational expenses paid for by a government subsidy, which is raised by taxing the population. Among the reasons for choosing this policy is the belief that it will on net reduce inequality of public social status by creating greater equality of

---

[134] *Ibid.*

[135] Though, it is worth noting that on the present account of social status, mere non-compliance would not be sufficient, on its own, to contribute to inequalities of public social status. If I violate the law in secret, and the rest of society is none the wiser, then my status will be unaffected. For my disregard of the law to contribute to my social status, it must either secure a greater share of perceived primary goods for me, or it must be regarded as a perceived primary good in its own right. Only in the latter case does the increase in social status come from the disregard of the law itself (rather than some advantages that the violation is instrumental in securing). But, for disregard of the law to be a status characteristic, such disregard must be viewed as a primary good by members of the general social group. Here we see some of the limits of Kolodny's argument once we try to apply it within the moral theory of social status. .

education. Alfie does not share this belief. He thinks that the educational policy is unjust because it will only exacerbate status inequalities. On Alfie's view, it is already the relatively educated and advantaged that are in a position to pursue higher education, and this policy will only widen the gulf of social status between the most educated and the least educated, who are left behind far earlier in the process of receiving an education.[136] He is convinced that complying with such a law amounts to supporting a substantial injustice. Alfie conclude that the status principle grounds a duty to disobey this law, and consequently Alfie refuses to pay his taxes so as to avoid supporting the educational policy.

Cases like Alfie's are, I think, to be expected in the normal course of democratic politics. How can we answer Alfie? If we adopt on Kolodny's argument, we can answer Alfie by citing the fact that Alfie is treating his fellow citizens as subordinates. We might say to Alfie: "By disregarding the law, you are depriving others the opportunity to influence these decisions. You accept that social equality is a moral ideal, so you must accept that everyone is owed an equal opportunity to influence these collective outcomes. This entails that you must comply with this law."

This reply will not be particularly convincing to Alfie. For he can answer: "I recognize that in acting against the law I will treat others as subordinates to some degree. But this law is so inimical to social equality that complying with it would leave others in an even lower social position than if I were to disobey the law. It is unfortunate that we are faced with a decision where social equality is unattainable, but in service of that end I will choose that course of conduct that deprives others of equal public social status as little as possible." The issue here is that Alfie's reason for refusing to comply with the outcome of democratic decision-making is precisely the reason that is supposed to explain why he has a duty to comply. Alfie may accept that he is to some degree acting in a way opposed to the ideal of social equality, he may simply think that complying with the law is even worse in that respect.

The complete status principle admits of various grounds of disobedience that cannot be answered by the principle itself. Recall that the complete status principle includes a clause that inequalities of public social status may be justified when further pursuit of equality of public social status would come at too great a cost to other goods and values. Each potential source of disagreement about this clause that led us to the

[136] This case illustrates only one kind of disagreement, namely, the kind that arises from disagreement about complicated empirical hypotheses. This is a prominent source of disagreement to be sure, but it will not be the only way in which individuals can come to disagree about what policies are best supported by the complete status principle. There may also be normative disagreements, which would arise when individuals disagree about whether some status inequality is justified, say because it is a consequence of a desirable value-promoting activity or because the policy that would eliminate status inequality comes at too great a cost to other goods and values. So, while I offer some particulars of an ongoing empirical debate to make the present case more concrete, I wish to emphasize that this is a particular specification of just one way in which individuals may disagree about the aims of the status principle within a diverse society.

problem of disagreement also seems to be a ground for justified disobedience. Persons will disagree about whether some law or policy comes at an undue cost to other goods and values, they will disagree about what goods and values are at stake and their relative importance, and they will disagree about the details of our actual social circumstance, such as the degree to which equality of public social status or other goods and values have already been promoted. In light of such disagreements, persons may take have reason to believe that the status principle provides grounds for disobeying democratic decisions. In this situation, appeal to the status principle as a ground of democratic authority will not be successful because the principle seems to weigh in favor of disobedience instead.

Thus, I do not believe that adopting Kolodny's argument for democratic authority within the present framework of a moral theory of social status will provide us with a successful account of democratic authority. This approach is unable to explain why individuals have obligations to comply with laws and policies when they have reason to hold that compliance with those laws and policies is worse from the perspective of the status principle. The issue here is that the reason that is supposed to explain political authority can also be an even more compelling reason to disobey the law.

To provide a justification of democratic authority on the present account, then, we will need to appeal to a supplemental moral principle. Such an appeal should not only identify a moral principle that can successfully establish the authority of democratic institutions, as it should also achieve that aim in a way that satisfies the desiderata of moral theory. It would be unsatisfactory if we were to simply introduce an additional principle on an *ad hoc* basis, however successful that principle may be at grounding democratic authority. Rather, we should hope that the principle has a compelling ground within the moral theory of social status and can furthermore be shown to cohere of many of commitments that we have either started with or arrived at throughout the course of developing that theory.

I propose that the *principle of reciprocity* can satisfy the relevant desiderata. That is, appeal to the principle of reciprocity can suffice to establish the authority of democratic institutions and that principle can be shown to be a proper and coherent part of the moral theory of social status.[137] In what follows, I will argue for both of these points. In the section that immediately follows, I will lay out and discuss the principle of reciprocity in greater detail. Then, in section 4 I argue that the principle of reciprocity shares the same fundamental basis as the status principle, to wit, the fundamental norm of recognition

[137] To be clear, it is not strictly speaking necessary that one appeal to a principle of reciprocity to supplement the account for authority. I take this route because I find a kind of fair-play theory of political authority to be the most appealing. I defend this point in my "Justice, Reciprocity, and the Boundaries of State Authority." It may be perfectly reasonable, however, to introduce a different supplementary principle. Though, I think it desirable that any supplementary principle that is introduced can be shown to cohere with the broader moral theory of social status. For one alternative candidate account that might satisfy the desideratum of coherence, see Scheffler, "Membership and Political Obligation."

respect. Section 5 then provides the argument for democratic authority based in the principle of reciprocity. On the theory of political authority that I develop, individuals ought to comply with the law only if it is sufficiently just, and because they benefit from others' compliance and so owe compliance in turn. Since this theory is a hybrid of views traditional referred to as functionalist and fair play theories of political authority respectively, we may refer to this hybrid theory as fair-play functionalism.

Fair-play functionalism takes a two-stage approach to the justification of political authority. First, we establish that some state is a candidate for authority by showing that it satisfied the relevant criterion of justice. Second, we establish individual duties to comply with a particular state on account of such individuals having a duty to reciprocate compliance with justice-advancing institutions. These are duties directed towards other citizens grounded in reciprocity.[138] Some individual thus has a duty, grounded in reciprocity towards other citizens, to comply with the institution of the functional state she is a subject of. The duties are mutually directed among individuals, and the content of the duties requires compliance with the particular institutions that the individuals are subject to.

3. The Principle of Reciprocity[139]

I will argue that we can provide a successful ground for the authority of democratic institutions by appeal to the

> *Principle of reciprocity:* individuals have a duty to return the reception of an acceptable good with a fitting and proportionate good in turn.

There are several important notions contained within the principle of reciprocity that require explication, namely, the ideas of acceptability, fittingness, and proportionality. To start, it may help to develop a general characterization of the idea of reciprocity.

At the most general level, the principle of reciprocity holds that a good is owed in return for a good received for its own sake. This kind of moral reciprocity should be distinguished from a merely strategic kind of reciprocity. The latter is a practice or act of benefitting others on the condition that one expects to receive a benefit in the future.

A key feature of duties of reciprocity is that they are essentially conditional in character. One owes a good in turn, but *only if* one received a good. Duties of reciprocity are also directional—one owes a good *to* those from whom one received a good. The conditionality and directionality of such duties raise several important questions. First,

---

[138] Compare Allen Buchanan, "Political legitimacy and democracy," pp. 713–16; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 312; John Rawls, "Legal Obligation and the Duty of Fair Play," p. 123.

[139] This section draws extensively from section III of my "Justice, Reciprocity, and the Boundaries of State Authority."

regarding the conditionality, when does one incur a debt of reciprocity? That is, when does the receipt of the good realize a duty to return a good in turn? Second, regarding directionality, how ought the debt of reciprocity be repaid? What kind of good ought to be offered in turn to fulfill the duty of reciprocity?

I will start with the second question, namely the constraints on the good owed in turn. Lawrence C. Becker identifies that one's duty to reciprocate a good received is constrained by conditions of fittingness and proportionality.[140] Fittingness holds that the good returned must be recognized as a good for the person receiving it.[141] Absent the condition of fittingness, one could repay debts of reciprocity without actually advancing the good of the other person, in which case a benefit would not be reciprocated. If I were to benefit from my Muslim neighbor's help, not only would it be in poor taste to repay her with pork, doing so would also fail to satisfy my duty to reciprocate her past kind deeds.[142]

The condition of proportionality holds that, after having received some good, one owes a (fitting) good of comparable degree to the other person,[143] which sets upper and lower bounds on duties to reciprocate. Upper bounds constrain the duty to reciprocate such that one does not owe more than what they received initially.[144] If my friend buys me a drink, reciprocity will not thereby demand that I respond by purchasing them a home or other good of considerably greater value. I simply owe them a drink in turn. Lower bounds require that the returned good is of sufficient value to the individual to whom one owes a debt of reciprocity. If my friend takes on a significant inconvenience to drive across the country to help me move, I will not be able to satisfy my duty to reciprocate by offering her my pocket change.[145]

Fittingness and proportionality provide us with a characterization of what kind of good is owed for a good received. But when does one incur a debt of reciprocity in

---

[140] Becker, "Reciprocity, justice, and disability," p. 18.

[141] Becker, *Reciprocity*, p. 107.

[142] This case is taken from Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, p. 207.

[143] Becker, *Reciprocity*, pp. 111–13.

[144] Individuals could, of course, reciprocate by providing goods of significantly greater value; such reciprocation is simply not required by duties of reciprocity, and so is supererogatory.

[145] Though it will not be particularly important to the discussion here, it bears mentioning that proportionality is also indexed to one's ability to repay or provide a good in turn and the burden of doing so. Here is a simple example to illustrate the point. Suppose Alfie and Beatrice are good friends who like to get lunch on a weekly basis. Beatrice is quite rich, whereas Alfie is poor. Beatrice also has expensive tastes, so when it's her turn to buy lunch, she takes Alfie to nice restaurants that he would normally not be able to afford to eat at. Does Alfie have a duty to reciprocate by paying for similarly expensive lunches? The standard thought is that Alfie does not have such a duty because it would be especially arduous for him to repay with a good of equivalent worth. What he owes is a benefit that comes as close as possible to being a proportionate return subject to the constraint that Alfie not take on any more burdens in providing the return than Beatrice took on in providing the initial benefit.

On this point, see Becker, *Reciprocity*, pp. 111-3. See also Brown, "Reciprocity without Compliance," p. 393.

the first place? A well-known critique advanced by Robert Nozick challenges the very idea of duties of reciprocity by arguing that such duties have implausible consequence. This critique is set out by way of sketching a number of cases, all of which have a common structure: in each case, a benefit is imposed on an individual, and a subsequent duty to reciprocate is taken to obtain in turn.[146] To mention one example, an individual goes about "thrusting" books into the homes of others.[147] If someone finds enjoyment in throwing books into the homes of others, it seems implausible that others owe the book-thrower some good just because the book-thrower happened to throw a book into their home. The mere imposition of a benefit seems insufficient to lead to duties to respond in turn, especially if the benefactor did not care for the benefit in the first place. Moreover, it would unappealing if others could saddle you with obligations just by imposing a benefit on you. Given how implausible such a world would be, we have reason to reject that there are duties of reciprocity.

A. John Simmons has replied to Nozick's imposed-benefit cases by relying on a distinction between goods that are merely received and goods that are accepted.[148] Duties to reciprocate, Simmons contends, obtain only when one *accepts* the initial benefit, where acceptance consists in either an active attempt to receive the benefit, or in willingly and knowingly receiving the benefit.[149] One does not necessarily accept every benefit one receives, and one incurs a duty to reciprocate only if one accepts the benefit. Duties to reciprocate do not obtain in Nozick's cases, then, because individuals only ever receive benefits—they never accept them—and so they are not counterexamples to duties of reciprocity.

Simmons's reply is an important start to an answer to Nozick's imposed-benefits cases, but his conditions of acceptance are incomplete, as he only identifies *evidence of acceptance*, and not the condition of acceptance proper. Surely, if someone actively seeks out a benefit, or willingly and knowingly accepts the benefit, then we have considerable reason to believe that she accepts the benefit. But consider a case where Alfie receives some benefit from Beatrice which he did not seek out, and he takes the benefit unreflectively and automatically. Suppose, however, that were Alfie to have reflected on the benefit at the time of receipt, he would have knowingly and willingly accepted the benefit. Does the fact that Alfie accepted the benefit unreflectively undermine his duty to reciprocate? In the case of other moral duties, lack of reflection rarely, if ever, undercuts one's duty. Indeed, when one fails to do what was otherwise thought to be one's duty on account of lack of reflection, the natural reply is not to excuse the failure, but to hold the individual accountable for being culpably ignorant or negligent. The concepts of culpable ignorance and negligence identify precisely those cases where

---

[146] Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia,* pp. 90-5.

[147] Ibid., p. 95.

[148] Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, pp. 125–30.

[149] Ibid., pp. 128–9.

individuals ought to have reflected more on the moral dimensions of the circumstances they were in. Insofar as reciprocity can ground moral duties, it seems to be subject to similar considerations of negligence and culpable ignorance.[150] And if this is true, then whether an individual actually accepts a benefit is not necessary to determine whether they have a duty to reciprocate; instead, what is relevant is the dispositional fact of whether they would have accepted the benefit had they reflected on it.

Thus, Simmons is right to identify acceptance as relevant for grounding duties of reciprocity, but it is not one's act or expression of acceptance that matters, but rather the *acceptability* of the benefit received. Actual acceptance of the sort Simmons discusses is certainly relevant, in that it is reliable evidence for the acceptability of some benefit, but it is only evidence, and the morally significant fact is the acceptability of the benefit. As for what constitutes acceptability of a benefit, the above discussion suggests the following as a condition of acceptability: some benefit X is acceptable to individual A just in case A has conclusive reason to choose to receive X and bear a duty to reciprocate a fitting, proportionate benefit rather than not receiving X and having no duty to reciprocate. The force of Nozick's imposed-benefit cases, I believe, arises from the fact that individuals would choose not to receive the benefit and have no duty to reciprocate than receive the benefit and have a duty to reciprocate. It is not only the case that individuals do not actually accept the benefits, but that if they were given the opportunity to, they would not. Thus, one has a duty to reciprocate a good on the condition that the good received was acceptable to one.

Do note that the condition of acceptability concerns *reasons* to choose, rather than mere choice. Reasoned choice is distinct from a mere act of choice because the former involves certain important normative capacities. When one exercises reasoned choice, they will have to use certain deliberative capacities and must be able to take account of relevant rules and reasons that bear on their case. I mention this important feature of acceptability because it allows us to see that duties to reciprocate might also obtain by virtue of the character of the good initially received.[151] Some of the force of Nozick's cases seems to arise from the fact that the goods received in his cases are rather trivial. Giving a neighbor a free book is, as far as morality is concerned, not especially important. Things are different when the goods provided are morally required—for example, an irrigation system that serves as the sole source of water for individuals in an arid climate. Even if benefits from morally required goods are not accepted by individuals, the morally required status of such goods may provide individuals with conclusive reason to choose the good. If someone were to find that doing her fair share to provide justice unappealing, this would no more exempt her from her obligation than an individual finding respecting the rights of others unappealing would exempt her from respecting such rights. When

[150] Arneson, "The principle of fairness and free-rider problems," p. 632; compare also Renzo, "Fairness, self-deception, and political obligation.

[151] Arneson, "The principle of fairness and free-rider problems."

one benefits from others acting to provide goods required by justice, then one incurs a duty to reciprocate the provision of that good.

Thus, we have a conception of reciprocity in some greater detail. Duties to reciprocate require that one provide a fitting, proportionate good in response to an acceptable good received. Acceptable goods are those that would have reason to choose to receive with the attending debt of reciprocity instead of receiving not good while being exempt from a debt of reciprocity. In the case of certain goods, such as morally mandatory ones, individuals may have overriding reason to choose reception of the good. Conjoining the principle of reciprocity with the status principle will provide us with a fair-play functionalist conception of political authority which will allow us to resolve the problem of disagreement. Before turning to develop that argument, let us first consider how the principle of reciprocity is situated in the broader theory that I have developed throughout this dissertation.

4. Recognition and Reciprocity

The principle of reciprocity and each normative notion that makes it up is based on this basic conception of persons. To defend this claim, it may be helpful to start by revisiting the conception of persons understood as fitting objects of recognition respect. To have recognition respect for persons is to regard them as morally considerable as such, and to take account of their interests in one's deliberation and conduct while recognizing that their interests establish certain normative constraints.[152] Recognition respect for persons is thus an appreciation of the equal fundamental moral standing of all persons.

Providing recognition respect for persons requires seeing them in a particular way. When persons as such are the ground of recognition respect they are conceived of as self-authenticating sources of valid claims.[153] Persons, on this conception, are sources of valid claims in the sense that there are genuine moral demands which depend on the existence of particular persons. And, persons are self-authenticating in the sense that the moral authority of some claims is grounded simply in the fact that they are some particular person's claims. On this view, persons have a special authority of their claims. We have already seen one prominent way in which this authority obtains in earlier discussions, namely when we took note of individuals' practical capacities to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good. Recognizing that persons are in possession of such a capacity amounts to recognizing that persons are authorities of their claims because that capacity includes the ability to exercise a great deal of influence over the content and direction of one's claims. So, on the present view persons are seen as fonts of the moral authority of their claims simply because they are persons.

---

[152] Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," p. 40; Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, p. 121.

[153] Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," p. 330; Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 23.

The conception of persons as self-authenticating sources of valid claims who are owed recognition respect grounds the principle of reciprocity. In the first place, recognition respect is itself a reciprocal moral notion.[154] By extending recognition respect to another, you are committed to recognizing that you too are the kind of being owed recognition respect. Conversely, if you are the kind of being that can acknowledge being the object of recognition respect, then you will be committed to offering recognition respect to other persons in turn. Possessing the capacity to extend recognition respect to others implies that one is an appropriate object of recognition respect oneself and being an appropriate object of recognition respect (and being able to appreciate that fact) implies that one has the capacity to extend recognition respect in turn.

But why should extending reciprocal recognition amount to duties of reciprocity in contexts of exchange? Let us take each of the constituent normative notions of the principle of reciprocity—acceptability, fittingness, and proportionality—in turn.

Start with acceptability. According to this condition, a person has a duty of reciprocity only if they received an acceptable good, and some good *G* is acceptable to some person just when that person has reason to choose the receipt of *G* along with the attending debt of reciprocity over not receiving *G* but being exempt from a duty to reciprocate.

The condition of acceptability is needed if we are to respect the fact that persons are the ultimate source of authority regarding their claims. As we have seen, without the condition of acceptability, the principle of reciprocity would be quite implausible. Individuals could enlist the services of others simply by imposing benefits on them. My thrusting a book into your home would suffice to create a duty on your part to return a benefit.[155] There is something deeply unappealing about such a state of affairs from the perspective of agency.[156] Our powers and capacities are not a mere instrument that any individual who pays a toll is entitled to use. The burdens and obligations that we take on play a dramatic role in directing our normative capacities and in shaping how we can pursue the fulfillment of our claims and the claims of others. Persons should have the final say in how their normative capacities are to be exercised with respect to advancement of both their own and others' claims, and so consequently they will bear a burden of reciprocity only for those goods the reception of which they can authorize themselves. In such a case, the debt of reciprocity is a moral burden that can be freely accepted.

The constraint of fittingness on goods returned obtains on similar grounds. The moral significance of the claims of persons is derived from no other fact than that they are some particular person's claims. On this conception, persons are in a privileged

[154] Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, pp. 20-2.

[155] Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 90-5.

[156] Becker, *Reciprocity*, pp. 127-8.

position with respect to their claims in two ways. In the first place, persons are in a unique position to exercise their normative capacities to revise the content of their claims and reorient their pursuit of what they conceive of as their good. Secondly, because their claims are their own, persons are in privileged position to ascertain the content and relative importance of their claims. Persons are thus authorities in the direction and determination of their claims. So, it is not up to any other person to be the final judge of what is good for anyone else, or to determine for them what claims are most significant or worthy of advancement. Hence, goods returned as a consequence of a duty to reciprocate must satisfy the condition of fittingness, they must be compatible with the other's standing as an authority over their claims.

This leaves us with the final condition pertaining to duties of reciprocity, namely the condition of proportionality. The proportionality condition sets the upper and lower boundaries on the amount of good that one has a duty to return for a good received. Why should persons who recognize one another as self-authenticating sources of valid moral claims have to make proportionate returns for good received?

Consider three mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive ways in which the burden to reciprocate can be assigned in a relationship where benefits are being exchanged: (a) the recipient has a duty to return a disproportionately greater good; (b) the recipient has a duty to return a disproportionately lesser good (which might mean no good at all); or (c) the recipient has a duty to return a proportionate good. Now, on the conception of persons as self-authenticating sources of valid claims which recognize one another as such, neither (a) nor (b) can be justified. To choose (a) or (b) would mean treating the claims of either the giver or the recipient as having a greater moral significance than the claims of the other. But the claims of persons are regarded as carrying moral significance simply because they are *that* person's claims. Persons regarded as being fundamentally morally equal should give rise to claims of equal moral significance.[157] Hence, moral equals interacting in an ongoing relationship of mutual exchange ought to return goods proportionate to goods received.

We can see, then, how each idea that makes up the principle of reciprocity finds its basis in the recognition of persons as self-authenticating sources of valid claims. Recognition respect for persons is a fundamentally reciprocal notion, such that persons are mutually committed to regarding one another as self-authenticating sources of valid claims. It is the status of persons as self-authenticating that explains why goods received must be acceptable and goods returned be fitting. It is the equal fundamental moral standing of persons that explains why the good returned must be proportionate. Thus, among individuals who are moral equals and who are capably of mutually recognizing this fact, fitting and proportionate goods are owed for acceptable goods received.

[157] Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," pp. 331-3.

Relations of reciprocity thus govern the exchange of benefits among equal members of the moral community.

5. Justice, Reciprocity, and Democratic Authority

The theory of democratic authority that I am proposing has a two-part structure. The first condition is the functionalist one, according to which it is a necessary condition of authority that institutions be sufficiently just. The second condition is expressed by the principle of reciprocity, by which I mean it must be shown that society provides acceptable benefits to its participants. Allow me to elaborate on the first condition.

The qualification of "sufficiency" within the first condition for political authority is meant to capture two things. In the first place, the standard of sufficient justice, rather than complete or maximal justice, is meant to capture that our social and political world is a complex one that we do not fully understand, and that as a consequence of our limited understanding, we often face great uncertainty in the design of practical policies meant to advance justice. Even persons loyal to the end of promoting justice who try to leverage their political institutions in good faith for that end may face considerable frustration.

The second idea captured by the qualification of sufficient justice is that persons will often have well-founded disagreements about what exactly justice requires of us. The sources of such disagreement will, I think, parallel the sources of disagreement concerning the justification of status inequality discussed in chapter IV. When there is widespread disagreement about the requirements of justice, we cannot expect institutions to act solely in service of any one conception of justice. Compromise and indeed errors in the advancement of justice will be a natural consequence of a political society that allows for widespread disagreement in collective decision-making.

Now, even if there may be legitimate disagreement about justice, this does not mean that any conception of justice can be proposed and advocated for as the appropriate aim of political institutions. There are still some constraints on what counts as a justifiable conception of justice. We must only tolerate such disagreement that is a sincere expression of a reasoned exercise of one's sense of justice. It is important to note that the term "the sense of justice" refers specifically to a practical capacity possessed by most persons.[158] As I understand it, persons in possession of a sense of justice are able to represent general rules of conduct that apply universally to all members of society. Moreover, persons in possession of an adequate sense of justice are able to develop and revise their understanding of what the content of the rules of society should be. And they can do so through the exercise of principled reasoning the structure of which is compatible with according all of one's fellow citizens recognition respect. The idea, then, is that persons in possession of a sense of justice are capable of abiding by common rules of conduct in good faith with a community of persons that they are capable of

[158] Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," p. 312; Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," pp. 397-9.

acknowledging as their moral equals. In an important way, the sense of justice is the social counterpart of individuals' capacities to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good. So, though the toleration of a significant amount of disagreement will be a basic feature of most any social condition, there are limits to the kinds of disagreement that we must tolerate. At the very least, we need not tolerate views that are in some way incompatible with the possession of an adequate sense of justice.

I understand the following as basic conditions that a society must satisfy if it is to qualify as sufficiently just. A sufficiently just society will be one that makes a good faith effort: to respect the human rights of all persons,[159] to take steps to ensure that all persons have access to institutions that will protect and respect their basic human rights,[160] and to implement and abide by the rule of law.[161] These conditions are sensitive to a state's institutional capacities. The demands of sufficient justice will be greater on relatively well-developed states. So, in states with a relatively high degree of development, there may be a moral requirement to implement and abide by democratic procedures of collective decision-making, supposing that democratic institutions are such that they reliable promote the protection of human rights.[162] Similarly, relatively well-developed democratic societies may have a duty to provide all citizens with the material conditions for the effective exercise of their rights to political participation, supposing the latter are either human rights or instrumental to the protection of human rights. As I understand them, these conditions of sufficient justice express basic commitments that are constitutive of an adequate sense of justice. Each takes for granted the basic moral equality of all persons and understands that fundamental moral standing as establishing constraints on the organization and functioning of political institutions.

Some satisfaction of the status principle will also normally be a condition of sufficient justice. There are two reasons for this. In the first place, the status principle condemns caste societies or societies that discriminate among citizens on the basis of irrelevant characteristics. These kinds of societies are generally conducive to widespread violations of basic human rights. So, the good faith commitment to the advancement of basic human rights will normally involve satisfaction of the status principle to some degree. Second, I believe that like the standards enumerated in the preceding paragraph, the status principle is a commitment that is constitutive of an adequate sense of justice. This is because the status principle is based on the fundamental norm of recognition respect for persons, and possession of an adequate sense of justice requires that the structure of one's reasoning be compatible with that norm. To be clear, I am not suggesting that realizing any particular degree of public social status is a commonly held

---

159 Buchanan, *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination*, pp. 86-91.

160 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

161 Buchanan, "Institutional Legitimacy," pp. 61-2. Further discussion about the rule of law and its relationship to the status principle follows below.

162 Christiano, "An Instrumental Argument for a Human Right to Democracy."

standard of basic justice. Indeed, our present problem is precisely that there will be a wide range of legitimate disagreement about the degree to which equality public social status should be promoted. Understood as a basic standard of sufficient justice, the status principle only requires that inequalities of public social status based in irrelevant characteristics are to be reduced and eliminated. Disagreement about further promotion of equality of public social status is to be worked out democratically.

So, to sum up the thought, on the present view political institutions can only be authoritative if they satisfy certain minimal conditions of justice. When institutions meet and maintain these minimal standards of justice, then they can be said to be worthy of support. But, being worthy of support does not establish that the institutions are *owed* support. This is where the second stage of the fair play functionalist theory of political authority comes. The second part is, of course, provided by the principle of reciprocity. The idea here is a familiar one from fair play theories of political obligation, namely that obligations to comply with laws and political institutions are duties of reciprocity owed to other citizens by virtue of having benefitted from their compliance with the law and political institutions. Defending this claim will provide us with an answer to the problem of disagreement.

To let start, let us suppose that there is some political community which relies on democratic institutions to make collective decisions, and which satisfies the minimal conditions of justice, such that these institutions are worthy of support. The first step to showing that individuals have a duty of reciprocity to comply with those laws and institutions requires establishing that individuals receive an acceptable benefit from others' compliance with those laws and institutions. There are a number of ways in which individuals can receive an acceptable benefit.

In the first place, sufficiently just societies will often provide goods that individuals have compelling reason to accept, such as the maintenance of an effective scheme of private property, the protection of human rights, or the provision of democratic institutions. Practices of private property with well-defined rights allow individuals to securely pursue meaningful projects in their life without concern for interference from others.[163] Democratic institutions guarantee individuals some degree of political power, in addition to constitutional provisions protecting basic liberties. The ability to securely pursue projects and to have guarantees of political power and basic rights are goods of significant value, such that it is likely that most individuals are prepared to respect others' political and property rights in return for having their rights respected. Lastly, we can add that the existence of democratic institutions gives individuals a reason to accept such benefits, because such institutions, we have seen, both express publicly a recognition of the equal public social status of citizens and promote equality of public social status by distributing political power in a relatively egalitarian fashion among the population. In chapter III, we saw that the argument for the status

[163] Lomasky, *Persons, Rights, and the Moral Community*, pp. 120-1.

principle identified rational grounds for individuals to value public social status. Individuals have reason to want public social status because, firstly, a sufficient degree of public social status is needed for individuals to have an adequate sense of self-esteem, and, secondly, because lack of public social status brings with it the risk of having one's moral standing be neglected. Hence, sufficiently just democratic institutions provide a number of goods that makes the benefit that such institutions provide acceptable.

In the second place, sufficiently just political institutions are necessary to advance justice, and this may provide an overriding reason to accept the goods that are a consequence of compliance with such institutions. As suggested above in section 3, when morally mandatory goods are at stake, individuals may have overriding reason to favor receipt of that good and the attending debt of reciprocity. In the case of sufficiently just societies, there are a number of morally mandatory goods at stake, such as the satisfaction of basic standards of justice.

So, we have two kinds of grounds that can explain why individuals receive an acceptable benefit when others comply with the laws and institutions of a sufficiently just political society. First, individuals may have interests and desires that would lead them to choose the goods provided by a reasonably just society and the attending debt of reciprocity. Second, the provision of justice may provide an overriding reason, such that individuals must choose the goods of a sufficiently just society and the attending debt of reciprocity. When either of these grounds obtain, individuals will have received an acceptable benefit, and so will owe a fitting and proportionate good in turn. This debt of reciprocity is owed to all those who comply with the laws and institutions that lead to the receipt of one's benefit. The same reasons that make such a benefit acceptable explains why compliance is a fitting and proportionate return. Most persons in a shared, minimally just political society stand to benefit in the same way, and often to similar degrees, from others' compliance with the laws and institutions of that society. Thus, we have it that individuals receive an acceptable benefit on account of others' compliance with the laws and institutions of a sufficiently just society, and that one can repay the resulting debt of reciprocity by complying in turn.

6. The Objection from Open-ended Reciprocity

The preceding argument faces an immediate objection. Duties of reciprocity are generally open-ended, in the that one is at liberty to choose how to reciprocate so long as they provide a fitting and proportionate return. If it is true that duties of reciprocity are open-ended in this way, then the relationship between debts of reciprocity and political obligations that is key to the present account is cut.

The claim that persons generally have some discretion in choosing how to reciprocate an acceptable benefit that they received seems quite plausible. The following example illustrates:

> *Baking.* As a runner, John benefits from a cooperative scheme to clean communal walkways every Saturday. He explicitly refuses to join in. However, to avoid free-riding, he bakes cakes weekly, leaving them in the community center for participating neighbors to enjoy—which they very much do.[164]

It seems as though John does not violate his duty of reciprocity despite not cooperating in the same way as his neighbors because he nevertheless returns a fitting and proportionate benefit by other means. This illustrates a general property of duties of reciprocity, namely, that persons are at liberty to reciprocate in whatever way satisfies the constraints of fittingness and proportionality. If this is true of duties of reciprocity generally, it is true of the duties that one incurs from others' compliance with the laws and institutions of their society. It stands to reason, then, that one does not have an obligation based in the principle of reciprocity to obey the law, but rather only an obligation to provide a fitting and proportionate benefit in turn, and such benefits may be offered in ways other than complying with the law and political institutions.[165] Call this the *problem of open-ended reciprocity*.

These observations not only set a challenge for fair-play accounts of political obligation—they also set an important constraint on how one might reply to the challenge of open-ended reciprocity. The constraint is that one's reply must show that there is something distinctive about the law and political institutions which forecloses reciprocation in ways other than compliance in turn. Without doing so, one would be committed to the implausible view that behavior such as John's in *Baking* is morally impermissible. But in such mundane cases, it seems perfectly reasonable to exercise discretion over how one reciprocates. The puzzle for defenders of fair-play accounts is to explain why such discretion is absent in the case of the law or political institutions, but not in many other kinds of cooperative endeavors.

7. Reciprocity and the Rule of Law

In reply to the problem of open-ended reciprocity, I will argue that the status principle sets constraints on how political institutions are to be designed, and that a regime of open-ended reciprocation will not be able to satisfy those constraint. More specifically, I will argue that the status principle requires that legal institutions satisfy the rule of law, and that a system of open-ended reciprocity cannot implement the rule of law without committing widespread violations of individuals' rights. In addition to providing an answer to the compelling objection raised by the problem of open-ended reciprocity, this argument will also serve to illustrate a further important implication of the moral theory

[164] This case was developed by Zhu "Fairness, Political Obligation, and the Justificatory Gap," pp. 294-5, and is discussed by Brown, "Reciprocity Without Complicance," pp. 386-8.

[165] Brown, "Reciprocity Without Compliance," pp. 399-401

of social status, namely, that equality of legal status is instrumental to achieving equality of public social status.

Central to my argument, then, is the claim that the status principle requires rule of law. The conditions of the rule of law were famously developed by Lon L. Fuller.[166] Fuller's claim was that internal to the concept of law are certain minimal moral standards for legal systems, such that even if one does not have a comprehensive moral theory on hand, they may nevertheless assess different legal systems in accordance with the internal morality of the law. The following precepts are typically taken to make up the internal morality of the rule of law.[167] *Generality*, laws are to be stated in general terms and apply equally to all persons within relevant classes, moreover the definition of relevant classes should have a principled basis so that law does not become a tool for discrimination. *Predictability*, legitimate laws that are implemented should be maintained long enough that subjects can rely on the law to make and pursue their plans. *Presumption against* ex post facto *criminalization*, there is strong, if not overriding, presumption against laws concerning criminal conduct applying retroactively. *Impartiality*, laws should be interpreted and applied in a fair way, with like cases being treated alike. Related to impartiality is the requirement that legal officials, such as judges, who have a personal stake in some case ought to recuse themselves. *Open access,* all subject to the law should have access to the law, and the representation needed to have such access. *Publicity,* laws are to be stated publicly in a manner accessible to and understandable by all subjects. And, *congruence,* the enforcement and administration of the laws is to cohere with the laws as they are formally stated.

These principles are taken to flow from the very idea of law as a system of rules for regulating the conduct of persons bound to live together in some common social setting. Fuller took considerable issue with Nazi legal codes in 1930's and 40's because (though certainly not only because) they fell short of these standards. Under the Nazi regime, individuals were regularly tried in secret courts in accordance with rules that were not made publicly available to them, often being subject to criminal laws retroactively. Such a regime seems to simply consist of the exercise of arbitrary and unchecked power under the guise of the law, rather than a good faith commitment to implementing and acting in accordance with a general system of rules that apply to all persons equally.

Fuller's argument for the rule of law, then, is a conceptual one. A system of rules for social organization only qualifies as law if it satisfies the rule of law. To this, we can add a substantive ground for the rule of law in the present account of morality of social status relations. The basic idea is that rule of law is required to achieve and maintain equality of legal status, and equality of legal status is integral to achieving equality of public social status. Public recognition as an equal within one's legal system is an important step

[166] The rule of law as the internal morality of legal systems was first proposed by Fuller in his reply to Hart, see his "Positivism and Fidelity to Law."

[167] See Fuller, *The Morality of Law,* pp. 33-41.

to being publicly recognized as a social equal. Equality of legal status can serve to advance equality of public social status in two ways. First, the establishment of equal legal status preempts one mechanism for the creation of greater inequality of public social status. Secondly, equal legal status serves as an assurance of one's equal status.

The reason why equality of legal status is likely to serve as a check on inequality of public social status is because legal status is likely to be a perceived primary good. If legal status is a perceived primary good, then inequality of legal status would be a ground for inequality of public social status. The first way in which unequal legal status can contribute to inequality of public social status is by contributing to the conditions of status construction. Legal status might be a perceived primary good, such that its correlation other characteristics creates novel status characteristics, or legal status might become a status characteristic in its own right. The thought here is that there are reasons for equality of legal status that parallel the reasons that led to equality of political power in the previous chapter. A second way in which differential legal status can give rise to inequality of public social status is by way of what sociologists call the "reverse process."[168] The basic idea of the reverse process is that individuals will treat the relative rewards or benefits that others receive as evidence for having either higher (when the benefits are relatively greater) or lower (when the benefits are less) social status. So the thought here is that those believed to be treated favorably by the legal process will be thought to have higher legal or social status, and that without rule of law, citizens will not be in a position to accurately determine whether others are being treated fairly or not, setting the stage for the reverse process to exacerbate inequalities of public social status.

The second reason why equal legal status is required on grounds of the status principle is that equal legal status will serve the function of providing individuals assurance of their equal basic moral standing. Recognition as an equal in the eyes of the law is powerful and public way of expressing to individuals that we recognize that they are equal members of the moral community. When it is publicly proclaimed that all persons are to be treated as equals within the law, and when persons can be seen that they are in fact treated as equals within the law, they will have greater assurance of the claim that they are in fact recognized as moral equals.[169] Indeed, in legal systems where some persons were assigned inferior legal status, that inferior status was generally justified by the claim that those persons also have inferior moral status. This line of reasoning has been illustrated time and again by the treatment of black Americans throughout American history, and is made amply clear by Chief Justice Taney in his opinion on *Dred Scott v. Sandford:*

---

[168] For some discussion of the reverse process, see: Cook, "Expectations, Evaluations, and Equity;" Harrod, "Expectations from Unequal Rewards;" Stewart and Moore, "Wage Disparities and Performance Expectations."

[169] For a comparable argument which holds that human rights serve to promote recognition of the equal moral standing among persons, see Buchanan, "The Egalitarianism of Human Rights."

> They [black Americans] had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit.[170]

The moral theory of social status helps us make easy sense of the pathology of Taney's reasoning. Taney, and no doubt most of his contemporaries, believes that black persons are simply morally inferior to white persons. Black persons, on this view, are not the kind of being that can possess rights or be a source of claims that is worthy of respect. So, it is natural that they should occupy the inferior social position of slaves. This line of reasoning ultimately leads to the infamous decision in *Dred Scott*, that black persons were not entitled to legal status either. Conversely, then, we may say that a guarantee of equal legal status will serve as a powerful assurance to all that we recognize their equal basic moral standing.

Thus, we can see that equality of legal status will be justified on grounds of status principle because, first, inequality of legal status will be conducive to the creation and exacerbation of inequality of public social status, and second, because equality of legal status plays an important role in providing persons with assurance that they are in fact recognized as equals. As the rule of law is necessary for achieving equality of legal status,[171] a requirement of the status principle will be that legal institutions satisfy the rule of law.

The next key claim in my reply to the problem of open-ended reciprocity is that a regime of open-ended reciprocity will be morally required to not implement the rule of law. If persons have discretion over how they may discharge duties of reciprocity arising from others' compliance, then they will be selectively subject to laws. That is, they may choose whether they have a duty to obey some particular law by choosing whether they should reciprocate with compliance or by some other means. If they choose to reciprocate by other means, then they will not have a duty to obey the law. So, if legal officials are to assess whether a genuine violation of the law has occurred, then they must proceed on a particularistic basis. In each instance, legal officials will need to assess the extent to which an individual has benefitted from others' compliance with the law, and they must also assess the extent to which they have repaid that debt. Legal trials will need to be complicated exercises in moral accounting in order to determine whether someone has in fact acted impermissibly in violating an apparent law.

One might challenge the preceding point by arguing that it is not true that those who reciprocate in ways other than compliance have no obligation to obey the law. Perhaps it

---

[170] Dred Scott v. Sandford, 60 U.S. 393 (1856), at p. 407.

[171] Christiano, *The Constitution of Equality*, pp. 55 and 174-5; Gowder, "The Rule of Law and Equality."

can be argued that legal officials have a duty to maintain the rule of law and so they may hold persons accountable to complying with the law despite their having no moral obligation to obey the law. This reply makes a point of distinguishing moral obligations from legal obligations and it holds that while persons might be morally exempt from a duty to obey the law, they might still be subject to a legal obligation to do so. While it is certainly reasonable (and often important) to distinguishes these two notions of obligation, nevertheless the reply will be unsuccessful because on a fair-play account it will not be permissible to design legal institutions such that they enforce obedience on legal grounds when moral grounds are absent because this will constitute a systematic violation of individual rights.

Fair-play accounts of political authority conceive of society as a collective cooperative endeavor meant to implement and maintain valuable institutions that serve persons understood as fundamental moral equals who are capable of mutual recognition of that fact. Given that basic moral equality, the benefits and burdens of this cooperative endeavor are to be divided in accordance with the principle of reciprocity—that principle specifies what every citizen's fair share of the burden of maintaining legal and political institutions is. Three closely related claims can be drawn from this proposition. First, citizens have a duty *only* to do their fair share. This means that, second, support for institutions in excess of one's fair share is supererogatory. So, third, legal and political officials have a right that citizens contribute to the maintenance legal and political institutions only to the extent that such contributions are not in excess of the citizens' fair shares of the burdens. Officials have no right to further contributions because such further contributions are supererogatory, and in being supererogatory, citizens have the right to choose whether or not to do the supererogatory action.

So, the reason why legal and political institutions cannot be designed such that they enforce compliance with the law on the part of citizens who have already done their fair share in supporting legal and political institutions by means other than compliance is because those citizens have a moral right to make no further contributions, and coercive enforcement of further contributions would violate that right. We can appreciate this point by considering a general case of public goods. Imagine a group of persons engaged in some collective endeavor that requires the provision of some public good (understood in the familiar terms of a non-rivalrous and non-excludable good). To provide this good, each person will need to do their part and contribute to the public good. In order to protect against free riding, some system of monitoring and enforcement may be needed. The claim being made here is that persons who have already done their part by contributing their fair share to the public good ought not to be sanctioned or compelled to make any further contributions. It would be wrong because unfair to coerce those who have already contributed their fair share to the public good into making further contributions. Similarly, it would be wrong because unfair to coerce compliance with the law on the part of those who have already discharged their debt of reciprocity through

some other means. Thus, if citizens retain a liberty to reciprocate others' compliance with laws and institutions as they choose, then the legal system within that society must make judgments on a particularistic basis without the rule of law because uniform application of the law would result in making unfair, and therefore wrongful, demands that others make contributions in excess of their fair share.

We can now complete the reply to the objection from open-ended reciprocity. In the case of debts of reciprocity that one incurs from others' compliance with the law and political institutions, the status principle constrains the liberty that one normally has in choosing how to reciprocate such that they must reciprocate in kind. Such a constraint obtains because the status principle requires that legal institutions implement the rule of law. But, under a regime of open-ended reciprocity, legal institutions cannot satisfy the rule of law because doing so would require systematically violating individuals' moral rights to not make a disproportionately greater contributions to the good of others. Thus, legal institutions in a community of social equals will necessitate that one reciprocates the benefits that one incurs from others' compliance with the law and political institutions by complying in return.

8. Equality under Law and Legal Exemptions

The reply to the open-ended reciprocity objection might raise a new worry about the present theory of political authority. By establishing that all subjects must be equally subject to the law, it appears that I have done away with one of the primary virtues of fair-play theories of political authority. Namely, I have done away with the conditions that allow fair-play theories to explain with some ease why certain individuals can be justifiably exempt from the law. Consider the example of a pacifist in a country with mandatory military service (which, suppose for the sake of example, must enlist a sufficient number of people such that the country is not threatened by predatory states).[172] In the present account, we might have said that a committed pacifist could repay their debt of reciprocity by some other means. But it seems that my remarks on the rule of law commit us to the claim that everyone must be subject to the law equally. And, this objection concludes, there are clearly some cases where persons are owed exemptions from the law, and the present view is defective insofar as it cannot explain why that is.

I think this objection is right to press that conceding the possibility of exemptions for special cases would be a significant theoretical cost, but I do not think that this is a cost that the present theory must take on. On the present view, individual exemptions from the law can be justified. To see how, it is important to distinguish between two kinds of cases that we have encountered concerning individual exemptions from the law. Consider first the case of Alfie, who would rather participate in civic service than pay his taxes. Consider second the case of the committed pacifist who has principled reason to refuse to participate in military service.

[172] Klosko, "Presumptive Benefit, Fairness, and Political Obligation," p. 249.

The difference between these two cases lies in the kinds of reasons that Alfie and the pacifist each have which determine whether the kind of law in each respective case is acceptable to them. Alfie does not regard tax laws as such unacceptable; indeed, Alfie is willing to take on and repay a debt of reciprocity, he simply wishes to repay by means other than complying with the law. The pacifist, by contrast, has conclusive reason to reject receipt of the benefit of mandatory military service—on the basis of the reasons available to the pacifist, she would choose to not receive of the benefit of mandatory military service and bear no debt of reciprocity over receiving that benefit and the attending debt.

So, the crucial difference between these two cases is that only in the case of Alfie is a debt of reciprocity incurred, and Alfie simply wishes to exercise discretion in how he discharges the debt. The rule of law is pertinent in those cases where individuals incur a debt of reciprocity form others' compliance with the law and seek to repay those debts by means other than compliance in turn. The idea is that in order to preserve social equality, those subject to the law must be subject to it equally. In the case of the pacifist, we have a person who ought not to be subject to the law in the first place. The benefit that the pacifist would receive from a law of mandatory military service would not be acceptable to her, meaning that no debt of reciprocity is incurred in the first place.[173]

I would like to add that the present discussion also points towards a principled account of when a law will lack authority on the present view. In the first place, the laws of an unjust society cannot be authoritative because the condition of sufficient justice is a necessary condition of political authority. Secondly, even laws in a reasonably just society will not be owed obedience, at least by certain parties who find such laws unacceptable. That is, when persons have conclusive reason to reject the benefits and accompanying debt of reciprocity that they receive from others' with some law, then they will be under no obligation to obey that law.

Thus, we have the theory of political authority that can complete our answer the problem of disagreement. I think it may be useful here to revisit the line of reasoning that led us here. It began in chapter IV with the demandingness objection to the status principle. This objection held that without some qualification, the status principle would ask too

[173] We should note here that there is another kind of legal exemption that the present view will be trivially compatible with. Above, the focus is on extra-legal exemption, that is, cases where the grounds for exemption from the law are some moral considerations external to the law. Contrast such exemptions with legal exemptions that are written into the laws themselves. For instance, tax laws could be written so that they have the following disjunctive structure: "pay X percent of your income, unless you do Y hours of civil service." In such a case, Alfie would be entitled to repay his debt of reciprocity by doing civil service in lieu of paying taxes, but he would no longer be breaking the law, he would be fully compliant with it.

much of us. In reply to the demandingness objection, I argued that the basic right of persons to the free development of their normative capacities entitles persons to some latitude in developing and pursuing a conception of the good. Consequently, inequalities of public social status may be justified when eliminating or reducing those inequalities comes at too great a cost to other goods or values. It was the introduction of this last claim that resulted in the problem of disagreement. In any society where there is even a moderate degree of evaluative diversity, there is bound to be considerable disagreement about when the pursuit of greater equality of public social status would come at too great a cost to other goods and values. This was the problem of disagreement—that persons would normally disagree about the demands of the status principle, and that this would make it impossible to implement the status principle in practice.

The solution that I proposed for the problem of disagreement was that of institutionalizing the status principle. When there is considerable disagreement in the interpretation and application of certain moral claims, we may proceed by deferring to a common set of rules that will provide us with a definitive judgment. This and the preceding chapter have defended the thesis that we ought to institutionalize the status principle by way of relying on democratic institutions.

In chapter V, I argued that democratic institutions were justified on the basis of the status principle. Political equality is required in order to achieve social equality. This explains why we ought to institute democratic institutions instead of alternatives, but it did not complete the reply to the problem of disagreement. To do that, we needed an explanation of why individuals who disagree with the outcomes of democratic decision-making ought nevertheless to comply with those outcomes, which is to say we needed a theory of democratic authority. That is what this chapter has aimed to provide. I have developed a fair play functionalist theory of political authority, according to which individuals have a duty to comply with the rules and laws of sufficiently just societies as a consequence of duties of reciprocity that they owe to others who comply with those rules and laws. Individuals ought to reciprocate by complying with rules and laws, rather than by providing a benefit by other means, because the alternative would require abandoning the rule of law, and rule of law is required in order to achieve social equality.

We thus arrive at the final claim needed to answer the problem of disagreement. The reason why individuals ought to comply with the rules and laws of democratic society, even if they think those rules and laws are to some extent unjust or morally inadequate relative to alternatives, is because they owe a duty of reciprocity to their fellow citizens as a consequence of benefiting from others' compliance with those rules and laws.

I would like to stress that I have developed this theory of democratic authority as a way of addressing a problem that is internal to the theory of social equality that has been my focus throughout this dissertation. I mention this because I would like to make it clear that I do not mean to propose the preceding account as a complete theory of

political authority, where such theories are understood to provide answers to all pressing questions concerning such authority in a clear and coherent way. There are a number of questions which I regrettably do not have adequate space to address here. Two especially pressing questions, I think, are those concerning the justification of limits of democratic political authority and the justification of civil disobedience. Perhaps the barest outline of how these questions would be addressed on the present view can be seen here—addressing both topics will likely require relying on the fact that duties of reciprocity are incurred only when one receives an acceptable benefit, and the fact that injustice will not be acceptable—but surely the present account falls well short of a satisfactory discussion of these issues. Further development of a complete theory of political authority is a valuable theoretical endeavor in its own right, it is simply one that must be set aside for the time being. Our present focus has been the moral ideal of social equality, and the framework of political authority developed here is, I think, sufficient for addressing the problem of disagreement that is internal to the theory that provides us with a coherent account of that ideal.

VII. Status, Cooperation, and Distributive Justice

Status relations often play an important role in shaping cooperative or prosocial behavior. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which the status principle is related to social cooperation and the distribution of the fruits of cooperation. I start with some discussion of the relationship between the status principle and distributive justice. The status principle, I argue, grounds a conditional principle of resource equality because resources and wealth are generally a source of public social status. I then go on to examine how social status relations shape cooperative behavior. In that discussion, it becomes important to distinguish between different kinds of cooperative contexts. In some cases, social status will play an important role in motivating or coordinating prosocial behavior, whereas in others social status will be an impediment to mutually beneficial cooperation.

1. Social Status and Cooperation

Relations of social status are among the basic features of the social world that shape the way humans interact with one another. This influence extends to cooperative settings, shaping the way in which humans engage in mutually beneficial social interactions. In this chapter, I will study the relationship between the moral theory of social status that I have developed throughout this dissertation and social cooperation broadly construed. Doing so will contribute to fleshing out the moral theory of social status in a number of ways. In the first place, it will help illuminate the substantive implications of the moral theory of social status for other domains of our social lives. For instance, I will argue that demands to promote greater equality of public social status may ground demands to promote greater equality of resources. Such a result is not only interesting in its own right, as it also illuminates the social conditions that would allow for us to relate as public social equals. The discussion throughout this chapter can also be treated as a model for how to reason about the substantive implications of the status principle in social practice. One thing that I hope is made especially clear about this reasoning is that it must be sensitive to often complex and subtly variable relationship that social status has to other constituents of social order.

Sometimes, the influence of social status on cooperation is to the good of participants. Social scientists have identified a number of ways in which status relations guide us to socially better outcomes. A number of theoretical accounts have been developed illustrating the ways in which social status can help facilitate cooperation by acting as a coordination mechanism[174] or by motivating contributions to public goods.[175] These are clearly desirable features of status relations, but status relations can also have

[174] Mark, "Status Organizes Cooperation."

[175] Gintis et. al., "Costly Signaling and Cooperation;" Whitmeyer, "Prestige from the Provision of Public Goods;" Willer, "Groups Reward Individual Sacrifice;" Henrich and Boyd, "Division of Labor, Economic Specialization, and the Evolution of Social Stratification."

detrimental effects on social cooperation. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was intimately aware of how our social psychology can lead to pathological behavior in social settings. Repeatedly throughout the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau makes mention of the social costs of our concern for status:

> consuming ambition, the ardent desire to raise one's relative fortune less out of genuine need than in order to place oneself above others, instills in all men a black inclination to harm one another...[176]

> I would show how much this universal desire for reputation, honors, and preferment which consumes us all exercises and compares talents and strengths, how much it excites and multiplies the passions and, in making all men competitors, rivals, or rather enemies, how many reverses, how many successes, how many catastrophes of every kind it daily causes by leading so many Contenders to enter the same lists: I would show that it is to this ardor to be talked about, to this frenzy to achieve distinction which almost always keeps us outside ourselves, that we owe what is best and what is worst among men, our virtues and our vices...[177]

Rousseau demonstrates a subtle appreciation for the complex pathologies that concern for relative social position creates. He is alive to the fact that there are two general ways by which we can advance our relative social position. We might make great contributions to some kind of public good, adding to our successes, virtues, and what is best among us. Or, equally effective is dragging others below you. The purely positional nature of social status relations makes it the case that an effective way to enhance your own social status is to reduce the status of others. When persons adopt this latter strategy, the pathologies of social status begin to emerge. It becomes desirable that those with whom you cooperate and interact fail so that you may come to occupy a superior social position. As we shall see, Rousseau is right to treat social status as a mechanism for breeding social antagonism.

What are we to make of the relationship between social status and cooperation, then? On the one hand social status carries promise to be a powerful engine for the production of social benefit. On the other, it seems to breed social pathologies that can lead to mutual harm. A complete evaluation of social status relations in cooperative contexts must be sensitive to the varied ways in which social status can shape our cooperative interactions. The following aims to develop a framework for making such complete evaluations. I start by examining the relationship between the status principle and distributive justice. Following that, I develop a series of game theoretic models to capture the different kinds of cooperative contexts that will influence how we evaluate relations of social status and the status-seeking behavior that they engender. The varied

[176] "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men," part 2, para. 27.
[177] *Ibid.*, part. 2 para. 52.

array of social contexts within which status relations have influence will preclude a general conclusion about how social cooperation is to be organized according to the moral theory of social status. While we may have reason to promote equality of public social status, oftentimes we will have reason to allow but constrain status-seeking behavior, in other cases status-seeking behaviors will be strictly productive and we will have reason to tolerate it outright, whereas in yet other cases tolerating some degree of social status inequality will minimize the social costs of status-seeking.

2. Resources and Public Social Status

In the following section I will argue that the status principle will entail demands for greater equality of resources under certain social conditions. That argument will rest on a key claim about the relationship between resources and public social status which I will elaborate on here. That claim is that possession of a greater relative share of resources is a robust source of greater public social status. This key claim will serve as a sort of bridge premise connection the present theory of the morality of social status with notions of distributive justice.[178]

The relationship between status inequality and resource inequality is, in principle, straightforward. If resources are the kinds of goods that can confer greater public social status, then inequality of resources will bring about inequality of public social status. Demands for resource equality would then follow naturally from demands for equality of public social status.

That such a relationship could obtain in principle is, of course, insufficient to establish that the status principle justifies any kind of distributive egalitarianism. Whether some feature of individuals will be a status characteristic is a question that concerns the contingent attitudes and beliefs of individuals. To address whether distributive inequality will give rise to status inequality, we need to assess the plausibility of the claim that inequalities of resources can contribute to inequalities of social status, and this requires consulting available empirical evidence.

I think many of us would take for granted that one's wealth and resources contribute to one's social status. Persons who serve as paradigm examples of the high status also tend to be quite wealthy. Aristocrats, after all, were not only of high standing but are also quite well off. If the status principle is to have implications for distributive justice, this intuitive relationship must be of a particular sort. For the status principle to condemn some inequalities of wealth and resources, it must be that certain inequalities of wealth and resources *cause* inequalities of public social status.

---

[178] For a number of discussions from varied points of view concerning relational equality and distributive justice, see: Anderson's "What is the Point of Equality?;" Anderson, "The Fundamental Disagreement between Luck Egalitarians and Relational Egalitarians;" Miller, "Equality and Justice;" Schemmel, "Why Relational Egalitarians Should Care About Distributions;" Schemmel, "Distributive and Relational Equality;" Scheffler's "What is Egalitarianism?"

There are two grounds that support the hypothesis that inequalities of resources will tend to cause inequalities of public social status. First, resources are compelling candidates for perceived primary goods, and inequalities of perceived primary goods are conducive to creating inequalities of public social status.[179] Second, available evidence suggests that resources are themselves often treated as a status characteristic, meaning inequalities of resources directly translate to inequalities in public social status.

In the first place, inequalities of resources might give rise to the conditions under which inequalities of public social status might obtain. According to status construction theory, one of the necessary conditions for some characteristic to become a (public social) status characteristic is that different states of the (diffuse) characteristic be correlated with different amounts of what I called perceived primary goods. Perceived primary goods are goods that most individuals *believe* contribute toward advancing their overarching ends and aims, whatever they may be. Resources are clear candidates for perceived primary goods because they are actual primary goods. Since resources can be used as all-purpose means to secure desirable goods, or to enlist the services of others, they will be reliable means for promoting one's ends and aims. If resources are actual primary goods, and individuals recognize this fact, then inequalities of resources will give rise to the conditions wherein public social status characteristics can be constructed. Once status characteristics are constructed, they will play a role in distinguishing relatively superior individuals (qua public person) from the relatively inferior (qua public person), giving rise to inequalities of public social status.

In the second place, individuals might treat resources as a status characteristic unto themselves, so that persons can have greater public social status just because they possess a greater share of resources. The phenomena of resource inequality giving rise to inequality of public social status has been frequently observed in sociology and the social sciences more broadly.[180] Empirical research indicates that when individuals possess differential amounts of resources, then individual reliably form the beliefs and attitudes that make up differences in social status.[181] Individuals seem to robustly treat possession of resources as conferring social status, and this disposition seems to be fairly robust across social settings. This might be because, as the previous paragraph suggested, that inequality of resources also contributes to creating conditions where status differences can be constructed. Resources might serve as both the characteristic being constructed

---

[179] Examples of this hypothesis obtain where there are persons who have high public social status *because* they are relatively wealthy. A familiar example that is often studies in sociological literature concerns how employees who receive a greater wage than their peers tend to become high status just because of the greater reward. On this point, see Harkness, "The Spread of Status Value." A similar explanation may be pertinent whenever members of higher economic classes have greater social status because of their class position.

[180] For a review, see Harkness, "The Consequences of Interpersonal Rewards," esp. pp. 224-5.

[181] Cook, "Expectations, Evaluations, and Equity;" Harkness, "The Spread of Status Value;" Harrod, "Expectations from Unequal Rewards;" Lerner, "Evaluation of Performance as a Function of Performer's Reward and Attractiveness;" Stewart and Moore, "Wage Disparities and Performance Expectations."

into a status characteristic, and as the good unequal distributions of which give rise to the conditions of status construction. All this is to say that available evidence supports the familiar observation that a reliable means to advance one's public social status is to acquire a greater share of wealth and resources.

To sum up, we have two reasons to be confident in the hypothesis that inequalities of resources can give rise to inequalities of social status. Inequalities of resources can give rise to social conditions where novel status characteristics are constructed, which may then contribute to inequalities of public social status. And, possession of resources may itself be regarded as a status characteristic, in which case possession (or lack) of resources will make a direct contribution to one's social status.

3. The Conditional Principle of Resource Equality

Supposing that this hypothesis—that inequalities of wealth and resources can cause inequalities of public social status—is well-supported, the status principle will justify

> *the conditional principle of resource equality:* inequalities of wealth and resources ought to be reduced or removed on the condition that doing so reduces or removes unjustified inequalities of public social status.

That the conditional principle of resource equality is restricted to *unjustified* inequalities of public social is a point I will elaborate on below. While the conditional principle of resource equality is a distinctly egalitarian principle of distributive justice, it is quite different from more familiar forms of resource equality. To better understand the conditional principle, I will take some time to contrast the principle with Ronald Dworkin's account of resource egalitarianism.

Dworkin's resource egalitarianism is among the most prominent luck egalitarian theories of justice.[182] In brief, on Dworkin's view it is unjust for some individual to be worse-off merely as a consequence of their unchosen circumstances.[183] Dworkin famously distinguishes between two kinds of luck: option luck and brute luck. "Option luck is a matter of how a deliberate and calculated gamble turns out."[184] The outcome of a well-researched and deliberately made investment, for instance, is a case of option luck. Differences that are a matter of option luck are, ultimately, caused by individual choices, and so are not unjust on Dworkin's view. Differences based in brute luck, on the other hand, are unjust. "Brute luck is a matter of how risks fall out that are not in that sense

[182] See his "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources," and *Sovereign Virtue*, ch. 2.

[183] Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, pp. 76 and 86. Dworkin sometimes states the idea in terms of individuals taking on "the true cost of their lives."

[184] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

deliberate gambles."[185] Outcomes that are a matter of brute luck are exogenous with respect to one's choices, for example being born with (or without) a disease or disability. Differences based in brute luck are unjust because they make individuals worse-off or better-off through no fault or choice of their own. Dworkin's view directs us to equalize individuals' brute luck, but to leave them to their own devices when it comes to matters of deliberate individual choice.[186] We are required to provide individuals with opportunities such that their particular unchosen circumstances do not restrict their opportunities relative to others.

While both the conditional principle and resource-based luck egalitarianism concern resources, they are clearly rather different principles. That difference carries to a fundamental level, as the principles have apparently distinct underlying rationales. Luck egalitarianism (resource or otherwise) is ultimately concerned with ensuring that individuals are no worse- nor better-off through no fault of their own. Luck egalitarian views take a direct concern with the way resources (or other goods, in the case of non-resource-based variants) are allocated among individuals. In the case of the conditional principle, concern with resources is ultimately derived from the status principle. Resource inequality enters the picture insofar as it contributes to inequality of public social status. But the concern with resources is not basic in the way it is for (resource-based) luck egalitarianism. Of course, one could offer arguments that the two views really do share the same fundamental ground. One could do this by arguing that luck egalitarianism is based on the same fundamental norm of recognition respect as the status principle. One might thus be able to show that there is a deep unity to between luck egalitarianism and the morality of social status. Be that as it may, there remain some prominent apparent differences between the two views examination of which will make character of the conditional principle of resource equality more precise.

I believe that there will be two kinds of cases where a luck egalitarian principle of equal resources will disagree with the conditional principle. In the first, an inequality of resources is based in option luck, but leads to inequalities of public social status. In the second, there is an inequality of resources based in brute luck, but no resulting inequality of public social status.

---

[185] *Ibid.*

[186] The test for equality on Dworkin's view is given by his famous desert island auction thought experiment. According to Dworkin, an initial allocation of resources (initial in the sense that individuals have not yet had the opportunity to try their option luck) is given by the set of resource bundles that would be divided among individuals will equal initial endowments such that no individual prefers the resource bundle that another receives to their own, *Ibid,* pp. 66-9. The last part of the preceding sentence describes Dworkin's envy test, and justice, on his view, is served when individuals' lives as a whole pass the envy test, *Ibid.*, p. 85. For some complications regarding whether the envy test makes for an adequate theory of justice or equality, see Heath, "Dworkin's Auction." As he particulars of the envy test and desert island auction are neither here nor there in the present context, I will not pursue them in any further detail.

Let us begin with the first case, where there is inequality of resources based in option luck that result in an inequality of public social status. Since the inequality of resources is, by hypothesis, a product of option luck alone, it should be morally justified according to luck egalitarianism. This is a case of someone who's good fortunate is a consequence of their deliberate choice. While such a case might be difficult to conceive of given the prevalence of unjust starting conditions and the fact that brute luck is pervasive in our lives, it may nevertheless obtain in some cases, and even if it does not, it is still instructive to consider in the present theoretical context. We might imagine, for instance, that persons start with equal sets of opportunities, and that as a sole consequence of their choices, some enjoy a far greater share of resources than others, which, consequently, results in the wealthier individuals having greater public social status. Where inequalities of resources are solely a consequence of option luck, resource-based luck egalitarianism would deem the inequality morally justified. The conditional principle brings us to a different conclusion. Even if an inequality of resources is solely a product of option luck, insofar as it contributes to unjustified inequalities of public social status, it is unjustified according to the conditional principle. The fact that the resource inequality is a product of option luck does not mitigate the fact that it would contribute to inequality of public social status, and such inequality is unjustified because it is incompatible with giving individuals the recognition respect that they are owed.

An important qualification in the preceding paragraph is that the inequality of resources gives rise to *unjustified* inequalities of public social status. As we established in chapter IV, inequalities of public social status can be justified when eliminating or reducing those inequalities would come at too great a cost to other goods or values. And, we might think that individuals taking responsibility for their own lives is morally important. In this case, the fact that a resource inequality is a product of option luck may be a reason that weights in favor of permitting the status inequality, since reducing or removing the status inequality would come at a cost to the value of individual responsibility (supposing that it is indeed a value). Hence, in an indirect way, the fact that some inequality is a consequence of option luck can contribute to the justification of certain resource inequalities. But, in the case of the conditional principle, unlike in the case of luck egalitarianism, such appeal simply serves as one reason among many that weigh in on the question of whether the resulting status inequality, and consequently the resource inequality, is justified.

The second kind of case where the conditional principle and resource-based luck egalitarianism will disagree concerns instances where resource inequalities are a consequence of brute luck, but those inequalities do not contribute to unjustified inequalities of public social status. Such case might obtain if, for instance, those who possessed a greater share of resources also had features which marked them as relatively

low status, such that their net status was equal to that of others in their society.[187] If resource inequality does not contribute to unjustified inequalities of public social status, then that resource inequality is not unjustified according to the conditional principle. However, by hypothesis the resource inequality in question is a consequence of brute luck, and so is unjustified according to luck egalitarianism.

So, while the conditional principle resembles a luck egalitarian principle, in that it provides us with moral reasons that weigh in favor of greater equality of resources, the two remain quite distinct. And such difference should come as no surprise, given what seems to be a difference in the underlying rationales for the two views. The reasoning that leads to the status principle, and therefore the conditional principle, is not directly concerned with individual choice and responsibility the way the reasoning in support of luck egalitarianism is. Whether some resource inequality arises through some fault of individuals' choices or not is of no direct concern to the conditional principle (though, it is of indirect concern, for appeal to individual responsibility might serve to justify status inequality).

In sum, because inequalities of resources tend to cause unjustified inequalities of public social status, the status principle provides us with reasons to favor greater equality of resources. The resulting principle of resource equality is conditional on reducing unjustified inequalities of public social status. Moreover, we must keep in mind that the pursuit of equality of public social status must also be balanced against other goods and values, and there are sure to be other important goods and values that are relevant in the economic sphere.

Now, some might find this implausible, so implausible in fact, that the entailment of a principle of resource egalitarianism is taken to be a *reductio* of the moral theory of social status that I have been defending. In reply to such skepticism, I believe there is an important point to make clear. The conditional principle only provides reasons in favor of greater equality of resources, and so does not provide a conclusive justification for an equal distribution of resources. Presumably, if someone is skeptical of resource egalitarianism, they have such a view because they hold various countervailing reasons. Those countervailing reasons, if they are genuine moral reasons based in significant goods or values, should factor into the justification of status inequality based in inequality of resources. That is, because the complete status principle is sensitive to competing goods and values, the conditional principle has built into it a sensitivity to reasons that weigh against bringing about greater equality of resources. The conditional principle does

[187] The point to keep in mind here is that the status principle requires equality of overall public social status, not equality along each dimension of public social status. Inequalities in various dimensions which, on the aggregate, resulted in equal overall public social status, are not problematic from the view of the status principle. It is lack of overall public social status that would pose a threat to giving persons their recognition respect, and so only inequalities of overall public social status are of concern according to the status principle. For the classic discussion and model of reaching aggregate assessments of social status, see Berger et. al. *Status Characteristics and Social Interaction.*

ultimately offer a reason in favor of greater equality of resources, we simply take into consideration countervailing goods and values as well.

4. Social Status and Cooperation

I took note in an earlier chapter[188] that public social status lacks the formal properties that a status relation must have in order to successfully organize cooperation. This is because, in the first place, relations of public social status range over entire societies, such that status incentives cannot lead to positive externalities for members not standing in those relations. When everyone stands in a given status relation, everyone is subject to the costs of competition for status (which include not only the costs incurred attempting to improve one's status, but also the costs borne by being unable to exit a relatively low status position). In the second place, at the scale that public social status is operative, it is unlikely that it can serve as an incentive for the production of public goods. This is because in large-scale societies, individuals will be unable to monitor contributions to common goods nor will they agree upon what the common good is in many cases. If relations of social status are to play some role in social cooperation, they must be of a more particular kind than public social status.

This might lead us to think that appeal to the status principle is misplaced within cooperative contexts, and that we should instead defer to the framework for assessing relations of non-public social status. While that framework may certainly be useful in assessing the organization of social cooperation, the status principle may still be of some significance. If we take for granted that differences of local status can sometimes "scale up," in the sense that they then go on to make contributions to one's public social status, then the status principle will carry implications for how cooperation ought to be organized. More precisely, in the case that some kind of local status governs cooperation and that kind of status contributes to individuals' public social status, then the status principle will have something to say about how we ought to organize cooperation. I shall take for granted throughout the following discussion in at least some cases a local kind of status can scale to produce differences in public social status, such that the status principle provides us with some reason to be concerned with the structure of social cooperation in such cases.[189]

I will also take for granted the assumption that permitting local status-seeking behavior will result in some inequality of local social status over time (which might then scale to contribute to inequality of public social status). The idea here is that individuals

---

[188] In section 3 of ch. III.

[189] Cases of individuals in high regard in some local status attaining high regard in the context of public social status are, I think, familiar enough from everyday experience. To take just one example, consider how receiving the Nobel prize can result in an individual not only having greater status in their profession, but also greater public social status. For further discussion of the mechanism by which local status characteristics can give rise to differences in public social status, see Berger and Fisek, "Diffuse Status Characteristics."

have different aptitudes when it comes to navigating social situations, and some are better social climbers than others.[190]

Ethnographers, anthropologists, and sociologists have developed sophisticated theories concerning the role of social status in social cooperation. A prominent line of thought holds that social status can, in many cases, incentivize contribution to public goods, or even incentivize individuals to cooperate more generally.[191]

To see how status can have such an effect on social cooperation, let us consider a classic case of a non-cooperative interaction, the Prisoner's Dilemma (PD). The PD is typically used to illustrate interactions where individually best choices lead to collectively suboptimal outcomes. Players in PDs are confronted with two courses of conduct, to cooperate or to defect. Defecting allows a player to secure a greater benefit at the expense of the other player (in the classic story, a prisoner can get a shorter sentence, but only by ratting on their partner). In a PD, defecting is an individually dominant strategy, meaning that no matter what the other player chooses to do, defecting always makes one better off. So, if parties were to choose in accordance with what option is best for them, they should mutually defect. But, this results in each player imposing greater costs on one another than there would be if both had cooperated. Figure A provides an illustration.

Figure A. The Standard PD

	Cooperate	Defect
Cooperate	5, 5	1, 7
Defect	7, 1	2, 2

The numbers in the figure represent the amount of goods the row and column players receive respectively. Individuals, I assume, always prefer a greater number of goods to a lesser one. As we see in the figure, both players can always improve the share they receive by defecting. But this results in a <Defect, Defect> equilibrium, which is suboptimal relative to <Cooperate, Cooperate>.

Introducing social status can "solve"[192] the PD by making cooperation the dominant strategy. Suppose that the row and column players are both members of a

[190] The dynamics by which local behaviors scale to create population-level status inequality have been well-studied. For some models, see: Gould, "The Origin of Status Hierarchies;" Lynn et. al., "A Sociological (De)Construction of the Relationship between Status and Quality;" Manzo and Baldassari, "Heuristics, Interactions, and Status Hierarchies."

[191] Gintis et. al., "Costly Signaling and Cooperation;" Whitmeyer, "Prestige from the Provision of Public Goods;" Willer, "Groups Reward Individual Sacrifice;" Henrich and Boyd, "Division of Labor, Economic Specialization, and the Evolution of Social Stratification."

[192] The introduction of social status will only "solve" the PD, rather than *solve*, because, strictly speaking, the introduction of social status changes the structure of the game such that it is no longer a PD. If *solving* the PD

social group that rewards cooperative behavior with social status. Let us modify the PD to reflect this change. I will signify the introduction of status by adding some value to a player's payoffs when they cooperate. We should be careful to note that since status is a zero-sum good, we should keep the status reward distinct from the goods, or "material reward" as I will call them, a player receives, since utility functions for goods will rely on different kinds of arguments than utility functions for status. Below, I will address the kinds of dynamics that are a consequence of the fact that the value of status is contingent on the status of others, but for now let us focus on the way that status incentives may "solve" PDs. Allow the unit 'p' (for "prestige") to demarcate status rewards. For ease of presentation of this example, let us also suppose that players' utility functions are such that they are indifferent between a unit of status and a unit of material goods. Consider now the game shown by figure B.

Figure B. The PD with Status Incentives

	Cooperate	Defect
Cooperate	5 + 3p, 5 + 3p	1 + 3p, 7
Defect	7, 1 + 3p	2, 2

Given how we have described this game, cooperating is now a dominant strategy for players, making <Cooperate, Cooperate> the equilibrium of the game. What the change from figure A to figure B shows is that status allows us to change the kind of interaction individuals are in while holding material conditions fixed.

The PD is, of course, but one kind of interaction among many that are salient for the study of cooperation. If we are to arrive at a relatively complete picture of the relationship between status and cooperation, we will need to consider other kinds of interactions as well. The kinds of reasons we have that weigh for and against status incentives in some kind of interaction will naturally depend on the effects of status incentives on that interaction, and status incentives, we shall see, have different kinds of effects for different kinds of interactions. So, we will need to be careful to distinguish between the many different kinds social interactions where status incentives may be relevant and evaluate the effects of status incentives in each case.

The simple case of the PD helps identify useful criteria for the evaluation of the effects of status incentives in various cooperative interactions. In the first place, we should consider whether the effect of social status produces a better outcome.[193] And, in

means providing an explanation of why rational agents would cooperate in the standard PD, then status does no such thing. Indeed, it would seem that the closest individuals can get to *solving* a PD is to "solve" it.

[193] What exactly makes an outcome better will vary by case. In the kinds of cases I will consider, outcomes are better either because they make one or both players better off without making the other worse-off, or because the outcomes lead to the production of public goods.

the second place, we should consider whether status incentives (and resulting social inequality) are necessary in order to reach the better outcome.

In the PD, we see that the introduction of social status does lead to a better outcome. Both parties are made strictly better-off when status incentives are introduced into the game. Whether status incentives are necessary to reach the better outcome will naturally depend on a number of contingencies. The first thing to consider is whether there are other feasible alternatives for modifying the structure of the interaction. The second thing to consider are the relative costs of alternatives, supposing there are alternatives, compared to the costs of relying on status incentives. We should also note that even if status incentives are the most efficient mechanism for incentivizing cooperative behavior, that still will not provide decisive justification of any inequalities of public social status that may ultimately arise as a consequence. This is because the benefit that would be secured by permitting inequality-causing status-seeking behavior may not be significant enough to outweigh the moral cost of greater inequality of public social status. If individuals disagree about whether the resulting status inequality is justified, then at that point they will need to defer to democratic institutions to adjudicate their conflicting judgments. The present discussion will simply layout the framework by which such assessments are to proceed, but the final reckoning, should some balance of values need to be struck, will have to be achieved democratically.

In what follows, I will comment on the role of status incentives in public goods production, which is simply a modified version of the PD, and then in subsections (i) and (ii), I will address cases where status relations are incidental to economic conduct and cases where status-seeking behavior is socially costly. The kinds of interactions considered here are by no means exhaustive, they are only meant to highlight what I think are interesting and familiar kinds of cooperative interactions. The implications of the status principle in such cases are also quite interesting, for, as we shall see, we will often have reason to restrain the degree of status inequality while permitting some inequality to persist.

The models of these interactions that I will examine will all be based on the following general framework.

Figure C. The General Status Game

	Seek Status	Defer Status
Seek Status	$W_{A1} + P_{A1}, W_{B1} + P_{B1}$	$W_{A2} + P_{A2}, W_{B2}$
Defer Status	$W_{A3}, W_{B3} + P_{B3}$	W_{A4}, W_{B4}

In the general status game, each player is faced with two strategies: they can either engage in status-seeking behavior or defer status-seeking. For the sake of simplicity, I will assume throughout that the kinds of cooperative interactions we are considering involve exactly

two individuals at a time. Focusing on only two-persons cases allows us to abstract away from the complexity of interactions with larger numbers of individuals, allowing us to focus on the relationship between status-incentives and individual behavior. Individuals receive a prestige payoff if, and only if, they engage in status-seeking. Prestige payoffs are denoted by 'P,' and material payoffs are denoted by 'W' (for "wealth"). The first letter subscript of payoffs denotes which player the payoff goes to, with 'A' indicating the row player and 'B' indicating the column player. The second, numerical subscript indicates which set of strategies that payoff results under, with 1 indicating <Seek, Seek>, 2 indicating <Seek, Defer>, and so on. This cumbersome notation gives the model enough degrees of freedom so that we can represent and examine a number of interesting cases.

Lastly, we need to define player utility functions. The utility function for material payoffs is straightforward enough: I shall assume that individuals have standard well-behaved utility functions over material goods, which is to say strictly positive, concave, continuous, and monotonic utility functions.

Utility functions over status, however, cannot be dealt with so quickly. Status, after all, is a positional good, so the value of one's status must be a function of both their own status and the status of others. We need not provide a precise statement of individual utility functions over status, I will address particularly interesting cases as they arise, but I will assume that the following general features obtain. Individuals prefer to be superior to others (rather than inferiors) and increasing superiority has diminishing marginal utility. That is, if you are already higher status than me, then each incremental gain in status after the fact is less valuable to you. I will also assume that individuals value a marginal gain in status based on how much it would change their overall status. So, the thought is that investing into status-seeking is not worthwhile to one if that status-seeking makes no difference to one's position relative to others. If Alfie wants to improve his social standing in his neighborhood (where social standing is based on the relative cost of your car, say), then getting a Honda will not do him any good when all his neighbors own Bentleys. This means that an individual's utility from a marginal gain in status approaches 0 as the gap in status between them and others increases. When the difference between individuals' social status is too great, then gains in status will have no effect on their relative position, making such gains effectively worthless.

Using this framework, let us examine a case quite similar to the PD, namely, that of public goods contributions. In a typical public goods game, players can either contribute or withhold, and contributions generate some positive externality G.[194] Let us suppose that mutual contribution will generate the greatest material benefit, but that contribution comes at some individual cost, so individuals would do better off for themselves by withholding.

[194] G represents the benefits conferred to third parties not present to the interaction. The benefits that players gain from others' contributions to public goods can be represented within the general status game by increasing W_{A1}, W_{B1}, W_{A2}, and W_{B3} as appropriate.

We might represent a game of this sort by simply adding that some positive externality is generated when individuals cooperate in the PD. The general status game instantiates a public goods game when status-seeking generates some positive externality G, and $W_{A1} + W_{B1} + 2G$ is the greatest material payoff, but $W_{A3} > W_{A1}$ and $W_{B2} > W_{B1}$. Status incentives will resolve the public goods problem when for row player $U_A(P_{A2}) > U_A (W_{A3} - W_{A2})$ and for column player $U_B(P_{B3}) > U_B (W_{B2} - W_{B3})$. That is, the utility that a player gets from the increase in status that players would receive by contributing to the public good must be greater than the utility players would receive from their increased material payoffs when they withhold. In this case, <Seek, Seek> is the equilibrium, which secures greatest aggregate amount of material payoffs.

How should we evaluate status inequalities stemming from status-seeking which results in greater public goods contributions? The fact that such status-seeking leads to increased public goods contributions is, I think, a clearly desirable feature, and so is a reason that speaks in favor of permitting the status inequality.

Moreover, status incentives have a unique feature that may make them more appealing than alternative means for addressing public good problems. Because status is an essentially positional good, it can lead to arms-race dynamics. If Alfie desires to be atop the donor list of some charity, and if Beatrice increases her contribution so that it is greater than Alfie's, then Alfie must increase his contribution in order to secure his desired position (and perhaps Beatrice responds by contributing more, and so on). If it is the case both that others want greater relative status and that the status-seeking behavior in question generates public goods, then status-seeking behavior will lead to greater contributions to public goods as individuals continuously compete over securing a greater share of status.

Consider now an alternative mechanism for securing public goods contributions, such as monitoring and applying sanctions for withholding. Such a mechanism seems to be less desirable than reliance on status incentives for two reasons. First, monitoring individual behavior and doling out punishment as necessary would come at some material cost (not to mention intrusiveness), which is deadweight (relative to the status alternative). Second, since such alternatives do not rely on incentives the value of which is positional, it cannot generate the arms-race dynamic that leads to increased contributions. Status incentives thus have unique and appealing features when they are rewards for contributions to public goods.

We thus have compelling reasons that weigh in favor of permitting inequalities of public social status that are a consequence of status-seeking which leads to increased contributions to public goods. But, we should not be so quick as to conclude that *any* inequality of public social status that is a consequence of such a process is justified. If inequalities of status become too great, status incentives will become ineffective. This is because the utility of status payoffs is essentially relative. If status inequalities are too great, marginal gains in status will make no difference to one's place in the social

hierarchy, and this makes such gains worthless. So, for example, if Alfie has donated so much more than Beatrice to some charity that Beatrice has no hope of catching up to Alfie's place, and both parties know this, neither individual has reason to engage in further status-seeking.

Hence, in order for status incentives to be effective, there must not be too great a status inequality between players. Since the utility that individuals receive from status depends on their relative position, status incentive will only be effective when there is sufficient parity of status among players. In cases like public goods problems, though we may have some reason to justify inequalities of public social status that are a consequence of local status-seeking, it will not follow that we have reason to any degree of status inequality. We thus have compelling reason to maintain background conditions such that relative positions in the status hierarchy are competitive—individuals must be able to reasonably expect to improve their social status by status-seeking, as otherwise status will not serve as an effective incentive for socially desirable behavior.

i. *Incidental status*. By "incidental" I mean that status incentives and material incentives overdetermine individual conduct. Such a case obtains when $W_{A1} > W_{A3}$, $W_{A2} > W_{A4}$, $W_{B1} > W_{B2}$, and $W_{B3} > W_{B4}$. Here is an example of a game that satisfies these constraints:

Figure D. Incidental Status Rewards

	Seek Status	Defer Status
Seek Status	2 + 1p, 2 + 1p	2 + 1p, 1
Defer Status	1, 2 + 1p	1, 1

An example of such a case might be confronted when individuals are choosing between occupations, some of which come with both greater material and greater prestige. Status incentives in these cases lead individuals to take the same kind of conduct that they would have taken had the status incentives been absent. If being a doctor comes with both relatively greater material and prestige rewards, then the choice of occupation is overdetermined by the incentives.

We might think that when status rewards are incidental in this way the case for status equality is trivial. Status incentives are superfluous in this case, and supposing status-seeking comes at a cost of greater inequality of public social status. Reliance on status incentives in this case comes strictly with a moral cost, and so has no redeeming features.

There are, however, two complications in this case that might make it worthy of greater philosophical interest. First, there are complications concerning how we might mitigate status inequality in such cases. Second, there are complications concerning conflict with other kinds of egalitarian intuitions that some might hold.

Starting with the first complication, we must be careful in how we aim to mitigate status inequality that results from interactions where status rewards are incidental. I think it would be unappealing, for instance, to outright prohibit status-seeking behavior when that behavior is socially productive. Consider again the case of being a doctor. It may be true that the greater social status that comes with being a doctor is not necessary to attract individuals into occupying such positions, but that does not mean that in order to reduce inequality of public social status we should prohibit individuals from being doctors.

What we should hope to do, rather, is to intervene upon individual beliefs and attitudes such that the relevant kind of behavior is not rewarded with social status. So, in cases where status is incidental to productive behavior, we may have reason to reduce inequality of public social status by way of changing individual beliefs and attitudes such that status inequality is reduced. But, we will have reason against outright prohibition or disincentivizing of the conduct that leads to status inequality when that conduct also results in appealing benefits. Hence, status inequality might be justified even when the status incentive is not necessary for productive conduct, insofar as we are unable to eliminate the status inequality without frustrating a kind of conduct that we have compelling reason to permit. While it may play no role in social cooperation, status inequality in such case may be of a sort that we must nevertheless tolerate.

On to the second complication, which concerns conflicts between egalitarian demands. Let us suppose for the sake of illustration that we have sufficiently effective means of intervention such that we could undercut the individual beliefs and attitudes that confer status in cases where status rewards are incidental. Additionally, let us modify the case such that the material pay-offs for the row player are always strictly greater than the material payoffs for column. In the general game, we represent this modification by the introduction of the constraint that $W_{A1} > W_{B1}$, $W_{A3} > W_{B2}$, $W_{A2} > W_{B3}$, and $W_{A4} > W_{B4}$. Suppose, moreover, that our only available means of intervening on material payoffs is to reduce row player's payoffs such that they prefer to engage in a different, less socially beneficial kind of conduct. Perhaps we could cut the pay of being a doctor in the row player's case, but that this would lead her to pursue being a gardener instead. And, suppose further that if were to reduce row's material incentives so as to bring about material inequality, we can still incentivize row to pursue a more socially productive kind of conduct by way of status incentives. The resulting situation, then, is one where the individual who is disposed to receiving a greater material reward will pursue a socially productive course of action only if she gets either greater material rewards or some status rewards. If she gets neither then she will pursue a less socially beneficial course of action. The case, as I have described it, leads to a conflict egalitarian intuitions. Supposing that we wish to continue incentivizing individuals to take relatively socially productive positions, we find ourselves in a position where we may choose either between bringing about greater equality of social status or greater equality of material goods, but not both.

Hence, while we might think status incentives are straightforwardly unnecessary in the case where status rewards are incidental, such a case is nevertheless an interesting one to study. For, perhaps unintuitively, in such cases we may still have compelling reasons that weigh in favor of justifying inequalities of public social status, and moreover such cases seem to create philosophically interesting conflicts of egalitarian intuitions.

ii. *Socially costly status-seeking.* While status incentives can certainly have prosocial effects, theory and evidence also indicates that status incentives can give rise to socially costly outcomes. When an efficient way for individuals to improve their status is to take on social costly behavior, then from an individual's point of view acting in ways that generate considerable costs for others may well be worth gains in status. Yet, if individuals were to engage in such behavior regularly, cooperation can be disrupted or undermined.[195] Consider two ways that someone working in a collaborative group in some firm might try to improve their status within that firm—they could do good work, or they could offload work on others and then attempt to take credit for it. In the latter case, the individual both takes on a lesser cost (she can spend less time working) and she avoids a risk of falling behind in status, as might happen if others try to take credit for her work. But, if offloading work and taking credit becomes a widespread practice, then fewer individuals will do work, more individuals will conflict over who takes credit for what, and this would be a worse outcome than what might have occurred if every participant had just done their share of the work in the first place.

Let us define cases of socially costly status-seeking more precisely. Within the framework of the general status game, status-seeking is socially costly when $W_{A4} > W_{A2} > W_{A1}$, $W_{B4} > W_{B3} > W_{B1}$, but $U_A(P_{A1}) > U_A\ (W_{A2} - W_{A1})$, $U_A(P_{A2}) > U_A\ (W_{A2} - W_{A4})$, $U_B(P_{B1}) > U_B\ (W_{B3} - W_{B1})$, and $U_B(P_{B3}) > U_B\ (W_{B4} - W_{B3})$. That is, a status game has socially costly status-seeking whenever seeking status leads to lesser material payoffs and prestige rewards incentivize individuals to engage in status-seeking behavior. Figure E is one example of a game satisfying these constraints.

Figure E. Socially Costly Status-Seeking

	Seek Status	Defer Status
Seek Status	1 + 5p, 1 + 5p	1 + 5p, 2
Defer Status	2, 1+ 5p	2, 2

Cases of socially costly status-seeking abound in everyday life. In order to improve his standing vis-à-vis his colleagues, an employee might intentionally sabotage the project of one of his colleagues. Players on the same basketball team may enter into

[195] Kitts, "Collective Action, Rival Incentives, and the Emergence of Antisocial Norms;" Loch et. al., "Status competition and performance in work groups;" McAdams, "Relative Preferences."

conflict with the aim of securing more playing time. Individuals use time during meetings to engage in unproductive self-aggrandizing behavior.[196] In all these cases, an individual imposes a cost on the group—lower productivity, intrateam conflict, and wasted time—in order to secure greater status for herself.

With these kinds of interactions, the zero-sum nature of status incentives will give rise to a socially costly arms-race dynamics. If you engage in socially costly status-seeking to increase your standing, and I wish to avoid falling behind in standing, then I will have to engage in such costly status-seeking as well in order to keep up. But supposing we received relatively equal status returns on our behavior, the essentially relative character of status makes it the case that neither of us will have improved our standing vis-à-vis the other despite having taken on material costs. When status-seeking is socially costly, the positional nature of status may make it the case that individuals regularly engage in socially costly conduct while receiving no benefit in turn. Such conduct is strictly socially wasteful.

These observations may lead us to conclude that there is no reason to permit inequalities of public social status that arise as a consequence of socially costly status-seeking behavior. Such inequalities would seem to have no redeeming features, as the behavior that gives rise to them makes individuals strictly worse-off. This certainly gives us some reason to favor disincentivizing socially costly status-seeking, and also provides a clear reason against justifying any resulting inequalities of public social status.

But, nevertheless, I do not think a conclusive case can be made against permitting status inequalities in this instance. Status inequality of certain degree may be desirable in this case, especially if it is infeasible to reduce socially costly status-seeking by other means. Recall the assumption that the utility that an individual derives from a marginal gain in status is a function of how that marginal gain affects her place in the status hierarchy. When the difference in status between individuals is too great, then the value of marginal gains in status will be quite low since such marginal gains will have almost no effect on one's relative position. When there is such a (relatively great) degree of status inequality, individuals will no longer have reason to engage in status-seeking behavior, since the marginal gains in status that such behavior might confer will no longer be valuable. Within the context of socially costly status-seeking, status inequality could reduce the social costs of status-seeking behavior by undercutting the value of marginal gains in prestige by aspiring social climbers.

To illustrate, let us consider the case of the game depicted in figure E. Suppose that the difference in status between both players is so great as to make the marginal value of status effectively zero. Gains in prestige have almost no effect on the relative standing between the players, so they see little point in acquiring greater prestige at a cost.

[196] The first two examples are drawn from Kitts, "Collective Action, Rival Incentives, and the Emergence of Antisocial Norms," p.241. The last example is drawn from Henrich and Henrich, *Why Humans Cooperate*, pp. 125-30.

This makes mutual deference of status the resulting equilibrium. Status inequality of a sufficient degree motivates players to avoid socially costly conduct.

Thus, in the case of socially costly status-seeking, we have one compelling reason against justifying resulting inequalities of public social status, to wit, that permitting the behavior that results in such inequalities comes at a considerable social cost. But, we might also have reason to tolerate status inequality of a degree necessary to disincentive status-seeking behavior in contexts where such behavior is socially costly. Whether we should proceed by permitting such a degree of status inequality or by pursuing alternative mechanisms of curbing socially costly status-seeking will naturally turn on the particulars of the case under considerations. Permitting status inequality to a sufficient degree would seem to be a relatively effective mechanism, for it undercuts the motive for status-seeking, but such a strategy comes at the moral cost of increased resulting inequality of public social status. Alternative mechanisms, such reliance on monitoring and sanctioning, should be expected to be less efficient, for the motive for status-seeking will remain, and such mechanisms are sure to make errors in some cases. But, more coercive measures might come with the advantage of reducing the moral cost of greater inequality of social status (supposing that monitoring and sanctioning are at least moderately effective).

Examining these cases has made clear, I hope, there are number of ways in which status incentives can influence cooperation. We should also be careful to acknowledge that this analysis has used a relatively simple analytic model, a two-person strategic game, in order to orient our evaluations in these different cases. Being a model, these games necessarily simplify the ways in which individuals will actually interact, and when it comes to all-things-considered decision-making, among the things to consider will be the various complexities not represented within the models just considered.

All that being said, I think the preceding analysis does provide us with some important lessons concerning the evaluation of status inequalities that are a consequence of behavior shaped by status incentives in cooperative contexts. First, as we have observed, in most cases we will find reasons that weigh in favor of accepting some degree of status inequality. Status incentives, and resulting status inequality, can result in productive behavior (when status-seeking is prosocial), or, status inequality can undercut undesirable behaviors (when status-seeking is socially costly). It seems that status incentives can play a valuable enough role in cooperation that in some cases we might find the use of such incentives, and the consequential public social status inequality, to be justified. Second, while we may have reason to permit of some inequality of status that is a consequence of incentivized status-seeking, this does not mean that we should categorically permit all inequalities of public social status that are caused in this way. In the case of prosocial status-seeking, we should still aim to maintain sufficient parity of social status among individuals such that status incentives are sufficient to drive their

behavior to socially desirable ones. And, in the case of socially costly status-seeking, we need not tolerate a greater degree of status inequality than is necessary to curb the undesirable status-seeking behavior. Hence, the relationship between status incentives and cooperation is such that in many cases we may have reason to justify resulting some inequality of public social status, but we will not have reason to permit just any degree of status inequality, and indeed we will often have reason to constrain such inequality so that status incentives do not lose their motivational force.

5. Status and Coordination

The previous section studied how status can serve as a motive for (un)productive cooperation. In this section, I will examine how social status can play a role in organizing social cooperation. A prominent way in which status coordinates behavior is by identifying certain individuals to whom others must defer. The high status, after all, often command greater authority within the settings that they are high status, and such perception of authority may have interesting consequences for the organization of cooperation.

Such a role of social status will be especially salient where individuals confront coordination problems. Coordination problems are situations where individuals wish to take complimentary courses of action, but there are multiple such complimentary courses of action available. The challenge faced by individuals consists in finding a way of choosing just one set of complimentary actions to pursue. Let us consider a familiar variant of coordination problems. Suppose you and I would like to get lunch together. We both prefer to eat together than to eat alone, but we have different preferences over where to eat. I would prefer to get pizza, while you would prefer to get sandwiches.

Figure F. A Simple Coordination Game

	Pizza	Sandwich
Pizza	2, 1	0, 0
Sandwich	0, 0	1, 2

The central challenge posed by coordination games consist in identifying some mechanism by which we settle on how to coordinate.

We can represent coordination problems within the general status game by imposing the following restrictions. Suppose, for instance, that the best outcome is when parties coordinate on exactly one player seeking status. Such a game obtains when both W_{A2} and W_{A3} are greater than W_{A1} or W_{A4}, and W_{B2} and W_{B3} are both greater than W_{B1} or W_{B4}. If we further suppose that $U_A(W_{A2} + P_{A2}) > U_A(W_{A3})$ and $U_B(W_{B3} + P_{B3}) > U_B(W_{B2})$ then we have a game that is comparable to the simple coordination game depicted in figure F. In this variant of the status game, both players prefer <Seek, Defer> or <Defer,

Seek> to either of the other two outcomes, but have conflicting preferences over <Seek, Defer> and <Defer, Seek>. This might lead us to think that status incentives will play a disruptive role in such interactions. Both parties will be moved to improve their relative standing, resulting in the relatively worse <Seek, Seek> outcome. But, I think there is an intuitive mechanism for resolving such conflict already available to players that this rendition of the status game does not capture. When individuals face a coordination problem in a context where social status is salient, it seems natural to think that coordination can be achieved by deferring to the higher status player. Whoever holds the higher standing could direct behavior to reach a more desirable outcome.

Noah P. Mark relies on such a model of status-based coordination to illustrate how we may have evolved to exhibit status behaviors.[197] Mark shows that groups of players can resolve coordination problems when they use status to select one player who chooses some collective strategy to which all other players then defer. The way status resolves coordination problems is straightforward—we change a strategic game where individual preferences conflict into a parametric game where the highest status player makes the sole move, and all others fall in line.

Mark's model, however, excludes a detail that this is crucial in the present analysis. On his account, the social hierarchy that coordinates cooperation is determined endogenously and without cost.[198] But, as we have already seen, gains in status are a powerful motive. Even if hierarchy might resolve coordination problems by identifying one individual as a decision-maker that others will defer to, we might expect the motive for status to lead to conflict over who will be the leader.

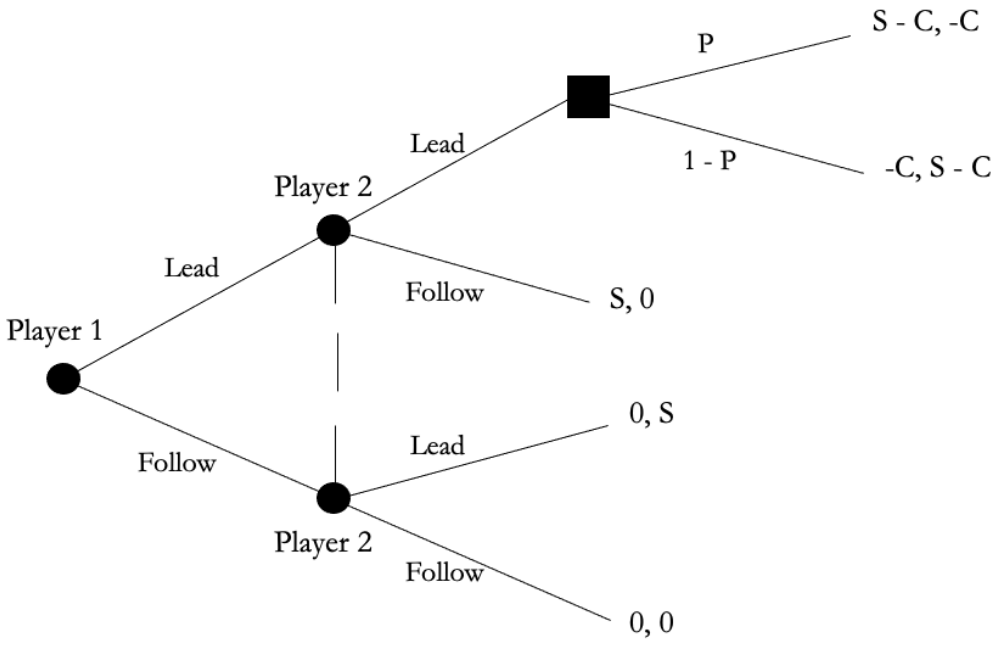
Let us consider then, a model of status-based coordination which internalizes costs from conflict over leadership. As with the preceding analysis, I shall suppose that the interaction involves only two players, who I will call Player 1 and Player 2. Each has the same two strategies available to them, they can either Lead, or they can Follow, and the players will choose simultaneously. If exactly one player leads, then there is a determinate leader who will coordinate cooperation, and that leader enjoys the benefit of greater status, represented by the benefit S. If neither lead, no party to this conflict will coordinate collective action. This need not mean that coordination will not be achieved. For the sake of simplicity, I will take for granted that some leader is always chosen, so that the benefits of coordination are always secured—the winner of a different leadership contest might take over, the contest might be repeated, or perhaps a member of the population is chosen at random to be the leader. Of greatest interest for us is the case where both

[197] In his "Status Organizes Cooperation."

[198] *Ibid.,* pp. 1612-3. This is not to suggest that Mark was wrong or misguided in excluding these complications. His model was, after all, designed to address a very different problem, namely the evolutionary stability of hierarchically organized cooperation, and to that end his model makes an illuminating contribution. Our present aims, however, are concerned with precisely the costs of organization, and so such simplification would exclude relevant information.

parties choose to lead. In this case the players enter into conflict, and winner of the conflict will be deemed the leader. Conflict in the model is meant to capture the familiar stuff of hierarchical politics, which involves costly activities like coalition building, cajoling, ingratiating, and the like which, I assume, detract from the cooperative endeavor at hand. Because such conflict is costly (time spent greasing the wheels of politics is time unspent on more productive tasks), both parties will take on some cost C (which, for simplicity, is assumed to be symmetrical), and since the outcome of such conflict is uncertain, the probability P (between 0 and 1) represents the likelihood that Player 1 wins out. The interaction just described is represented in extensive form by figure G:

Figure G. Leadership Game.



There are three Nash equilibria in the leadership game. The first two are pure equilibria, <Lead, Follow> and <Follow, Lead>. The third is the impure equilibrium where Player 1 plays Lead with the probability given by 1/(1 - P + C/S), and Player 2 plays lead with the probability given by 1/(P - C/S). Under the impure equilibrium, there is some probability, given by the conjunction of the two probabilities stated in the preceding sentence, that both players Lead, and so incur the cost of conflict.

Notice, however, that as the likelihood that some player will win out in the conflict increases (as P approaches either 1 or 0), the impure equilibrium will begin to approximate one of the pure equilibria. So even if conflict is possible, its likelihood is minimized when it is clear that in the case of conflict, one particular player is more likely

to win out.[199] For this reason, I believe we observe relatively little conflict in established hierarchies.

In established status hierarchies, it is effectively predetermined who will win out in a given case of conflict. Superiors normally trump inferiors when conflict arises, and this fact is known in advance by all parties. Conflict in cooperative settings is most commonly observed to occur in cases where status hierarchies are ill-defined.[200] I thus propose that well-defined status distinctions serve to determine in advance what individuals will win out in the case of conflict. Being high status can contribute to winning out in leadership conflicts for a number of reasons. The high status might control a greater share of resources, or individuals will be disposed to defer to higher status individuals, reducing the cost of building a winning coalition. The presence of well-defined status distinctions, then, can be understood as driving the value of P to either 0 or 1 in the leadership game.

Status hierarchies thus not only resolve coordination problems by identifying one individual that others will defer to, they also reduce the costs of coordination by identifying what individual will win out in the case of conflict over leadership. At the limit, where status relations define the relative position of each individual vis-à-vis each other, there might be no costs arising from conflict over leadership. We thus see how status relations can not only coordinate cooperation by identifying leaders, but how inequality of such relations can minimize the costs of conflict over leadership positions.

How, then, should we evaluate inequalities of public social status that are a consequence of status inequalities which serve to coordinate individual behavior in the way modeled by the leadership game? We have a clear reason that speaks in favor of justifying those inequalities of public social status. Successful coordination that leads to the provision of desirable goods while reducing cost from conflict over coordination is an appealing benefit. A conclusive assessment will naturally have to compare the use of status as a coordination mechanism against alternative coordination mechanisms. Perhaps some less efficient coordination mechanisms, which might give rise to conflict more often than well-defined status hierarchies, may still be all-things-considered more desirable on account of reducing the moral cost of inequalities of public social status.

There is one kind of consideration that will weigh in favor of tolerating status inequality that facilitates coordination. When a status hierarchy is relatively well-defined, the beliefs and attitudes that make the set of status distinctions that constitute the hierarchy will be relatively entrenched. That is, individuals will have a relatively high degree of credence in the beliefs making up their status relations, and the related attitudes will be reliable and persistent. If it should happen that a status hierarchy already exists

[199] Though I have assumed that the cost of conflict C is the same for both players, we can here observe that if players have asymmetric costs of conflict, then under the mixed equilibrium the player with the lower relative cost will play Lead more often.

[200] Loch et. al., "Status competition and performance in work groups."

and is relied on to organize cooperation in some setting, then displacing this hierarchy may be rather difficult and costly.

Suppose, for instance, that we were to pass some policy that required some firm to alter its organization from a hierarchical arrangement to some alternative. If the social hierarchy in that firm was well-defined, then I think it doubtful that the attitudes and beliefs that make the status relations comprising the hierarchy will shift immediately with the introduction of a single policy. But the new policy is also in effect, and it requires that some alternative means be used to attain coordination. What has happened, then, is that the introduction of the new policy has served only to make the existing status hierarchy less well defined, while not displacing it entirely. We are left with an instance of the leadership game, where the value of P has been moved away from either 0 or 1, meaning that wasteful conflict should occur more frequently. The idea, then, is that when stable coordinating status hierarchies are already in place, attempts to remove such hierarchies can serve only to make the status relations less well-defined. The result is that status inequality is not eliminated, while the cost of coordination is made greater. Such a result is, I think, strictly inferior to the case where there is a well-defined hierarchy, for we do not eliminate the hierarchy and only reduce some benefits that might have been gained from having such a hierarchy in place.

Because of such path-dependence we may often have reason to favor leaving in place well-defined status hierarchies that facilitate coordination. This does not mean that we should *always* leave such hierarchies in place. It might be possible to intervene in the hierarchy in ways that does not result in the strictly morally inferior outcomes. For instance, if we could find ways to alter the beliefs and attitudes of the individuals that make up the hierarchy, then the hierarchy might not remain in place after some intervention. Or, perhaps we could hope to convince individuals relatively high in the status hierarchy to defer to an alternative coordination mechanism. While this latter strategy might still result in some conflict, if those who are relatively high in the status hierarchy are also those who defer to some new kind of organization, then we should expect that they will win out in conflicts that arise from the presence of the residual status hierarchy (supposing, of course, that these individuals retain their greater relative place). It may thus be instrumental to successful reform that relatively high-status individuals buy-in to the reform.

In sum, it would seem that inequalities of social status can play a valuable role in coordinating cooperation. This serves as a reason in favor of justifying inequalities of public social status that are a consequence of such local status inequalities. Moreover, because of the path-dependence of reliance on status as a coordinating mechanism, we may often be a in position where maintaining existing local hierarchies is our best available means of achieving coordination.

In this chapter, I have hoped to make clear what the demands of the morality of social status imply in the context of distributive justice and social cooperation. Status relations pervade throughout most corners of our social lives and interact in complex ways with the other determinants of social order. This much is true about cooperation and social status. The status principle can weigh in favor of greater equality of resources on the one hand while providing us with reason to tolerate hierarchy in workplace on the other. What the specific content of the demands of the status principle ultimately amount too is thus clearly a matter that depends a great deal on the particulars of the social context that we are concerned with. This chapter, I hope, has sufficed to provide an outline of how to think through such particulars when reasoning about the morality of social status and its relationship to other constituents of social orders.

VII. Conclusion

This dissertation has offered a moral theory of social status. Relations of social status play a fundamental role in the organization of social life. They shape the access that individuals have to advantage, and more deeply, I think public social status relation influence our very ability to see others and ourselves as equal members of the moral community who are worthy of respect. I have argued that because of these features of public social status relations, the morality of social status is deeply egalitarian. The organizing principle on this view was the status principle, according to which we ought to reduce and illuminate inequalities of public social status.

I began by analyzing the concept of public social status. Status relations are ubiquitous among human social groups, and range over many different kinds of groups. While there are many different kinds of social status, all status relations have the same basic structure. Some person's status is ultimately based in how other members of the relevant group appraise her relative to other members of that group. Status is what others think of you in comparison to others; it tells us what rung you occupy on the social ladder. Public social status, however, has some distinctive properties compared to other kinds of status relations. The relevant group for public social status is the entire society over which the status relation ranges. Appraisals of public social status are appraisals of others qua public persons. Because they range over societies as a whole, relations of public social status are inescapable, and seep into and influence many of our interactions with fellow citizens.

It is this distinctive character of public social status that explains why the status principle is justified. Unlike other kinds of social status, public social status bears a special relationship to our equal fundamental moral standing. That relationship is mediated by a right grounded by our equal fundamental moral standing, namely, the right of all persons to freely develop their basic normative capacities. This right holds that all persons are subject to a duty not to undermine or threaten the development of others' basic normative capacities; we have a duty to fellow persons not to preempt the attainment of the rudimentary capacities needed to act as agents in our world.

Inequalities of public social status are of moral concern, then, because they threaten the adequate development of our basic normative capacities. In the first place, such inequalities threaten to leave the low status with an inadequate sense of self-esteem. When one is publicly regarded as an inferior, it can be difficult to set and maintain commitments to one's projects and aspirations, as it will be difficult to regard oneself as the kind of being that is worthy or capable of such pursuits. Absent an adequate sense of self-esteem, many persons are likely to find the development of their basic normative capacities stunted or frustrated. Secondly, inequalities of public social status often give rise to circumstances where the moral standing of the low status is unrecognized. Rather, they are seen as morally inferior beings, which is a state of affairs that is directly

incompatible with mutual recognition of our equal fundamental moral standing. Hence, in order to preserve the conditions for the adequate development of basic normative capacities and to preserve the conditions for mutual recognition of our equal fundamental moral standing, we ought to have equality of public social status.

Of course, as we have seen, the demands of the status principle must be qualified if the view is to be a plausible one. A justifiable status principle must have some principled ground for justifying some inequalities of public social status Without a clause for the justification of inequalities of public social status, the status principle would have us subordinate the pursuit of all other goods and values for the sake of equality of public social status, which amounts to a comprise of our agential integrity. I argued for two points in reply to the demandingness objection. First, I argued that there are some inequalities of public social status that can never be justified. Such inequalities are those based in what I called irrelevant characteristics of persons, and such inequalities are never justified because irrelevant characteristics are characteristics for which there is not even a *pro tanto* reason to treat as a ground for public social status. We cannot recognize other persons as our moral equals if we are prepared to treat them as social inferiors for no reason at all. Second, I argued that the right to the free development of basic moral capacities held by all persons also serves as a ground for the justification of public social status inequalities. More precisely, inequalities of public social status are justified when pursuing greater equality of public social status would come at an undue cost to other goods or values. In an important way, then, the basic conception of persons as equal members of the moral community both grounds the demands of the status but also sets natural limits on those demands. The idea is that there must not be so much inequality of public social status that some persons experience frustration and serious obstacles in the development of their basic normative capacities, but nor can the demands for public social status equality be so stringent that persons have no opportunity to exercise their basic normative capacities in pursuit of other goods and values that they deem worthy.

The latter condition introduced the challenge of explaining when exactly it would be the case that advancing some degree of public social status equality came at too great a cost to other goods and values. I called this the problem of disagreement. I argued that to answer the problem of disagreement, the status principle will need to be institutionalized. Deep evaluative disagreement creates a moral coordination problem, and institutions can be relied on to adjudicate conflict and resolve the coordination problem.

The kinds of institutions that we should rely on to resolve this moral coordination problem are democratic institutions. The status principle provides us with grounds for the justification of democratic institutions. Democratic institutions, on this view, are justified because they are instrumentally to advancing greater equality of public social status. Equality of public social status is advanced because democracies allocate power in a relatively egalitarian way, and power is likely to be an important source of public social

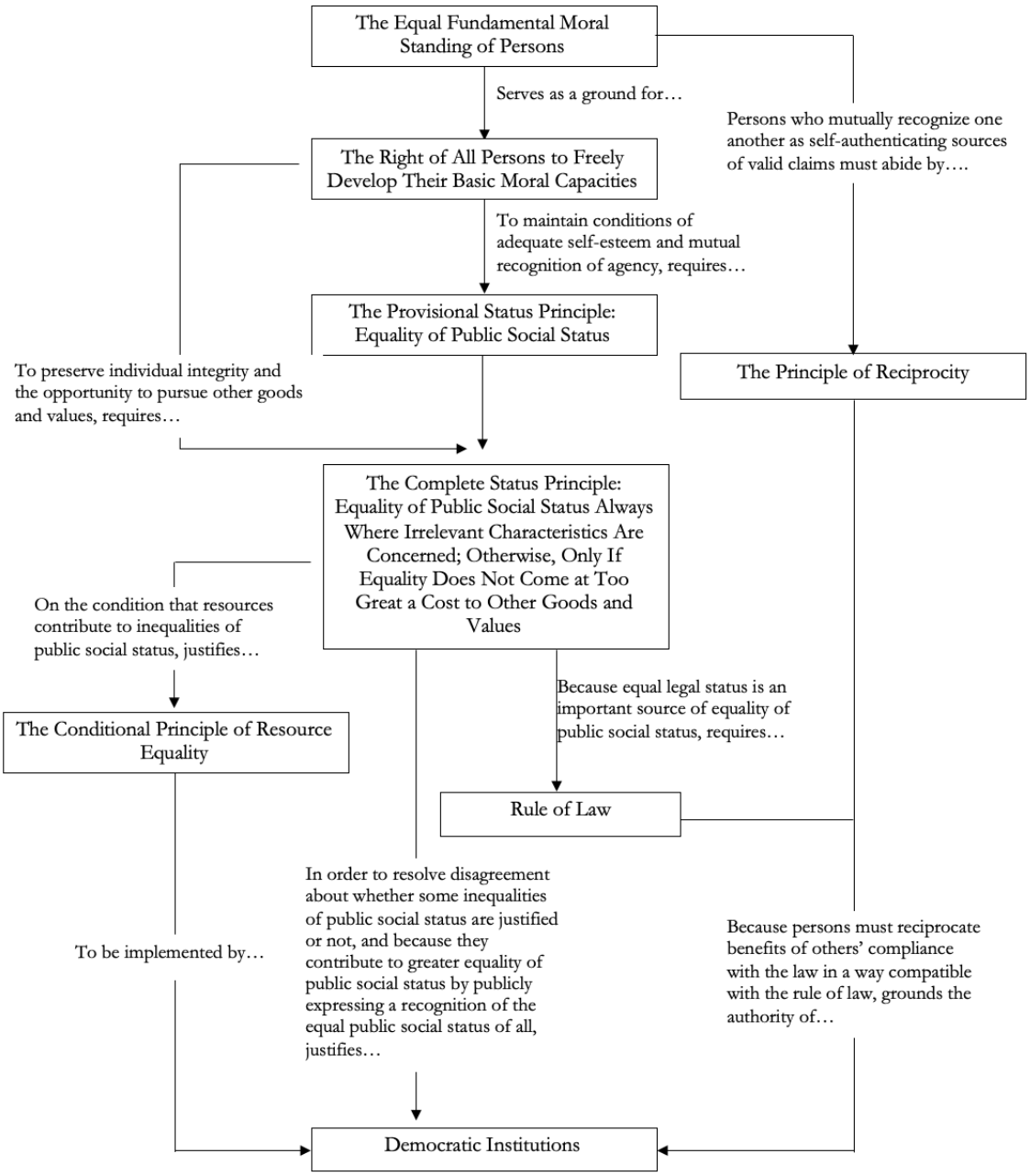
status. And, even when power must be allocated in an inegalitarian way, as when political officials must wield a greater amount than citizens, democratic institutions provide public assurance of all citizens' equal basic moral standing such that concerns about social inferiority based in remaining power inequalities can be answered.

Just showing that democratic institutions were justified was not sufficient to complete the reply to the problem of disagreement. We also need to show that persons should comply with the solution to the moral coordination problem that democratic institutions normally produce. To that end, we must show that democratic institutions are authoritative. I argued that the status principle alone cannot provide an account of democratic authority, and so some supplementary principle must be introduced. I argued in favor of the principle of reciprocity, which I argued shared the same fundamental ground as the status principle. From there, I established that democratic institutions will be authoritative in most cases, supposing that they operate within a sufficiently just society.

In the final substantive chapter, I developed the implications of the status principle with respect to distributive justice and social cooperaiton. An entailment of the status principle in this context is what I called the conditional principle of resource equality. Because resources will often contribute to inequality of public social status, when they do so there are reasons stemming from the status principle that weigh in favor of greater equality of resources. Of course, there may be other countervailing reasons that weigh in favor of justifying inequalities of resources, in which case a final reckoning is to be achieved by democratic means. Additionally, I explored how status organizes and motivates social cooperation, drawing attention to the various ways in which it may be desirable to constrain, or indeed even tolerate, inequalities of social status in cooperative contexts.

Figure A provides a summary of the core features of theory and their justificatory relations.

Figure A. Key Principles and Their Justificatory Relations.



To conclude the dissertation, I would like to make two kinds of remarks. The first has to do with how we can make our world morally better in terms of better fulfilling duties based in the status principle. The second has to do with the place of the moral theory of social status in moral theory broadly construed.

Starting with the first, given the indeterminacy of the demands of the status principle, prior to an institutional process of adjudication we can only make some general conjectures regarding what kinds of laws and policies should be introduced to better achieve equality of public social status. Among those laws, the greatest priority goes, I think, to those that would serve to undermine inequalities of public social status based in the irrelevant characteristics of persons. This adds to the moral urgency of addressing such problems as gender and racial inequalities. It is an empirical matter, of course, what policies will best address these problems. The framework here suffices to provide only a general kind of guidance which holds that we ought to pursue laws and policies which would provide a greater share of perceived public goods to the low status, or which would provide them with similar status conferring advantages that are possessed by the high status.

There is, however, one particular kind of reform that I think the present framework will help us appreciate the importance of. As they are presently arranged, democratic institutions do not appear to accurately represent the evaluative commitments and interests of all citizens that live under them. In many democratic societies, representatives are a relatively homogenous group that often answer to a select share of citizens. If democratic institutions are to appropriately weigh all relevant normative considerations and to adjudicate between them, they must be able to more accurately represent the normative commitments held by all citizens. Indeed, this is a prerequisite of relying on democratic institutions as an effective means of adjudicating conflicting judgments regarding whether some inequality of public social status is justified or not. Thus, on account of the need to institutionalize the status principle by relying on democratic processes, it is imperative that existing democratic institutions be reformed so as to more accurately take account of the interests and normative convictions of all citizens.

My second and final remarks have to do with the place of the status principle in morality more broadly construed.

We can understand the relationship between the status principle and morality more broadly construed, I think, by appreciating the fundamental role of the conception of persons as possessing equal fundamental moral standing in the moral theory of social status. The fundamental normative premises of the present work are, first, the claim that our equal fundamental moral standing is something that is owed recognition respect, and second, that recognition respect for persons grounds a right on the part of all persons to freely develop their basic normative capacities. Now, I think that these two premises are quite thin, so thin in fact, that I think most any moral theory is able, if not required, to accept them. These premises in effect assert that all persons are in a fundamental way moral equals, and that this requires allowing individuals to develop their agential capacities without interfering with or undermining that development. Any view that accepts the moral equality of persons should thus be committed to accepting the status principle. Consequently, I believe that the theory of relational equality developed here

can be understood as a sort of freestanding moral module which can be integrated into any comprehensive moral doctrine.

Thus, the status principle expresses a basic moral requirement grounded only in the recognition of persons as possessing equal fundamental moral standing. It is, we might say, a moral principle for moral equals who must inevitability stand within social relations with one another. It is simply inappropriate for persons sharing equally in a common fundamental moral nature to allow for any public distinctions of inferiority or superiority within their moral community.

APPENDIX: JUSTICE, ENVY, AND SOCIAL STATUS

Earlier discussion of the status principle in this dissertation has, I think, proven to have a significant flaw. I had failed to consider that there might be moral reasons that weigh in favor of structuring public social status relations in a particular way. Once such reasons are taken into consideration, the structure of the status principle must be complicated a good deal.

My aim in this appendix is to correct this flaw in my earlier discussion and to propose a revised conception of the complete status principle. In what follows, I distinguish between different kinds of public social status, taking care to recognize that there might be well-grounded relations of public social status. Such relations are made well-grounded by the fact that the shared relative appraisal that constitutes the status relation is based on a standard of excellence that is in turn grounded in considerations of justice. In contrast to well-grounded relations of public social status, we might instead have arbitrary relations of public social status. which Arbitrary public social status is based in standards of assessment that do not reflect a person's objective social worth, where objective social worth is based in the standards of excellence that constitute well-grounded public social status. In effect, the mistake I made in the earlier chapters was to simply take for granted that status relations will almost always be arbitrary. The discussion in this appendix rectifies this mistake and revises the complete status principle.

Ultimately, I do not think the inferential relations between the status principle and things such as the justification of democracy will change in light of these revisions. I do think that this discussion will better illuminate the relationship between the status principle and justice. The status principle should be understood as a companion moral principle that can ground demands for greater equality than even justice requires. Though, we should not mistake the relation between the status principle and justice as oppositional. In the final section, I argue that the status principle is better understood as representing a reconciliation between moral freedom and justice given the fact that under contingent social conditions the two can come into conflict.

I. Justice and Envy

Any conception of justice that allows for some inequalities of advantages[201] allows for the possibility that citizens in a just society will experience envy toward some of their fellows. Even relatively egalitarian theories of justice that are prominent in philosophical debates, such as luck egalitarianism or John Rawls's account of justice as fairness, allow for inequalities when they are the outcome of a deliberately made choice or to the greatest advantage to the least advantaged respectively. When such inequalities should obtain, even in a society that is

[201] Here and throughout I use the term "advantages" as a generic term to refer the material and social benefits that are the object of principles of justice.

just by egalitarian lights, some citizens may experience envy, which I will understand as "the propensity to view with hostility the greater good of others."[202]

Rawls famously argues that some of such experiences of envy in a just society may be *excusable*. Inexcusable envy is a kind of spite—a person experiencing inexcusable envy detests the greater advantage of another as such and there is no other reason that motivates her to remove the difference of advantage than that the emotional experience of envy. Inexcusable envy is strictly socially costly, as the satisfaction of such envy only makes some worse off without making condition of the envious any better. Excusable envy, on the other hand, is made so because of the deleterious effect that existing inequalities have one's sense of self-esteem. Writes Rawls:

> A person's lesser position as measured by the index of objective primary goods may be so great as to wound his self-respect...[a just] society may permit such large disparities in these goods that under existing social conditions these differences cannot help but cause a loss of self-esteem.[203]

When one's experience of envy is a reaction to inequalities that come at a cost to one's sense of self-esteem, then that experience of envy is excusable. Unlike inexcusable envy, the satisfaction of excusable envy would make the envious person genuinely better off by reducing the degree to which their self-esteem is setback.[204]

Though such envy may be excusable, the burden of envy will still be borne by the envious. Of course, Rawls argues that a society that realizes his own conception of justice is "not likely to arouse excusable general envy...to a troublesome extent."[205] The experience of excusable envy may not be so widespread as to jeopardize the stability of a just society, but it remains the case that there can be some persons who experience some degree of excusable envy. In such a case, it would seem that those who experience excusable envy must ultimately bear the costs of such envy. This means that not only must the envious put up with the ugly emotion, but they must also tolerate the setback to their sense of self-esteem that makes their experience of envy excusable.

Even if excusable envy is not so widespread as to pose a threat to the stability of a just society, we may still wonder whether those who experience excusable envy have any claim concerning the distribution of advantages based in the damage to their sense of self-esteem. Can there be inequalities in just societies that are so great as to bring about significant setbacks to the self-esteem of some persons such that those persons have a claim to some degree of satisfaction of their envy?

We can understand this question as asking whether there is yet a third kind of envy. There may be two different kinds of excusable envy: *merely* excusable envy and *reasonable* envy.

---

[202] TJ p. 466
[203] Ibid., p. 468
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid., p. 471

While both kinds of envy fall under the general category of excusable envy, reasonable envy is distinct from merely excusable envy in that it is provoked by inequalities which the envious have a claim to have reduced. Merely excusable envy and reasonable envy differ with respect to who bears the burden of envy—merely excusable envy assigns the entire burden to the envious, whereas reasonable envy assigns some of the burden to the envied.

It is natural to think that there is no such thing as reasonable envy, such that all excusable envy is only merely excusable. Envy, after all, is a brute expression of our contingent psychological propensities. Why should justice be held hostage by this unbecoming accident of our nature? Indeed, a canonical challenge to egalitarian theories of justice is that such theories amount to little more than expressions of envy. We can understand such an objection because we understand justice as something that does not, and should not, answer to envy.

I believe that these concerns about grounding claims of justice in envy are correct. But even granting that envy cannot ground claims of justice there might still be such a thing as reasonable envy. Reasonable envy is provoked by inequalities which the envious have a claim to have reduced, but this does not mean that the ground of this claim is the experience of reasonable envy itself. The ground might instead be some other moral principle. The crux of the matter, then, is whether there is indeed such a ground. If such a ground is to be found, then we will have the basis for moral claims to more egalitarian distributions of advantages—more egalitarian than even some egalitarian theories of justice require, supposing that such theories might allow inequalities that are great enough to be the objects of reasonable envy.

Rawls's remarks on the conditions of excusable envy and its relationship to self-esteem point to a promising ground for reasonable envy. If persons have a claim to some adequate degree of sense of self-esteem, and if inequalities can be great enough that they threaten to undermine the achievement of that degree of sense of self-esteem, then persons might experience reasonable envy in response to that threat to their self-esteem. The key claim in this schematic outline of an argument for reasonable envy is that inequalities of advantages can undermine individuals' achievement of an adequate degree of a sense of self-esteem. By virtue of what would such a relationship between inequalities of advantages and individuals' sense of self-esteem obtain?

I will argue that social status establishes the requisite relationship between inequalities of advantage and individuals' sense of self-esteem so as to provide a ground for reasonable envy. More precisely, I will argue that inequalities of public social status caused by inequalities of advantages can ground claims to reduce those inequalities of advantages. As discussed in chapter III, the basic thought here is that persons have a claim against others threatening their achievement of an adequately developed sense of self-esteem, and inequalities of public social status bring about such a threat.

II. Public Social Status

As much of this argument borrows from work done earlier in the dissertation, I will take some time to briefly restate key ideas, like that of social status and the provisional status principle. In chapter II, I proposed the following account of social status.

> *Social Status:* individual A's social status within some group G consists of the relative appraisals shared among other members of G which compare A to other members of G on the basis of some shared standards S that are believed to constitute excellence qua group member by members of G.

This statement differs only slightly from the statement in chapter II, where I did not make explicit that status relations must be tied to some group. Besides making this dependence on a group clearer, this statement of social status is no different from the statement given earlier, as social status is still understood in the same basic terms, i.e., as being the convergent relative appraisals that others make of you.

As noted at the outset of this appendix, the concept of public social stands in need of some revision. My earlier discussion of public social status drew greatly from sociological accounts of social status. In particular, I defined public social status as consisting of convergent relative appraisals the object of which are diffuse characteristics. Those characteristics, recall, are features of persons that all members of society are capable of making appraisals of. Here, I will speak of public social status in terms of one's excellence as a member of society or in terms of one's public social worth. Using this language of evaluation will make the relationship between public social status and justice clearer, and diffuse status characteristics are, in effect, features of persons that are treated as though they comprised such excellence or public social worth.

Put in general terms, then, one's public social status is comprised of relative evaluations of one's worth to society as a whole. Following the schema for social status stated above, we can say that the relevant group within which public social status relations obtain are one's society.

Crucially, in my earlier discussion of public social status I did not distinguish between one's objective social worth and one's perceived social worth. One's perceived social worth is based on standards that one's fellow members of society simply believe to constitute excellence as a member of society. Oftentimes, such standards track features of persons that are entirely arbitrary. Actual public social status relations in the United States, for instance, seem to be shaped by things like gender and race, with one's race or gender either improving or reducing one's public social status.[206] Whatever one holds to constitute objective excellence as a member of society, such brute features of persons simply are not fitting objects of appraisal.[207] For this reason, when relations of public social status are based on

[206] On gender see Ridgeway and Dikema, "Are Gender Differences Status Differences?" On race see Ridgeway, "Why Status Matters for Inequality," and the citations therein.
[207] Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," p. 42.

standards of assessment that are inappropriate grounds for objective social worth, I will call the public social status relations themselves and the standards that they are based on *arbitrary*.

In contrast to arbitrary public social status relations are assessments of public social status that are based on standards that in fact constitute excellence as a member of society. Clearly, much will turn on how exactly one understands objective excellence as a member of society. I will take for granted that one's conception of justice is the ultimate basis of such standards of excellence.[208] My hope here is to remain neutral between different conceptions of justice, as I believe that inequalities of public social status are a ground for reasonable envy on most any theory of justice. Accordingly, I will understand objective assessments of public social status as being based in justice, and the reader may fill in their preferred conception of justice to make the relevant standards determinate. Since principles of justice regulate the public social world, it seems appropriate that such standards form the basis of objective public social status relations. More precisely, I will take for granted that principles of justice are the ground for standards of assessment of objective social worth. Clearly, the standards of assessment of objective social worth cannot themselves be principles of distributive, as the latter apply to distributions of advantages rather than to the qualities of individual persons. My thinking is that given some principles of justice, we can rely on such principles as grounds for standards of objective social worth. Principles of justice may allow us to determine what characteristics or qualities of persons are conducive to advancing or maintaining justice, or what kinds of features of persons lead them to act in accordance with an ethos of justice. An example of how we can arrive at standards of public social worth from principles of justice will follow shortly. When some social status relation is based in standards of assessment that are grounded in principles of justice, I will refer to such a relation as *well-grounded*.

Though well-grounded public social status captures one's objective relative excellence as a member of society, actual public social status relations are hardly exclusively based on such standards. Rather, actual status relations seem to be mixed, with some standards of excellence being well-grounded and others being arbitrary. The problem with actual, arbitrary social status relations lies in the beliefs of the persons who stand in such relations. For actual social status relations to be changed from arbitrary to well-grounded,

---

[208] I wish to leave open here whether evaluative considerations that are not based in justice can come to shape relations of public social status. It is plausible to think that excellence along other kinds of evaluative dimensions may be an appropriate ground for greater public social worth. I set aside such non-justice grounds of public social status because they seem to me to be more complicated. Given the threat that inequality of public social status pose to moral freedom, it seems to me that some compelling reason must be given for treating some kind of evaluative consideration as a ground for public social status. Considerations of justice readily offer such reasons because justice concerns the organization of our public social world. By contrast, it is not as obvious that excellence along aesthetic dimensions should be the ground for public social worth, as opposed to a ground for social worth within groups whose common aim is the pursuit of aesthetic excellence. This is not to say that evaluative standards other than justice cannot serve as a suitable ground for objective public social worth, rather my point is only that considerations of justice most readily establish such a ground and in the case of other kinds of evaluative standards the situation appears sufficiently more complex that given our present focus we can set them aside.

the beliefs of persons standing in such relations must be changed such that they converge on standards of relative appraisal which are in fact standards of objective social worth. When public social status are exclusively well-grounded, meaning that members of a given society converge on standards of assessment of excellence qua member of society that are in fact standards of objective social worth, then I will refer to such social status relations as *well-ordered*. Well-ordered public social status relations, then, obtain when there is a convergence between perceived public social worth and objective public social worth. For well-ordered public social status relations to obtain, a sufficiently large portion of society must i) hold a shared conception of justice, and ii) must treat the shared standards of justice as providing the grounds for excellence as a member of society.[209] Under such conditions, it can be said that a common conception of justice regulates public assessments of the social worth of persons because the conception of justice serves as the ultimate ground for the standards of assessment of individuals' relative excellence as members of society.

Foundational to well-grounded, and therefore well-ordered, public social status is the idea that the standards of assessment that in part comprise these relations are based in principles of justice. As I noted two paragraphs above, principles of justice can only serve as the ground for such standards of assessment and so cannot themselves be the standards of excellence qua member of society. This must be so because principles of justice apply to distributions of advantages whereas standards of assessment for the excellence of members of society must apply to features or characteristics of persons. The question remains, then, how it is that principles of justice can serve as the ground of standards of assessment that constitute public social worth. My thinking is that justice can inform standards of public social worth by serving as a criterion for identifying features of persons that are indicative of their advancing the cause of justice. The thought here is that persons who possess features that are conducive to the advancement of justice are appropriately thought of as having superior public social worth than persons who lack such features.

To make this point more concrete, let us consider an example with a specific conception of justice. For sake of example, let us take for granted the conception of justice that Rawls defends in *A Theory of Justice,* which, as I am sure the reader knows, consists of the following two principles:

> First Principle: Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.
>
> Second Principle: Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:
>
> (a) To the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and

[209] As the name suggests, well-ordered public social status is the informal social counterpart of Rawls' conception of well-ordered society. See *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 397-405.

(b) Attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.[210]

We can rely on Rawls's conception of justice as fairness to develop standards of assessment of public social worth in the following way. Broadly put, the two principles of justice identify two features of our social world that we should promote as a matter of justice: an extensive package of equal liberty for all and the greatest advantage of the least advantaged. Justice gives us reason to promote and maintain conditions of equal liberty and maximal advantage for the least advantage. These reasons of justice in turn ground standards of the public social worth of persons. The reasons of justice by virtue of which we ought to bring about equal liberty and the greatest advantage of the least advantage also make it the case that features of persons that are conducive to bringing about such conditions are valuable. And by virtue of being valuable for the sake of promoting collective aim of justice, such features are fittingly treated as conferring greater public social worth on persons who possess them.

More concretely, let us consider what kinds of features of persons would be the source of well-ordered public social status having taken for granted Rawls's conception of justice. The features of persons that will be conducive to advancing justice are which contribute to advancing and maintain the equal liberty of all and which contribute to securing the greatest possible advantage for the least advantaged. There seem to me to be at least two features that will be appropriately treated as sources of public social worth in a society regulated by Rawls's conception of justice. First, persons who play an important role in maintaining the equal basic liberties of all should be appraised as having greater social worth. This will include persons who play crucial roles in political institutions that serve to maintain and protect the basic liberties of all. This will include, I think, political officials who hold prominent executive, legislative, or judicial roles.

Second, persons who contribute to securing greater advantages for the least advantaged are to be correctly conceived as having greater public social worth. In a society regulated by Rawls's two principles of justice all inequalities are to the service of the least advantaged. This means persons who earn relatively greater shares of public goods, such as wealth and income, should be thought of as having greater public social worth. I should be clear to distinguish this way of conferring greater public social worth on the well-off from how it is often done in actual human societies. In real societies, I think that for the most part the wealthy are treated as having greater public social status simply because they are wealth—wealth as such is the ground for greater (perceived) social worth. By contrast, in the Rawlsian society it is not wealth as such that is the ground of public social worth but rather the fact that the wealthy enjoy their advantages only because doing serves to secure greater advantages of the least advantaged. It is the advancement of the difference principle that grounds the public social worth of the relatively wealthy in a Rawlsian society.

[210] *Ibid.*, p. 266

Hence, we can see how in a Rawlsian society persons who possess features that contribute to advancing justice can be appraised as having relatively greater public social worth. To summarize the more general thought, principles of justice identify distributions that we ought to bring about. The reasons of justice that make such distributions required also ground the value of features of persons that are conducive to advancing justice. Those features of persons are thus made into fitting sources of public social worth because they are in fact valuable by virtue of their relationship to justice.

On some theories of justice, we may be led to hold that public social status relations ought not to exist at all. Robert Nozick, in a characteristically careful analysis of envy, argues that on his libertarian conception of justice there ought not to be rankings of persons in terms of their public social worth.

Nozick's analysis of envy shares many of the worries that lead us to the public social status principle in earlier chapters. Writes Nozick:

> In a society where people generally agree that some dimensions are very important, and there are differences in how people fall along these dimensions, and some institutions publicly group people in accordance with their place along these dimensions, then those who score low may feel inferior to those with higher scores; they may feel inferior as persons. (Thus, *poor* people might come to think they are poor *people*).[211]

This worry articulates the familiar thought that making people have an inferior sense of self-worth is in some way objectionable.[212] I take it that Nozick is indeed concerned with people having an inferior sense of self-worth, as opposed to merely describing this kind of psychological process, because he goes on to examine what kinds of arrangements will be conducive to avoiding a state of affairs where persons have an inferior sense of self-worth. Two features of Nozick's discussion are important here. First, he rejects a centralized approach that aims to bring about equality along those dimensions that ground inequalities of social status. The reason why Nozick rejects the mechanisms of central reform is that he thinks that new dimensions will simply come along to distinguish the relative worth of persons, repeating the same phenomenon.[213] Second, Nozick's positive proposal is to suggest that in a free society people will choose to organize into groups that value those dimensions that persons do perform well on. According to Nozick,

> The most promising way for a society to avoid widespread differences in self-esteem would be to have no common weighting of dimensions; instead it would have a diversity of different lists of dimensions and weightings. This would enhance each

[211] *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, p. 242
[212] C.f. Scanlon, "The diversity of objections to inequality," pp. 204 and 212-8.
[213] *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, p. 243

> person's chance of finding dimensions that *some* others also think important, along which he does reasonably well, and so to make a nonidiosyncratic estimate of himself. Such a fragmentation of a common social weighting is not to be achieved by some centralized effort to remove certain dimensions as important.[214]

I take Nozick to be saying that i) it is of moral concern that some persons will have an inferior sense of self-worth by virtue of scoring poorly along socially relevant dimensions, and ii) the most effective remedy for this concern is great degree of pluralism with respect to those dimensions of persons that are source of one's sense of worth. What claim (ii) amounts to is a rejection of public social status relations in a well-ordered (by libertarian lights) society. The thought is that rather than one kind of public social status, we ought instead to have many different kinds of non-public status relations for individuals to choose from because the latter maximizes the prospect of persons finding some kind of relation within which they will have an adequate sense of self-worth.

So, it is conceivable that one's conception of justice does not provide a ground for standards of assessment of individual public social worth because on one's conception of justice there ought not to be any public comparative evaluations of individuals' public social worth. Well-ordered public social status on Nozick's libertarian theory of justice, then, is no public social status relation at all. This is of some significance since, as we shall see below, the first claim of the complete status principle directs us to bring about well-ordered public social status relations. In the case of a libertarian theory of justice like Nozick's, that would seem to imply that we ought to bring it about that there are no relations of public social status. Though, I will mention that this matter of transitioning to morally required arrangements of public social status would seem to spell trouble for Nozick's view. He adds that a centralized effort to remove certain dimensions as important will simply introduce a new ground for public social status. "The more central and widely supported the effort, the more contributions to *it* will come to the fore as the commonly agreed upon dimension on which will be based people's self-esteem."[215] If this is right, it is unclear how on a libertarian conception we would transition to well-ordered public social status, which is to say a social arrangement where there are no relations of public social status. Such a transition would require precisely the kind of centralized effort contributions to which would form the grounds of a new public social status relation. This may be of some interest for, as we will see, the secondary and tertiary claims of the status principle carry quite egalitarian implications.

The preceding examples, I hope, illustrate the way in which theories of justice can be relied on to arrive at standards of public social worth. Indeed, one's theory of justice may carry the implication that there are no standards of public social worth, as with Nozick's libertarianism.

---

[214] *Ibid.,* pp. 245-6.
[215] *Ibid.*

In sum, we have an account of public social status and the different ways in which one's excellence as a member of society can be understood. Public social status relations based on standards of assessment that are not fitting standards for excellence as a member of society are arbitrary public social status relations. Fitting standards for assessment of one's excellence as a member of society are standards based in justice, on which well-grounded public social status relations are in turn based. We arrive at fitting standards of excellence by identifying those features of persons that are valuable by virtue of being conducive to advancement and maintenance of justice. The standards are genuine standards of excellence because they pick out features of persons that are in fact valuable, and those features of persons are valuable on grounds of justice. Actual public social status relations, in contrast, are based on standards that members of society believe to constitute social excellence, some of which may be arbitrary and others may be well-grounded. When actual public social status relations fully instantiate well-grounded relations, then such relations are well-ordered. It is important to distinguish between these different ways of understanding public social status because, as I will shortly argue, the kinds of claims that persons may have concerning public social status relations will depend on what kinds of public social status relations they are.

III. The Complete Status Principle

With a revised account of public social status that takes into consideration the different kinds of public social status, we will need to in turn revise the principle of equal public social status. The revised, complete status principle will be the ground for reasonable envy. In order to develop a revised account of the complete status principle, I will begin again with the provisional status principle that was defended in chapter III. According to

> *The Provisional Principle of Equal Public Social Status:* inequalities of actual public social status relations are to be reduced and eliminated.

To summarize briefly, there were two basic grounds offered for the provisional status principle in chapter III. First, inequalities of public social status can lead to neglect of the moral standing of the low status. When persons are too low status, there is a tendency for persons to fail to recognize them as being equal members of the moral community. Second, inequalities of public social status pose a threat to the development of basic normative capacities. Public social status inequalities do so by virtue of creating conditions wherein the low status may not have an adequate sense of self-esteem, and such a sense of self-esteem is necessary condition for the adequate development of person's basic normative capacities. Public social status inequalities thus pose a threat to the moral freedom of the low status by virtue of being social conditions within which the basic capacities constitutive of moral freedom cannot develop.

In the context of this appendix, we can straightforwardly see why the provisional principle is incomplete. The principle is only provisional because it fails to take into

consideration the fact that persons' claims concerning public social status will depend on the kinds of public social status relations that are in place. Recall Martin Luther King Jr.'s summary of the debilitating psychological effects of public social inferiority which is quoted in section 4 of chapter III. We might understand King's complaint as being properly directed not at the social inferiority of Black persons in the United States as such, but rather at the *injustice* of the social conditions that create such inferiority. If the appropriate target of such complaints is the injustice of background conditions, then persons will not have claims to reduce inequalities of public social status per se, but rather they will have claims to change public social status relations such that they are not made public social inferiors by virtue of background injustice. The idea, then, is that we might understand King's complaint as holding not against inequalities of public social status as such, but rather against inequalities of *arbitrary* relations of public social status.

We can determine the appropriate object of claims based in the status principle by examining whether there will be grounds for complaints about inequalities of public social status in a society with well-ordered public social status relations. Recall that for public social status relations to be well-ordered, public social status must be fully well-grounded, meaning that all evaluations of one another's excellence as a member of society is based on standards that in fact constitute such excellence. In order for that to be the case, all members of society must converge on common standards of excellence qua member of society, which I have taken to require agreement on a conception of justice, and all citizens must make their relative appraisals of one another's excellence as members of society on the basis of those common standards grounded in a shared public conception of justice. Will persons who have low status within well-ordered relations of public social status ever have a legitimate claim that public social status inequality be reduced? If persons do have such a legitimate claim, then claims advanced by the status principle are not *only* responsive to inequalities of public social status based in background injustice, but rather responsive to inequalities of public social status as such.

If the low status are to have a complaint about inequalities of public social status under well-ordered conditions, it would be because the status inequality is great enough to pose a threat to the moral freedom of the low status. There are two ways in which inequalities of public social status could threaten one's moral freedom. First, such inequalities can create social conditions where individuals cannot develop an adequate sense of self-esteem. Second, such inequalities can cause citizens to neglect the equal moral status of those who have low public social status. The second kind of threat cannot obtain when public social status relations are well-ordered, so at the very least claims for greater equality of public social status will be weaker when those relations are well-ordered. Whether the first kind of threat obtains, however, is indeterminate because that claim will depend on what the psychology of persons standing in well-ordered relations of public social status is like.

Let us start with the second kind of threat, which obtains when members of society fail to recognize the equal moral status of those with low public social status. Under well-

ordered public social status relations, there will not be such a threat because well-ordered status relations depend on convergent assessments based on shared standards of excellence which are in turn based in justice. If individuals are to sensibly apply standards grounded by principles of justice to assess the excellence of other members of society, they must think that those other fellow citizens are suitable objects for evaluation on the basis of such moral standards. And to think *that* individuals must think that fellow members of society are also fellow members of the moral community of persons. The thought, then, is that since well-ordered relations of public social status depend on convergent assessment of fellow citizens on the basis of standards grounded by principles of justice and since the application of such standards requires recognizing that one's fellow citizens are also fellow members of the moral community of persons to whom moral considerations derived from justice apply, there can be no risk that the moral status of those with low public social status is neglected. Recognition of the moral status of those with low public social status is a necessary condition for public social status relations to be well-ordered in the first place. Hence, there is no risk that the moral status of those with low public social status will be unrecognized when public social status relations are well-ordered.

Consider now the second kind of threat that inequalities of public social status pose to the low status, namely, that such inequalities will undercut the adequate development of a sense of self-esteem on the part of the low status. Whether such a threat will obtain when public social status is well-ordered will depend on what the psychology of persons standing in well-ordered public social status relations will be like. The reason why inequalities of public social status threaten the self-esteem of the low status, recall, is because persons who are publicly thought of and treated as social inferiors might internalize such a sense of inferiority and come to think of themselves as inherently unworthy of esteem. Regular public expressions that one is worthless may lead one to think of oneself as being unworthy of esteem as well. As King put the point, the worry is that being publicly treated as lacking any social worth disposes one to internalize a debilitating sense of "nobodyness."

The present question, then, is whether the psychology of persons who stand in well-ordered relations of public social status is such that those with low status will suffer some debilitating setback to their sense of self-esteem. At the level of philosophical inquiry, I think that this question is indeterminate. On the one hand, it seems plausible to think that being low status within well-ordered relations of public social status can be quite debilitating for one's sense of self-esteem. In such a society, all members must be sincerely committed to a common conception of justice that serves as the ground for standards of social excellence. It's plausible to think that when persons sincerely hold a conception of justice that regulates their evaluations of their own and others' social worth, they will desire to perform relatively well according to those standards. But to have low public social status in well-ordered conditions is to be publicly recognized as being among those who are relatively less excellent on the basis of standards of assessment that are grounded in principles of justice. Persons who derive their sense of worth from their worth in terms of those standards may then suffer

serious setbacks to their sense of self-esteem. On the other hand, it seems just as plausible to think that persons with a common and deeply held commitment to justice will not derive their sense of self-worth from their relative social worth based on standards of assessment that are grounded in justice. They might instead view the order of social status as an instrument for achieving a cherished end, celebrating greater contributions to the cause of justice made by others as simply a case of collective good fortune. The difficulty here is that the social conditions under which well-ordered relations of public social status obtain are so different from our own that we cannot accurately assess what the social psychology of persons standing in such social relations will be like.

Hence, the most that I believe we can conclude at this point is only that under well-ordered public social status relations claims to greater equality of public social status will be weaker than in non-well-ordered status relations. Because of this, complaints holding that the low status are at risk of having their moral status unrecognized are to be understood as complaints directed at arbitrary public social status. It is also possible that there are no claims to greater equality of public social status under well-ordered conditions, if it happens that our social psychology is so plastic that having low status within well-ordered relations has no effect on our sense of self-worth. But it is also possible that our social psychology is not so plastic, such that even within well-ordered public social status relations the low status will suffer a significant setback to their sense of self-esteem. If the latter case is true and the setback to self-esteem is great enough so as to pose a threat to the development of the basic moral capacities of the low status, then even in well-ordered public social status relations the low status will have claims to greater equality of public social status. So, at this point it is indeterminate whether complaints about setbacks to one's sense of self-esteem are directed at inequalities of public social status as such or are directed only at arbitrary relations of public social status.

The assumption that relations of public social status are well-ordered is, of course, a rather significant idealizing assumption. If we are to examine the implications of the status principle in more realistic social contexts, we will need to relax that assumption. In real social conditions, there will likely be deep disagreement about justice such that there will be no commonly held public conception of justice. More importantly, the psychology of real persons will hardly be so thoroughly regulated by a conception of justice, which means that their relative appraisals of others' excellence as members of society will be made on the basis of at least some arbitrary standards. Both these features of real social contexts will cause public social status relations to not be well-ordered.

So, when relations of public social status are not well-ordered, members of society will converge on some standards of assessment for excellence qua group which are not genuine standards of such excellence. Some inequalities of public social status will thus be arbitrary. This does not imply that all inequalities of non-well-ordered public social status are arbitrary. Some inequalities may still be based in fitting objective standards, which makes such inequalities well-grounded. When assessing the claims of the low status in non-well-

ordered condition, we must be careful to take into consideration whether inequalities of public social status are arbitrary or well-grounded.

Consider first inequalities of public social status based on arbitrary grounds. By definition there is already a defect in such public social status relations, as they are based in standards of assessment that are not appropriate standards of social excellence. So, there are grounds for at least a claim that public social status relations be reformed such that they are no longer arbitrary, and so well-grounded. Here, the low status have a ready complaint that their condition of social inferiority is based to some extent on standards that are not a fitting ground for assessment of their social worth; their social inferiority is unreasonable.

So, the first claim against arbitrary inequalities of public social status is that public social status relations be reformed so as to be well-ordered. This will require changing the social conditions that lead persons to form the beliefs and attitudes constitutive of using an arbitrary standard as a measure of social excellence. Suppose, as is likely to be true, that we will be unable to fully satisfy the claim to make public social status relations well-ordered in concrete social contexts, such that there is bound to be some degree of residual inequalities of public social status based in arbitrary standards. Insofar as such inequalities persist, the grounds of the status principle provides the low status with undefeated claims to reduce and eliminate such inequalities. Inequalities of public social status pose a threat to the moral freedom of the low status, and when such inequalities are based in arbitrary standards there is no countervailing reason that weighs in favor of allowing such inequalities. The low status are exposed to the risk of having the development of their basic moral capacities stunted and of having their equal moral status go unrecognized. These are serious dangers, and if there is no reason at all that weighs in favor of maintaining the social conditions that create such dangers, then we have conclusive reason to remove the threats faced by the low status by reducing or eliminating inequalities of public social status based in arbitrary standards.

So, when it comes to inequalities of public social status based in arbitrary standards, we ought to: first, reform public social status relations so as to make them as well-grounded as possible; and second, reduce and eliminate inequalities of public social status based in arbitrary standards that could not be reformed.

We are left with inequalities of public social status based in well-grounded standards of social excellence. Trivially, there is no reason to reform the socially converged upon standards that constitute such relations, as they are already fitting standards of objective social worth. Moreover, in the case of well-grounded inequalities of public social status, there are reasons that weigh in favor of maintaining the social conditions that bring about such relations, namely, the reasons of justice which serve as the ground for standards of objective social excellence. So, while the low status may have some claim against being low status based in the threat posed to their basic moral freedom, those claims must be balanced against the considerations of justice that serve as the basis of well-grounded relations of public social status.

Given the countervailing considerations of justice that obtain in the case of well-grounded inequalities of public social status, the low status will not have a claim that *all* such inequalities be reduced and eliminated, as in the case of arbitrary inequalities of public social status. However, the low status may have a claim that well-grounded inequalities of public social status be reduced to some tolerable degree when those inequalities pose too great a threat to their moral freedom. Such a claim may hold if we grant that there is a special urgency attached to achieving an adequate degree of security with respect to the development of one's basic moral capacities.

Following T. M. Scanlon, I will understand the urgency of some benefit as being based in two considerations: first, the reasons by virtue of which the benefit is in fact desirable; second, the availability of alternatives and the sacrifices that would come with forgoing the benefit in question.[216] Some benefit A can be more urgent than some other benefit B, then, when the reasons that makes A desirable are weightier than the reasons that makes B desirable, when the available alternatives for A all bring about a significantly lesser degree of well-being than possession of A brings about, or some combination of both these grounds.

I believe that there is a special urgency attached to achieving an adequate degree of security with respect to the development of one's basic normative capacities. Such urgency obtains because the reason by virtue of which moral freedom is desirable is an especially weighty reason and because there are no alternatives that can offset the cost to one's well-being that a lack of moral freedom comes with.

Consider first the reasons by virtue of which adequately developed basic normative capacities are desirable. Two such reasons were mentioned in the argument for the provisional status principle. First, we might think that our basic moral capacities are simply constitutive of the kinds of beings that we are, such that a good human life depends on those capacities being adequately developed. A distinctly human life is one that comes with many moral ties that make such a life worth living—ties of friendship, trust, comradery, and the like. We enter into many such relationships because of the choices we make and the ends that we pursue. The exercise of our moral capacity to formulate and pursue a conception of the good plays a profound role in shaping the ends that we set for ourselves, which in turn shape the kinds of associations and relationships that we enter into. Absent adequately developed normative capacities, then, we lose out on being able to direct our most basic evaluative commitments and their resulting influence over our lives. When this happens, I believe that an important and distinctive good is lost.

Second, there is the instrumental reason that adequately developed normative capacities are important for making sure that your interests are adequately taken into consideration and promoted. With respect to their own interests, persons are generally in the best position to ascertain what exactly their interests are, to interpret their interests when they are complex or open-ended, and to make choices about complex tradeoffs when they

[216] "Preference and Urgency," p. 661

should arise. Without adequately developed moral capacities, persons will be unable to effectively examine and reflect on their interests, and so an important source of knowledge about a person's interests is lost. If we add to this the assumption that persons generally favor and focus on promoting their own interests, then we should also expect that those with inadequately developed normative capacities will also suffer a systematic setback to their interests relative to those with adequate capacities.

There are substantial and weighty reasons, then, for holding an adequate degree of development for our basic normative capacities to be desirable. The second, instrumental, reason for finding adequately developed normative capacities desirable also makes it the case that the alternative to having such adequately developed capacities would leave one much worse off. Absent the ability to critically reflect on and examine one's interests, one will be in a severely disadvantaged position when it comes to advancing one's interests. Having adequate normative capacities is simply a precondition of being able to effectively advance one's well-being, and so without these capacities the well-being of persons will suffer dramatically.

The benefit of adequately developed basic normative capacities is thus an urgent matter indeed. While considerations of justice weigh in favor of maintaining well-grounded relations of public social status, the urgency of realizing an adequate degree of development with respect to one's basic normative capacities outweighs those considerations of justice. Hence, under non-well-ordered public social status relations, the low status may have claims that even well-grounded inequalities of public social status be reduced, though only up such a point that the development of their basic normative capacities is no longer threatened.

The provisional status principle, then, must be refined in order to appropriately take into consideration the way that different kinds of public social status shape the kinds of claims that those who are low status may have. The conclusions arrived at in the examination of different kinds of public social status relations culminate in the

> *Complete Principle of Equal Public Social Status:* (a) public social status relations are to be reformed so that they are well-grounded, (b) insofar as inequalities of arbitrary public social status persist, those inequalities are to be reduced and eliminated, and (c) insofar as there are inequalities of well-grounded public social status, if those inequalities pose a threat to the adequate development of the basic normative capacities of the low status, then those inequalities are to be reduced up to such a point that such a threat no longer obtains.

The three clauses of the complete status principle are stated in order of priority. We start with (a), which directs us to make public social status relations well-ordered, or if that is impossible, to make them as well-grounded as possible. We then turn to arbitrary public

social status relations first, which (b) directs us to reduce and eliminate.[217] Only after arbitrary public social status relations have been dealt with do we turn to well-grounded public social status. The urgency of having adequately developed basic normative capacities grounds a claim to reduce inequalities of well-grounded public social status up to such a point that the development of those capacities is no longer threatened. It is possible that satisfaction of the prior clauses brings about the satisfaction of (c), in which case there is no reason to reduce inequalities of well-grounded public social status at all. And, as we have seen, whether (c) applies to well-ordered public social status will depend on what the psychology of persons standing in such relations is like. If inequalities of even well-ordered relations pose a threat to the sense of self-esteem of the low status, then even in well-ordered social conditions persons may have claims to reduce inequalities of public of social status, though, as with clause (c), the claim is only to reduce inequalities up to that point that the development of the basic normative capacities of the low status is no longer threatened. Lastly, notice that the structure of the status principle is sensitive to the fact that claims based in the risk that the moral status of the low status will be unrecognized are, properly speaking, claims that hold only against arbitrary public social status relations. This is why claim (c) only makes reference to the development of basic normative capacities, as concerns about the moral status of the low status being unrecognized are adequately addressed by both (a) and (b).

---

[217] To return to a point made above in section II of the appendix, it is clause (b) of the status principle which would make a libertarian theory like Nozick's carry substantial egalitarian implications. Recall that Nozick is skeptical that centralized efforts to eliminate differences in self-esteem are bound to be unsuccessful because he thinks that participation in such an effort will simply become a new source of public social status. Nozick thus accepts what we may call the *replacement thesis,* according to which any attempt to undo inequalities of public social status is bound to simply replace the social inequality. The replacement thesis is a challenge to Nozick's own libertarian ideal of public social status relations. For, as we have seen, on a libertarian view, to make relations of public social status well-ordered we must simply remove them outright. Given, however, that just about every human society already has will for the foreseeable future will have relations of public social status, libertarians must confront the replacement thesis themselves. For, undoing of public social status relations that already exist will invariably require some kind of centralized coordination, but in that case by Nozick's own lights we will simply replace the existing public social status inequality with a new one. If that is right, being unable to satisfy claim (a) of the status principle is a foregone conclusion—the truth of the replacement thesis makes it such that given that public social status relations exist, they cannot be made eliminated and so cannot be made well-ordered by libertarian lights. This means that *all* inequalities of public social status are arbitrary by libertarian lights, and so having arrived at clause (b) of the status principle, we have it that all inequalities of public social status should be reduced and eliminated and so far as possible. We might think this is of little significance for libertarians, as the truth of the replacement thesis makes the demands of (b) moot—efforts to try and undo public social status inequality will simply reinstate those inequalities in new form. The truth of the replacement thesis, however, only implies that relations and inequalities of public social status cannot be completely eliminated, but this does not mean that inequalities of public social status cannot be reduced. Consider: we enact public policy P in order to reduce public social status inequality. P is successful in reducing one dimension of public social status inequality, but support for P becomes a source of status. It does not follow that support for P need to create exactly as much status inequality as was removed in the first place. Hence, the truth of the replacement thesis does not undercut demands to advance equality of public social status. If libertarians are committed to both the replacement thesis and to the view that in well-ordered social conditions there are no public social status relations at all, then libertarians must accept that in realistic social conditions they are committed to reducing inequalities of public social status so far as possible, and thus entails rather egalitarian policies.

IV. Reasonable Envy

Recall that the analysis of social status and the status principle was meant to fill an important gap in the argument for the possibility of reasonable envy. As Rawls identified, envy can be excusable when it is responding to inequalities of advantages make it the case that those with relatively fewer advantages experience a setback to their self-esteem. Envy becomes reasonable when the setback to one's self-esteem is so great that it grounds a claim to reduce the inequalities of advantages that provoke envy. In either case, there is a gap between inequalities of advantages on the one hand and setbacks to self-esteem on the other. Why should inequalities of advantages, especially inequalities sanctioned by justice, make it that some persons suffer a setback to their sense of self-esteem? The analysis of public social status provides an answer to this question—inequalities of advantages will bring about a setback to one's sense of self-esteem when the possession of greater advantages is a source of greater public social status, and differences of public social status, when great enough, will setback the sense of self-esteem of those with low public social status. The status principle, then, will allow us to identify when exactly envy is inexcusable, merely excusable, or reasonable.

Before elaborating on the relationship between the status principle and envy, I would like to first set aside the special case of well-ordered relations of public social status. As we have seen, it is indeterminate whether the low status in such relations have a claim for bringing about greater equality of public social status. The source of indeterminacy is the fact that, at the level of philosophical inquiry, we cannot settle whether the self-esteem of the low status will be setback within well-ordered public social status relations. Given such indeterminacy, we cannot settle what kinds of claims concerning public social status the low status would have when public social status is well-ordered.

I will further assume that under such realistic social conditions, among the arbitrary standards that constitute public social status relations will be the standard according to which possession of a greater amount of wealth and resources is a source of greater social worth. That greater wealth and resources is often a source of status in actual social contexts is, I think, a fact familiar enough from ordinary social experience. Moreover, wealth and resources have been a source of greater public social status throughout human history and in a variety of cultural contexts.[218] For these reasons, I think it is safe to assume that within realistic social contexts the possession of greater relative wealth and resources will be a source of greater public social status.

Taking for granted, then, that our focus is more realistic relations of public social status which are in part based on a standard that treats wealth and resources as sources of public social status, we may apply the status principle to determine whether envy experienced by persons standing in those relations is inexcusable, merely excusable, or reasonable.

---

[218] Harkness, "The Consequences of Interpersonal Rewards."

For most persons in these conditions, the experience of envy will generally be inexcusable. A necessary condition for envy to be excusable is that it is responding to a difference between persons that brings about some setback to the self-esteem of persons. Differences of public social status can setback one's sense of self-esteem when one is publicly appraised as being inferior to others and one comes to internalize this sense of inferiority. But many persons standing in public social status relations will occupy a middle ground within such relations, being both above many persons while being below many others. In such a case, one is not predominantly conceived of as a public social inferior, and so no legitimate threat to their sense of self-esteem can arise. Envy experienced by persons other than those with especially low public social status, then, is always inexcusable envy because such envy is responding to a difference that poses no legitimate threat to a person's sense of self-esteem.

Envy will be excusable, then, when it is a response by the low status to relative disadvantages that bring about some setback to their sense of self-esteem by virtue of producing inequalities of public social status. Such envy will be *merely* excusable when the low status have no claim for greater equality of public social status. The low status will lack such a claim when we have gone through the process of satisfying the three clauses of the status principle in order of priority. Having satisfied clauses (a) and (b) of the status principle so far as possible, there may remain inequalities of public social status based predominantly in well-grounded considerations that bring about some setback to the self-esteem of the low status. However, clause (c) only grants a claim to advance equality of public social status when inequalities of public social status are so great as to pose a serious threat to the self-esteem of the low status. If the threat is not so great that the urgent good of adequately developed basic moral capacities is not in jeopardy, then there will be no claim to greater equality of public social status. In this case, the envy of the low status is merely excusable.

Reasonable envy, then, is envy that is a response to inequalities that ground differences of public social status which clauses (b) and (c) of the status principle direct us to reduce or eliminate. The objects of reasonable envy are i) differences between persons which contribute to inequalities of arbitrary public social status, or ii) differences between persons which contribute to inequalities of public social status, arbitrary or well-grounded, that are so great as to pose a threat to the low status developing an adequate sense of self-esteem. Envy is thus made reasonable when it is a response to differences between persons which are either unreasonable, in the sense of being based in arbitrary standards of assessment, or which ultimately cause the basic moral capacities of the low status to be threatened. In such a case, we may think of envy as symptomatic of an inadequate sense of self-esteem, which mean that the experience of envy is evidence of a claim on the part of the low status to reduce, to some extent, the inequalities that provoke the experience of envy.

Having granted the assumption that inequalities of resources and wealth will play a role in exacerbating public social status inequalities, the claims based in the status principle that make envy reasonable may direct us to make the distribution of advantages more

egalitarian than even justice requires. It could be the case that persons treat the possession of greater wealth and resources as conferring greater public social status while the distribution of wealth and resources conforms, for the most part, to justice. For the sake of example, let us take for granted a luck egalitarian conception of distributive justice. It could be the case that inequalities of resources are based solely in option luck[219] while persons nevertheless treat the possession of resources as a source of public social status. If inequalities of resources based in option luck become too great, they may in turn produce inequalities of public social status that threaten the development of the basic normative capacities of the low status. In which case, it would seem that the low status would have a claim to make the distribution of resources more egalitarian despite the fact that the prevailing distribution is just.

An immediate reply to this kind of possibility is to take issue not with the distribution of resources but rather with the convergent beliefs and attitudes that lead to inequalities of resources being a ground for inequalities of public social status. In a truly just (by luck egalitarian lights) society, persons will not treat the greater advantages possessed by others by virtue of their option luck as a source of social status.

This reply, however, only serves to restate the first clause of the status principle, which was that public social status relations are to be made well-ordered. But we are concerned with precisely the case where public social status relations are not well-ordered. Supposing that we have exhausted our abilities and made public social status as well-grounded as possible and inequalities of resources and wealth nevertheless continue to produce inequalities of public social status that threaten the self-esteem of the low status, will the low status then have a claim to reduce the inequality of even a just distribution?

I believe that the low status will have such a claim, and the claim is based in the greater urgency of securing the adequate development of basic moral capacities vis-à-vis that of fully realizing justice. The difference in urgency lies in the difference of available alternatives. The alterative to realizing social conditions that protect against threats to the development of the basic moral capacities of the low status is to leave the development of those capacities insecure. In such a situation, we risk denying a central part of a good human life to the low status. Whereas the alternative to realizing full justice in this situation is to accord the most advantaged citizens with marginally fewer advantages. Justice will not be fully served in this case, as the most advantaged are denied some share of their advantages that they have a claim to. But the most advantaged will still retain a relatively greater share of advantages, and, moreover, basic conditions of the most advantaged having a good life will not be threatened when marginal claims of justice held by them are unfulfilled. Given the fundamental importance of achieving adequate development of our basic moral capacities, I believe that the claim of the low status to social conditions that provide sufficient security to the development of those capacities is more urgent than the claim of the most advantaged to the marginal satisfaction of claims of justice, such that the former is

[219] On the brute luck vs. option luck distinction, see Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue,* p.73.

overridden. Hence, under non-well-ordered conditions, the low status may have claims to reduce inequalities of advantages even when the distribution of advantages is just.

The status principle, then, plays the role of constraining principles of justice when those principles allow for inequalities great enough to pose a threat to the development of the basic normative capacities of the low status. The role that the status principle plays is thus comparable to the role that G. A. Cohen's principle of community plays in his account of socialism. Cohen's preferred conception of justice is what he calls socialist equality of opportunity, which is a kind of luck egalitarian principle. "The community principle constrains the operation of the egalitarian principle by forbidding certain inequalities that the egalitarian principle permits."[220] But, what exactly is the relationship between justice and the community principle, or, in our case, the status principle? Cohen has no answer. "Do the relevant prohibitions [of the community principle] define the terms within which justice will operate, or do they sometimes (justifiably?) contradict justice? I do not know the answer to that question."[221] We may ask the same question here: do the demands of the status principle set the boundaries within which justice may operate, or do they contradict justice?

It seems at first that the status principle does contradict justice because the status principle is grounded by reasons that are distinct from reasons of justice. The reasons that lead us to the status principle are reasons about freedom, and more precisely, moral freedom. Freedom in a general sense and justice are straightforwardly distinct. Demands of justice can, for instance, require setbacks to freedom, as when, say, it is unjust that someone goes free when they ought to have been imprisoned. Similarly, the constraints of freedom can oppose the demands of justice, as, for example, when I must as a matter of freedom respect your political advocacy for a candidate running on a platform that contains unjust policies.

Freedom in the general sense, however, seems quite distinct from moral freedom, such that even if the former is demonstrably distinct from justice, the latter may still stand in some more significant relationship with respect to justice. It seems to me that considerations of moral freedom invariably factor into argument for conceptions of justice. I have two general arguments to offer in support of this claim. The first is that recourse to our capacity for moral freedom will be needed to explain why it is that certain things count in the domain of distributive justice in the first place. The standard objects of distributive justice are familiar sorts of advantages like rights, liberties, and the material conditions for well-being (i.e. income, occupation, etc.). The reason why these things are appropriate objects of justice is, I think, because things like rights and the material conditions for well-being are important preconditions for the effective exercise of our basic normative capacities. It is because the rights that we are ascribed and the resources that we possess play so profound a role in our ability to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good that they are appropriate objects of principles of justice.

---

[220] *Why Not Socialism?*, p. 12.
[221] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Contrast an object's significance to our moral freedom as a criterion for it being an appropriate object of justice with another appealing criterion, namely, that an object is significant for our well-being. This latter criterion is unappealing, I think, because it makes the scope of justice too broad. There are too many idiosyncratic sources of welfare for us to think that some objects being a source of welfare for some makes it an appropriate object for justice. Just because one persons derives joy from counting blades of grass it does not seem to follow that opportunity to count blades of grass is an object of justice. In a similar vein, the welfare criterion would license redistributive claims that are hard to stomach. Body parts and personal relationships, for example, are sources of well-being, but they are not plausibly objects of redistributive justice.

So, my first reason for claiming that considerations of moral freedom bear an important relationship to justice is that the former are needed to explain why certain things are appropriate objects of justice. The second reason I will offer is simply the fact that considerations of moral freedom often feature at the foundational level of most any conception of justice. Arguments for all of justice as fairness, luck egalitarianism, and libertarianism appeal to such things as the capacity for individual choice and the significance of leading one's life on one's own terms to provide support for the relevant conception of justice. One would be hard pressed, I think, to find a compelling conception of justice the argument for which made no reference to things like individual plans and projects, our capacity for deliberate choice, and the ends that we set for ourselves in our lives.

Hence, I believe that considerations of moral freedom invariably factor into and shape considerations of justice. Because of this, I believe that moral freedom is related to justice in that considerations of moral freedom are i) serve to justify some conceptions of justice, and ii) serve to identify what objects are within the scope of claims of justice. Reasons of moral freedom, it seems to me, are reasons that are at least as basic as reasons of justice. Consequently, I am led to the conclusion that the considerations of moral freedom that ultimately ground the status principle set the terms within which justice operates, as Cohen puts it, rather than contradicting justice.

So, I do not think that moral freedom contradicts justice. This does not mean that the two kinds of evaluative considerations cannot come into conflict. Contingent conflicts between values abound in our world, with moral freedom and justice being no exception. Indeed, the status principle responds to the possibility that attaining justice can come at an unacceptable cost to individual moral freedom. The possibility of contingent conflict does not necessarily imply, however, that the there is a deeper evaluative inconsistency. If the self-esteem of some suffers under conditions of inequality of public social status, it is not because moral freedom is as such incompatible with justice but rather because the contingent psychology of persons makes the mutual achievement of perfect justice and moral freedom impossible. In this case, the opposition between justice and moral freedom is not *real*, meaning that the relationship between the normative notions of justice and moral freedom is not a necessary one but an accident of our natures.

Moreover, the status principle identifies the conditions under which moral freedom and justice can be reconciled given that our contingent psychology can bring the two kinds of values into conflict. The first clause of the status principle, which directs us to make public social status relations well-ordered, identifies the conditions under which the features of our social psychologies that may bear on our moral freedom are suitably regulated by considerations of justice. When public social status is well-ordered, justice and moral freedom are brought into harmony. This harmony may be disrupted by the experience of setbacks to our sense of self-esteem that arise as a contingent feature of our social psychology or because of our inability to fully realize well-ordered relations of public social status. In that case, the secondary and tertiary clauses of the status principle identify the social conditions that strike the appropriate balance between justice and moral freedom, achieving a reconciliation between two values brought into conflict by virtue of accidents of our social nature and history.

As the discussion here has indicated, the relationship between justice and public social status is a complex one. My hope is that the remarks made here shed some light on that relationship. The conclusion that we have arrived at is that the complete status principle (in its revised form) identifies the grounds by virtue of which relatively disadvantaged persons might have claims to reduce inequalities that provoke envy on their part. Reasonable envy, then, is not merely a brute and unappealing emotion as with inexcusable envy, but rather is an emotion that can play a regulative social function because the satisfaction of reasonable envy would bring about social conditions that pose a less severe threat to the moral freedom of the low status. I am thus led to conceive of reasonable envy as a social instrument for achieving reconciliation between justice and moral freedom under accidental social conditions. Though, we should be careful to note that this does not mean that we must provide full satisfaction of reasonable envy, nor that any experience of envy is reasonable. Rather, many, if not most, experiences of envy will be inexcusable, and in cases where envy is reasonable the claim to satisfy reasonable envy only carries up to that point that the basic moral capacities of the low status are no longer threatened. Insofar as the low status continue to experience envy after that point, it is merely excusable envy, the burden of which must be borne by the low status.

REFERENCES

Anderson, Cameron, John Angus D. Hildreth, and Laura Howland. "Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive? A Review of the Empirical Literature." *Psychological Bulletin* 141, no. 3 (2015): 574–601.

Anderson, Cameron, and Gavin J. Kilduff. "The Pursuit of Status in Social Groups." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 18, no. 5 (2009): 295–98.

Anderson, Elizabeth. "The Fundamental Disagreement between Luck Egalitarians and Relational Egalitarians." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40 supplement (2010): 1–23.

———. *The Imperative of Integration*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

———. "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (1999): 287–337.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Arneson, Richard J. "Luck Egalitarianism Interpreted and Defended." *Philosophical Topics* 32, no. 1/2 (2004): 1–20.

———. "The Principle of Fairness and Free-Rider Problems." *Ethics* 92, no. 4 (1982): 616–33.

Becker, Lawrence C. *Reciprocity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

———. "Reciprocity, Justice, and Disability." *Ethics* 116, no. 1 (2005): 9–39.

Berger, Joseph, Bernard P. Cohen, and Morris Zelditch. "Status Characteristics and Social Interaction." *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 3 (1972): 241–55.

Berger, Joseph, and M. Hamit Fisek. "Diffuse Status Characteristics and the Spread of Status Value: A Formal Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 4 (2006): 1038–79.

Berger, Joseph, M. Hamit Fisek, Robert Z. Norman, and Morris Zelditch. *Status Characteristics and Social Interaction: An Expectation-States Approach*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1977.

Berger, Joseph, Robert Z. Norman, James W. Balkwell, and Roy F. Smith. "Status Inconsistency in Task Situations: A Test of Four Status Processing Principles." *American Sociological Review* 57, no. 6 (1992): 843–55.

Berger, Joseph, Susan J. Rosenholtz, and Morris Zelditch. "Status Organizing Processes." *Annual Review of Sociology* 6 (1980): 479–508.

Bianchi, Alison J. "Status Characteristics/Expectations States Theory." In *Encyclopedia of Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, edited by John M. Levine and Michael A. Hogg, 844–48. Los Angeles: Sage, 2010.

Bicchieri, Cristina. *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Blader, Steven L., and Ya-Ru Chen. "Differentiating the Effects of Status and Power." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102, no. 5 (2012): 994–1014.

———. "What's in a Name? Status, Power, and Other Forms of Social Hierarchy." In *The Psychology of Social Status*, edited by Joey T. Cheng, Jessica L. Tracy, and Cameron Anderson, 71–95. New York: Springer, 2014.

Blader, Steven L., Aiwa Shirako, and Ya-Ru Chen. "Looking Out From the Top: Differential Effects of Status and Power on Perspective Taking." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 42, no. 6 (2016): 723–37.

Boehm, Christopher. *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior*. Revised. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Brown, Brookes. "Reciprocity Without Compliance." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 48, no. 4 (2020): 382–421.

Buchanan, Allen. "Institutional Legitimacy." In *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, edited by David Sobel, Peter Vallentyne, and Steven Wall, 4:53–78. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

———. *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination: Moral Foundations for International Law*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

———. "Moral Status and Human Enhancement." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 37, no. 4 (2009): 346–81.

———. "Political Legitimacy and Democracy." *Ethics* 112, no. 4 (2002): 689–719.

Christiano, Thomas. "An Instrumental Argument for a Human Right to Democracy." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 39, no. 2 (2011): 142–76.

———. "The Authority of Democracy." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (2004): 266–90.

———. *The Constitution of Equality: Democratic Authority and Its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Cohen, G. A. *Rescuing Justice and Equality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

———. *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

———. "Where the Action Is: On the Site of Distributive Justice." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 26, no. 1 (1997): 3–30.

———. *Why Not Socialism?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Congleton, Roger D. "Efficient Status Seeking: Externalities, and the Evolution of Status Games." *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 11, no. 2 (1989): 175–90.

Cook, Karen S. "Expectations, Evaluations, and Equity." *American Sociological Review* 40, no. 3 (1975): 372–88.

Darwall, Stephen. "Self-Interest and Self-Concern." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14, no. 1 (1997): 158–78.

Darwall, Stephen L. *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

———. "Two Kinds of Respect." *Ethics* 88, no. 1 (1977): 36–49.

Dworkin, Ronald. *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

———. "What Is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10, no. 4 (1981): 283–345.

Estlund, David. "Liberalism, Equality, and Fraternity in Cohen's Critique of Rawls." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (1998): 99–112.

Fast, Nathanael J., Nir Halevy, and Adam D. Galinsky. "The Destructive Nature of Power without Status." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48, no. 1 (2012): 391–94.

Fiske, Susan T. *Envy up, Scorn down: How Status Divides Us*. New York: Russel Sage, 2011.

———. "Interpersonal Stratification." In *Handbook of Social Psychology*, edited by Daniel T. Gilbert and Gardner Lindzey, 5th ed., 941–82. New York: Wiley, 2010.

Fiske, Susan T., and Jennifer Berdhal. "Social Power." In *Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles*, edited by Arie W. Kruglanski and E. Tory Higgins, 2nd ed., 678–94. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Fiske, Susan T., Amy J. C. Cuddy, Peter Glick, and Jun Xu. "A Model of (Often Mixed) Stereotype Content: Competence and Warmth Respectively Follow from Perceived Status and Competition." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82, no. 6 (2002): 878–902.

Flynn, Francis J., Ray E. Reagans, Emily T. Amanatullah, and Daniel R. Ames. "Helping One's Way to the Top: Self-Monitors Achieve Status by Helping Others and Knowing Who Helps Whom." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91, no. 6 (2006): 1123–37.

Fourie, Carina. "What Is Social Equality? An Analysis of Status Equality as a Strongly Egalitarian Ideal." *Res Publica* 18 (2012): 107–26.

Frank, Robert H. "Are Workers Paid Their Marginal Products?" *American Economic Review* 74, no. 4 (1984): 549–71.

———. *Choosing the Right Pond: Human Behavior and the Quest for Status*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

———. "The Demand for Unobservable and Other Nonpositional Goods." *American Economic Review* 75, no. 1 (1985): 101–16.

Fuller, Lon L. "Positivism and Fidelity to Law: A Reply to Professor Hart." *Harvard Law Review* 71, no. 4 (1958): 630–72.

———. *The Morality of Law*. Revised. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.

Galinsky, Adam D., Joe C. Magee, Deborah H. Gruenfeld, Jennifer A. Whitson, and Katie A. Liljenquist. "Power Reduces the Press of the Situation: Implications for Creativity, Conformity, and Dissonance." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95, no. 6 (2008): 1450–66.

Galinsky, Adam D., Joe C. Magee, M. Ena Inesi, and Deborah H. Gruenfeld. "Power and Perspectives Not Taken." *Psychological Science* 17, no. 12 (2006): 1068–74.

Gates Jr., Henry Louis. *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow*. New York: Penguin Books, 2020.

Gaus, Gerald. "A Tale of Two Sets: Public Reason in Equilibrium." *Public Affairs Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2011): 305–25.

———. "Self-Organizing Moral Systems: Beyond Social Contract Theory." *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics* 17, no. 2 (2018): 119–47.

———. *The Order of Public Reason: A Theory of Freedom and Morality in a Diverse and Bounded World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Gaus, Gerald F. "Public Reason and the Rule of Law." In *The Rule of Law*, edited by Ian Shapiro, Vol. 36. Nomos. New York: New York University Press, 1994.

Gaus, Gerald, and Kevin Vallier. "The Roles of Religious Conviction in a Publicly Justified Polity: The Implications of Convergence, Asymmetry and Political Institutions." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 35, no. 1–2 (2009): 51–76.

Gintis, Herbert, Eric Alden Smith, and Samuel Bowles. "Costly Signaling and Cooperation." *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 213, no. 1 (2001): 103–19.

Goldhamer, Herbert, and Edward A. Shils. "Types of Power and Status." *American Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 2 (1939): 171–82.

Gould, Roger V. "The Origins of Status Hierarchies: A Formal Theory and Empirical Test." *American Journal of Sociology* 107, no. 5 (2002): 1143–78.

Gowder, Paul. "The Rule of Law and Equality." *Law and Philosophy* 32, no. 5 (2013): 565–618.

Guala, Francesco. *Understanding Institutions: The Science and Philosophy of Living Together*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Guinote, Ana. "Power and Goal Pursuit." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33, no. 8 (2007): 1076–87.

Harkness, Sarah K. "Spread of Status Value: Rewards and the Creation of Status Characteristics." *Social Science Research* 61 (2017): 98–111.

———. "The Consequence of Interpersonal Rewards." *Sociology Compass* 8, no. 2 (2014): 219–31.

Harris, Lasana T., and Susan T. Fiske. "Dehumanized Perception: A Psychological Means to Facilitate Atrocities, Torture, and Genocide?" *Zeitschrift Für Psychologie* 219, no. 3 (2011): 175–81.

———. "Dehumanizing the Lowest of the Low: Neuroimaging Responses to Extreme Out-Groups." *Psychological Science* 17, no. 10 (2006): 847–53.

———. "Social Groups That Elicit Disgust Are Differentially Processed in the MPFC." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 2, no. 1 (2007): 45–51.

Harrod, Wendy Jean. "Expectations from Unequal Rewards." *Social Psychological Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1980): 126–30.

Heath, Joseph. "Dworkin's Auction." *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics* 3, no. 3 (2004): 313–35.

Henrich, Jospeh, and Robert Boyd. "Division of Labor, Economic Specialization, and the Evolution of Social Stratification." *Current Anthropology* 49, no. 4 (2008): 715–24.

Henrich, Jospeh, and Francisco J. Gil-White. "The Evolution of Prestige: Freely Conferred Deference as a Mechanism for Enhancing the Benefits of Cultural Transmission." *Evolution and Human Behavior* 22, no. 3 (2001): 165–96.

Henrich, Jospeh, and Natalie Henrich. *Why Humans Cooperate: A Cultural and Evolutionary Explanation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Hoff, Karla, and Priyanka Pandey. "Discrimination, Social Identity, and Durable Inequalities." *American Economic Review* 96, no. 2 (2006): 206–11.

———. "Making up People--The Effect of Identity on Performance in a Modernizing Society." *Journal of Development Economics* 106 (2014): 118–31.

Keltner, Dacher, Deborah H. Gruenfeld, and Cameron Anderson. "Power, Approach, and Inhibition." *Psychological Review* 110, no. 2 (2003): 265–84.

King, Martin Luther. "Letter from Birmingham City Jail." In *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 289–302. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986.

Kitts, James A. "Collective Action, Rival Incentives, and the Emergence of Antisocial Norms." *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 2 (2006): 235–59.

Klosko, George. "Presumptive Benefit, Fairness, and Political Obligation." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 16, no. 3 (1987): 241–59.

Kolodny, Niko. "Rule Over None II: Social Equality and the Justification of Democracy." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42, no. 4 (2014): 287–336.

Lerner, Melvin J. "Evaluation of Performance as a Function of Performer's Reward and Attractiveness." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1, no. 4 (1965): 355–60.

Levine, Adam Seth, Robert H. Frank, and Oege Dijk. "Expenditure Cascades." *Available at SSRN*, 2010. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1690612.

Lewis, David. *Convention*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.

Lippert-Rasmussen, Kasper. *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Loch, Christopher H., Bernardo Huberman, and Suzanne Stout. "Status Competition and Performance in Work Groups." *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 43, no. 1 (2000): 35–55.

Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government*. Edited by C. B. Macpherson. Indianopolis: Hackett, 1980.

Lomasky, Loren E. *Persons, Rights, and the Moral Community*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Lynn, Freda B., Joel M. Podolny, and Lin Tao. "A Sociological (De)Construction of the Relationship between Status and Quality." *American Journal of Sociology* 115, no. 3 (2009): 755–804.

Manzo, Gianluca, and Delia Bladassarri. "Heuristics, Interactions, and Status Hierarchies: An Agent-Based Model of Deference Exchange." *Sociological Methods & Research* 44, no. 2 (2015): 329–87.

Mark, Noah P. "Status Organizes Cooperation: An Evolutionary Theory of Status and Social Order." *American Journal of Sociology* 123, no. 6 (2018): 1601–34.

McAdams, Richard H. "Relative Preferences." *Yale Law Journal* 102 (1992): 1–104.

Motchoulski, Alexander. "Democratic Public Justification." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 50, no. 7 (2020): 844–61.

———. "Justice, Reciprocity, and the Boundaries of State Authority." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (2021): 48–69.

———. "Relational Egalitarianism and Democracy." *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 18, no. 6 (2021): 620–49.

———. "The Epistemic Limits of Shared Reasons." *European Journal of Philosophy* 28, no. 1 (2020): 164–76.

Murphy, Liam B. "Institutions and the Demands of Justice." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 27, no. 4 (1998): 251–91.

North, Douglass C. *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books, 1974.

O'Neill, Martin. "What Should Egalitarians Believe?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 36, no. 2 (2008): 119–56.

Pasquier-Doumer, Laure, and Fiorella Risso Brandon. "Aspiration Failure: A Poverty Trap for Indigenous Children in Peru?" *World Development* 72 (2015): 208–23.

Quong, Jonathan. *Liberalism Without Perfection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Revised. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.

———. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

———. "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical." In *John Rawls: Collected Papers*, edited by Samuel Freeman, 388–414. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

———. "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory." In *John Rawls: Collected Papers*, edited by Samuel Freeman, 303–58. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

———. "Legal Obligation and the Duty of Fair Play." In *John Rawls: Collected Papers*, edited by Samuel Freeman, 117–29. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

———. *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

———. "The Basic Structure as Subject." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1977): 159–65.

Renzo, Massimo. "Fairness, Self-Deception and Political Obligation." *Philosophical Studies* 169, no. 3 (2014): 467–88.

Ridgeway, Cecilia. "The Social Construction of Status Value: Gender and Other Nominal Characteristics." *Social Forces* 70, no. 2 (1991): 367–86.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L. "Conformity, Group-Oriented Motivation, and Status Attainment in Small Groups." *Social Psychology* 41, no. 3 (1978): 175–88.

———. "Gender, Status, and Leadership." *Journal of Social Issues* 57, no. 4 (2001): 637–55.

———. "Status in Groups: The Importance of Motivation." *American Sociological Review* 47, no. 1 (1982): 76–88.

———. "Why Status Matters for Inequality." *American Sociological Review* 70 (2014): 1–16.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L., Kristen Backor, Yan E. Li, Justine E. Tinkler, and Kristan G. Erickson. "How Easily Does a Social Difference Become a Status Distinction? Gender Matters." *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 1 (2009): 44–62.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L., and James W. Balkwell. "Group Processes and the Diffusion of Status Beliefs." *Social Psychological Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (1997): 14–31.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L., and Joseph Berger. "Expectations, Legitimacy, and Dominance Behavior in Task Groups." *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 5 (1986): 603–17.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L., Joseph Berger, and LeRoy Smith. "Nonverbal Cues and Status: An Expectations States Approach." *American Journal of Sociology* 90, no. 5 (1985): 955–78.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L., Elizabeth Heger Boyle, Kathy J. Kuipers, and Dawn T. Robinson. "How Do Status Beliefs Develop? The Role of Resources and Interactional Experience." *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998): 331–50.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L., and David Diekema. "Are Gender Differences Status Differences?" In *Gender, Interaction, and Inequality*, edited by Cecilia L. Ridgeway, 157–80. New York: Springer, 1992.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L., and Kristan Glasgow Erickson. "Creating and Spreading Status Beliefs." *American Journal of Sociology* 106, no. 3 (2000): 579–615.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men." In *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, edited by Victor Gourevitch, 111–222. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Scanlon, T. M. "Preference and Urgency." *Journal of Philosophy* 72, no. 19 (1975): 655–69.

———. "The Diversity of Objections to Inequalities." In *The Difficulty of Tolerance: Essays in Political Philosophy*, 202–18. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

———. *Why Does Inequality Matter?* New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Scheffler, Samuel. "Membership and Political Obligation." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2018): 3–23.

———. *The Rejection of Consequentialism: A Philosophical Investigation of the Considerations Underlying Rival Moral Conceptions*. Revised. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1982.

———. "What Is Egalitarianism?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 31, no. 1 (2003): 5–39.

Schemmel, Christian. "Distributive and Relational Equality." *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics* 11, no. 2 (2011): 123–48.

———. "Why Relational Egalitarians Should Care About Distributions." *Social Theory and Practice* 37, no. 3 (2011): 365–90.

Sen, Amartya. *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*. Expanded Edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.

———. *Inequality Reexamined*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Shelby, Tommie. "Integration, Inequality, and Imperatives of Justice: A Review Essay." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 42, no. 3 (2014): 252–85.

Simmons, A. John. *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

Smart, J. J. C., and Bernard Williams. *Utilitarianism For and Against*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Stapel, Diederik A., and Hart Blanton. "From Seeing to Being: Subliminal Social Comparisons Affect Implicit and Explicit Self-Evaluations." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87, no. 4 (2004): 468–81.

Stewart, Penni A., and James C. Moore Jr. "Wage Disparities and Performance Expectations." *Social Psychological Quarterly* 55 (1992): 70–85.

Viehoff, Daniel. "Democratic Equality and Political Authority." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42, no. 4 (2014): 337–75.

———. "Power and Equality." In *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, edited by David Sobel, Peter Vallentyne, and Steven Wall, 5:3–38. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Walzer, Michael. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. New York: Basic Books, 1983.

Webster Jr., Murray, and Stuart J. Hysom. "Creating Status Characteristics." *American Sociological Review* 63, no. 3 (1998): 351–78.

Wenar, Leif. "The Nature of Rights." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 33, no. 3 (2005): 223–52.

Whitmeyer, Joseph M. "Prestige from the Provision of Collective Goods." *Social Forces* 85, no. 4 (2007): 1765–86.

Wietmarschen, Han van. "What Is Social Hierarchy?" *Nous*, forthcoming. https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12387.

Willer, Robb. "Groups Reward Individual Sacrifice: The Status Solution to the Collective Action Problem." *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 1 (2009): 23–43.

Williams, Andrew. "Incentives, Inequality, and Publicity." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27, no. 3 (1998): 225–47.

Wuepper, David, and Travis J. Lybbert. "Perceived Self-Efficacy, Poverty, and Economic Development." *Annual Review of Resource Economics* 9 (2017): 383–404.

Zhu, Jiafeng. "Fairness, Political Obligation, and the Justificatory Gap." *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (2016): 290–312.