

Statement of Proposed Future Research

Tentative Title: Social Freedom, Equality, and the Sphere of Justice; Beyond Borders of Nations, Species, and Biology

My research is focused on understanding the roles and responsibilities of individual agents as they navigate and ultimately transform the institutional structures and social norms they find themselves in. This research project builds off the work in my dissertation defending a concept of social freedom understood as the (robust) absence of (socially remediable) constraints. This new project focuses on freedom's interaction with the, I argue, related idea of 'equality.' The animating idea is that a careful understanding of the relations between freedom and equality clarifies the necessity of expanding the scope and application of our normative thinking both in terms of 'who or what' matters but also in terms of what their mattering demands of us.

The research projects described below are all united by the claim that the sphere of justice is larger than the State and that its subjects reach beyond borders; whether of nation, species, or even natural origin, as in case of (possible) artificial sentences. My intention is to utilize the methods of analytical political theory to supplement and expand on the academically underappreciated insights that moved millions of people involved in radical political movements—from anarchist, and liberation theological, to animal liberationist and transhumanist—to challenge the foundations of their political and ethical worlds. In practical terms my goal is to defend many of these insights in straightforwardly analytic terms but to do so while accommodating our rapidly changing empirical realities. This second task depends on considering the effects of existing realities such as the waning importance of traditional Westphalian nation states, the rapidly changing climate, and the seemingly imminent development of AI in this century. The four subprojects described below share this starting point and take it in four slightly different directions.

A Substantive Defense of an Egalitarian Ethos

This project focuses on supplementing the limited, politically liberal, justification of egalitarian social norms defended in my dissertation with a more substantive or perfectionist defense of egalitarianism as a means of realizing various goods. My argument for such an ethos depends on three related claims. The first claim is that an egalitarian ethos is an effective means of ensuring the widespread realization of freedom—this is an idea I explore in my dissertation. The second is that we should treat equality itself as having a sort of justificatory bias such that departures from equality must be justified. To vindicate this claim I draw on existing work on luck egalitarianism to show that such departures depend on legitimately holding agents responsible for conditions that leave them worse off than their peers. And this, I argue, is a difficult bar to meet. My final claim is that relating to others as equals is an expression of a 'communitarian' or 'solidaristic' way of relating with others that itself is positively Good. In other words, liberals or not, we *ought* to try to develop a positively egalitarian set of values, an 'egalitarian ethos', in order to realize the Good. A positive side effect of such an ethos is that it avoids reliance on the increasingly impotent mechanisms of the traditional nation state while simultaneously fitting larger projects of cosmopolitan solidarity.

Exploitation as Unfreedom

I believe an account of exploitation, like other normative ideas, should try to meet two desiderata—it should accurately capture our sense of what is normatively salient about the idea *and* secondly, it should help facilitate moral action. That is, a good definition of a normative idea is both theoretically and practically sound. One dominant explanation of the objectionableness of exploitation appeal to the structure of the relationship between exploiter and exploited and identify a procedural wrong. These accounts do a great job practically because they enable us to think about changes to our social system that might eliminate the procedural wrong. However, I think such purely procedural terms fail to be explanations of the right sort most principally because I think they make it difficult to see why the exploitation of the already disadvantaged is particularly galling for us. My suggestion is that this is because procedural accounts miss an ‘egalitarian intuition’ underlying our objections to exploitation. A second set of dominant explanations identify exploitation as substantive harm and so avoid many of the shortcomings I identify in procedural accounts. However, these accounts of exploitation often struggle to meet the action-guiding desideratum I identified above. Naturally, my suggestion is then that we turn to a third definition of exploitation that meets both desiderata. To that end I draw on my dissertation research to offer an account of exploitation as a sort of unfreedom. The result is a simpler understanding of exploitation’s wrong-making features that also offers a clear path to its eradication.

Why We Should be Anti-Capitalist Effective Altruists

In published work I have defended the theoretical coherence of anti-capitalist Effective Altruism. My focus here is on developing a positive argument for becoming an ‘anti-capitalist effective altruist’ that should speak to existing advocates of either Effective Altruism or anti-capitalism as well as those from outside these theoretical frameworks. My positive argument for endorsing a sort of Anti-Capitalist Effective Altruism depends on synthesizing Analytic Marxist and Effective Altruist thought. I believe this is useful intervention because Analytic Marxism offers fertile grounds for thinking about socio-economic institutions in a way that might facilitate ‘systemic change’ while Effective Altruism offers a clear commitment to guiding the action of individual agents *and* a willingness to accept a wide scope of moral standing. The synthesis I defend will be attractive to any agents motivated by the efficient realization of justice and the Good. Especially those of us who want to understand what we can and should do both as individuals, and as members of collective social groups. My hope is that by identifying a plausible synthesis, we will be better placed to expand the argument beyond those already sympathetic to one or the other position. I argue that for those of us who are interested in the widespread realization of freedom a certain orientation to our society is necessary. In short, the way we get from our deeply unjust society complete with rampant unfreedom and inequality to the sort of utopian world envisioned by reformers of many stripes is via an anti-capitalist effective altruism.

Freedom, Harm, and the Moral Standing of Animals (and AI)

In ordinary speech we often discuss treatment of non-human animals in terms of individual compassion and kindness; environmental ethicists have offered a variety of arguments that understand human obligations to non-human animals more stringently. However, even these are within the scope individual ethical duties which suggest that when we wrong animals it is a wronging beyond the scope of the political. I argue that this is a mistake. Because unfreedom can harm animals in the same way as it harms human beings, animals should be subject to the same

sort of political protections as other beings. In short, animal liberation should be understood as a demand of justice that can be collectively realized and legitimately enforced, even in liberal societies. The claims explored here generalize for many other non-standard political subjects; e.g., AI or future people.