



## **Aristotelian Society Synopses II**

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# Aristotelian Society Synopses II

Contributions (on [bit.ly/ib-biblio](http://bit.ly/ib-biblio) on 36 and 64) to J. W. Scott (ed.), *A Synoptic Index to the Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Vol. II: 1950–1959* (London, 1961: Harrison & Sons), 16–18; [page references to CC2 added in red](#)

**BERLIN, I.** (Sir Isaiah Berlin)

3 *Logical translation*, Vol. L (1949–50), pp. 157–88

*Synopsis:* **A** Indication of (i) doctrines of truth and meaning of the general type emanating largely from the work of Russell and (ii) doctrines influenced by the correspondence theory of language, the basic fallacy underlying which it is the purpose of this paper to disclose, 157–8 **B** The chief way in which the fallacy manifests itself—the desire to translate propositions of many types into propositions of one particular type, 158–61 **C** The reason for choosing singular categorical propositions as the type which is, in this way, set up as model or logical ideal. It is a particular doctrine of how symbols mean. Consideration of the resulting puzzle—viz. how to deal with the many ways in which symbols do seem to mean, and which is not *prima facie* identical with the one single way in which, according to this doctrine, they are all supposed to mean, 161–2 **D** Two ways of solving this puzzle: (i) the ‘deflationary’ method, that of ‘reducing’ the recalcitrant sentences to the privileged or ‘good’ ones. This involves identification of the qualities required of a ‘good’ sentence, on the assumption that sentences other than the ‘good’ ones can only be salvaged to the degree to which they can be shown to possess elements which they share in common with the ‘good’ ones. The residue is to be disposed of somehow—they be shown not to perform the function of ‘meaning’ which symbols are supposed to perform, 162–4 **E** The paradox of the ‘deflationary’ method, is that a great many sentences which obviously do possess a meaning, cannot be allowed to do so within the schema, 164–8 **F** The other solution is (ii) the ‘inflationary’ method, which provides ‘objects’ (of different types or ‘status’) for all the multitudes of ‘unprivileged’ sentences, i.e. propositions other than singular categorical ones, to which they are then assumed to have the same relation as ‘facts’ of a normal kind have to the ‘privileged’ ones. This leads to a vast multiplication of types of entity in the world and suffers from an opposite defect to that of the ‘deflationary’ theory, namely that *no* sentences can now be *excluded*; and the world becomes populated by a fantastic variety of mythological entities, obviously invented to save an unsatisfactory theory, 168–72 **G** One fundamental fallacy common to both these desperate remedies (‘either singular categoricals or not propositions’). This is the supposition that there exist ‘basic’ propositions—the ultimate entities to which it is hoped to reduce everything—‘basic’, or ‘simple’ or ‘sense-datum’ or ‘atomic’ propositions, ‘protocols’, etc., all of which spring from the belief that language or symbols function in only one way; and that all apparent deviations from this can, with sufficient skill, be ‘reduced’ to this single relationship with which the function of meaning can be identified; the relationship, the abandonment of which it is, that opens the door to endless aberrations, senseless use of symbols, metaphysics and general chaos, 172–80 **H** The source of this desire (for analysing all descriptive uses of language in terms of one basic use, and all the ingredients of the universe in terms of one basic entity) which leads to logical atomism and phenomenalism: it seems to arise from three distinct and equally fatal tendencies, 180 **I** (a) The correspondence-theory of language, which automatically renders the greater part of significant sentences meaningless and then has to resort to unpalatable expedients to save them, 180–2 **J** (b) The Ionian fallacy, i.e. that of asking what ‘everything’ consists of, and of applying concepts which necessarily apply only to parts of the universe to the whole universe, which leads to absurdities, 182–4 **K** (c) The quest for certainty and security, by which philosophers from Descartes, Locke and Berkeley, to Russell and his disciples, have been led to try and avoid error, vagueness and uncertainty by whittling sentences until they assert as little as possible, for fear of saying something which may be false. But even this attempt, to *purchase incorrigibility at the expense of saying as little as possible*, is in principle illusory; for to assert anything significant is automatically to render oneself liable to error. The less said the smaller the risk, but risk can never be avoided entirely, save at the cost of literally saying nothing at all, and confining oneself to vacuous tautologies, 184–6 **L** The epistemological problems which have led to the connected fallacies of inflation and deflation (the desire to reduce ‘irreducible’ distinctions to a single type) are genuine enough; but in this case the remedy has bred a metaphysics far more fantastic than any which it promised to exorcise, and is therefore a great deal worse than the disease, 186–8

'Logical Translation', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 50 (1949–50), 157–88

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**B** The chief way in which the fallacy manifests itself – the desire to translate propositions of many types into propositions of one particular type, 158–61 **73–6**

**C** The reason for choosing singular categorical propositions as the type which is, in this way, set up as model or logical ideal. It is a particular doctrine of how symbols mean. Consideration of the resulting puzzle – viz. how to deal with the many ways in which symbols do seem to mean, and which is not *prima facie* identical with the one single way in which, according to this doctrine, they are all supposed to mean, 161–2 **76–7**

**D** Two ways of solving this puzzle:

(i) the 'deflationary' method, that of 'reducing' the recalcitrant sentences to the privileged or 'good' ones. This involves identification of the qualities required of a 'good' sentence, on the assumption that sentences other than the 'good' ones can be salvaged only to the degree to which they can be shown to possess elements which they share in common with the 'good' ones. The residue is to be disposed of somehow – to be shown not to

<sup>1</sup> Contributions are numbered continuously through the two volumes of synopses.

perform the function of ‘meaning’ which symbols are supposed to perform, 162–4 **77–9**

**E** The paradox of the ‘deflationary’ method is that a great many sentences which obviously do possess a meaning cannot be allowed to do so within the schema, 164–8 **79–83**

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**G** One fundamental fallacy common to both these desperate remedies (‘either singular categoricals or not propositions’). This is the supposition that there exist ‘basic’ propositions – the ultimate entities to which it is hoped to reduce everything – ‘basic’ or ‘simple’ or ‘sense-datum’ or ‘atomic’ propositions, ‘protocols’ etc., all of which spring from the belief that language or symbols function in only one way; and that all apparent deviations from this can, with sufficient skill, be ‘reduced’ to this single relationship with which the function of meaning can be identified; the relationship the abandonment of which it is that opens the door to endless aberrations, senseless use of symbols, metaphysics and general chaos, 172–80 **88–96**

**H** The source of this desire (for analysing all descriptive uses of language in terms of one basic use, and all the ingredients of the universe in terms of one basic entity), which leads to logical atomism and phenomenalism: it seems to arise from three distinct and equally fatal tendencies, 180 **96**

**I** (*a*) The correspondence theory of language, which automatically renders the greater part of significant sentences meaningless and then has to resort to unpalatable expedients to save them, 180–297–8

**J** (*b*) The Ionian fallacy, i.e. that of asking what ‘everything’ consists of, and of applying concepts which necessarily apply only to parts of the universe to the whole universe, which leads to absurdities, 182–3 98–100

**K** (*c*) The quest for certainty and security, by which philosophers from Descartes, Locke and Berkeley to Russell and his disciples have been led to try to avoid error, vagueness and uncertainty by whittling sentences until they assert as little as possible, for fear of saying something which may be false. But even this attempt *to purchase incorrigibility at the expense of saying as little as possible* is in principle illusory; for to assert anything significant is automatically to render oneself liable to error. The less said the smaller the risk, but risk can never be avoided entirely, save at the cost of literally saying nothing at all, and confining oneself to vacuous tautologies, 184–6 100–3

**L** The epistemological problems which have led to the connected fallacies of inflation and deflation (the desire to reduce ‘irreducible’ distinctions to a single type) are genuine enough; but in this case the remedy has bred a metaphysics far more fantastic than any which it promised to exorcise, and is therefore a great deal worse than the disease, 186–8 103–5

4 *Equality*, Symposium (with R. Wollheim), Vol. LVI (1955-56), pp. 301-26

*Synopsis*: **A** Preamble. 'Everyone to count for one and no-one for more than one' is the heart of the doctrine of equal rights. The formula is vague, ambiguous, neither self-evident nor universally believed; and it depends neither on the doctrine of natural rights, nor on that of positive rights, since it could be held for purely utilitarian reasons; nor is it imposed by the arbitrary will of a sovereign. Equality has been closely connected with belief in human rights, and is historically and psychologically intertwined with that belief, but does not logically entail it. For this reason it may be useful to inspect it apart from its normal historical and psychological setting, 301-2

**B** Egalitarianism is a specific application of the principle that similar cases should be accorded similar treatment. This in practice means that uniform treatment should occur, in those aspects of life which deeply matter to individuals. This is tantamount to saying that it is 'natural' or 'rational' to treat every member of a given class as one treats any member of it, and 'unnatural' or 'irrational' to break this rule. This formula can easily be reduced to nullity by (a) accounting for all cases of unequal treatment by citing special circumstances to justify this; and (b) by representing unequal treatment of members of any class, as being equal treatment of them, when viewed as members of some class. Such *reducciones ad absurdum* can only be avoided by making clear what considerations are relevant in each case; and this will itself depend on differences of value and purpose on the part of individuals or groups, which will in turn depend on unpredictable differences of situation. The method of the application of general principles to given situations, can thus never in principle be exhaustively provided or justified, 302-4

**C** This position comes to saying that where there is equality of treatment, no reason need be given for this; for it is 'natural' or self-justifying. Only inequality calls for justification. If I divide a cake among ten persons, to give each one-tenth is 'self-evidently' right; and needs no defending; only other ratios of distribution call for special reasons. This is the notion of equality as *intrinsically* rational or intrinsically just. This acceptance of the canons of uniformity, regularity, similarity, symmetry as *eis ipsis* superior to their opposites, rests upon two further notions, namely those of rules as such, and of equality as an end desirable in itself, 304-5

**D** All rules, as such, entail equality. To enforce a rule is to promote equality of behaviour or treatment. This is true of moral, legal, religious, political rules, rules of teams, clubs, etc. It follows simply from the proposition that rules do not allow of exceptions. So far as rules are necessary for the survival of any society, the equality entailed by them is co-extensive with social morality as such, i.e. with the existence of any system of social behaviour. Rationality is then identified with a minimum degree of consistency of behaviour required by any human association. Social morality may then be conceived as an interrelated network of mutually consistent rules. I may then be able to criticise such a political or moral system on at least three grounds. I may say: (a) that the rules are broken for no sufficient reason, i.e. exceptions are protested against as such, equality demanded for its own sake; or (b) that the rules concerned are bad because they are in conflict with other rules aimed at producing greater equality; or (c) that the rules are deplorable because they are rules, i.e. because they promote the ideal of social equality, which is deplored as such. This is a direct attack on equality as a way of life, 305-11

**E** What is an egalitarian society? A wholly egalitarian society is one in which dissimilarity is reduced to a minimum. A society can be condemned for inequality because, in it, some are richer or stronger or freer or more famous than, or are in some other way markedly different from, others. This may derive from belief in natural rights. Alternatively, such condemnation may take the form of regarding all inequalities as irrational. Theoretically this last may extend not merely to inequalities of wealth or power, but to the existence of any form of authority, say that of the conductor of an orchestra. A pure egalitarian wants a society in which any differences which may tend to produce inequalities, are removed. He will prefer a society in which men are as similar as possible, physically, mentally, emotionally, etc. It may be thought that such a society is in practice unrealisable; or that violently tyrannical measures would be necessary to bring it about. But this is not relevant to the concept itself. Such extreme equality—the maximum similarity of a body of all-but-indiscernible human beings—may never have been put forward as a serious ideal; but those parts of equality that have in fact been demanded are specific *modifications* of this idealised model, which for this reason is of central importance, 311-15

**F** Such modifications are—(a) orthodox *liberal* doctrines according to which, provided that men are (a) equal before the law, and (b) governed (in some sense) by their common consent, and (c) possess a minimum of civil liberties protected by the principle 'one man one vote', no further interference (say economic) should be permitted. It is plain that to insist upon such initial political or legal equality is to be influenced by ideals other than mere equality. Even such an egalitarian as Condorcet thinks that enlightened government can be secured only by elites armed with greater power than the governed. Elites are justified by the need, not for equality, but for creating a society in which certain other ends can be attained—e.g. happiness, virtue, justice, progress in the

arts and sciences, etc. Condorcet supposes all these things to be compatible and indeed interconnected. The fallacy here, and its springs, 315–19 **G** It seems to follow that equality is merely one end among many, an ultimate principle whose compatibility with other equally ultimate principles cannot be guaranteed, but will depend on the concrete situation. The demand for equality often takes the form of a belief in 'fairness'. Equality and fairness are closely bound up. Fairness is defined negatively as not breaking a rule, where the advantage of so doing depends on its being kept by others. Examples of cases where fairness is not compatible with maximum social happiness and other values. Desire to be fair is connected with moral sensitiveness, of which one of the criteria is liability to qualms of conscience at the prospect of certain types of action. Fairness, with equality, emerges as an end in itself, whose claim may, in a given situation, be rejected or reduced in favour of the claims of wholly different ends or visions of life. We choose as we choose, because one solution seems to us to embody a blend of satisfaction of claims and desires which we prefer as a total pattern to the blend provided by some other solution. Into such blends, versions of equality, equity, fairness, etc. enter in various not easily analysable, nor exhaustively classifiable, ways, 319–24 **H** Examination of those who regard equality neither as one among many ends nor as an ultimate goal, but as *intrinsically undesirable*, since they oppose all rules as such, and desire an unsystematic society, ruled by the arbitrary will of an inspired leader, or the unpredictable movement of the 'spirit' of a nation, race, party or church. Such anti-egalitarianism is not as rare as some liberals and socialists assume, or as unsuccessful in its conflicts with the traditional western principles of equality, justice, natural rights, and a minimum of civil liberties. Belief in equality is a deep-rooted principle in human thought, but the notion that it is as self-evident to all sane men as that 'red is different from blue'—which the defenders of 'natural law' (and Locke at times) hold,—is incorrect, as the subsequent career of egalitarianism has shewn. As for extreme egalitarianism, which requires the minimisation of all distinctions between men, and the maximization of assimilation and uniformity,—this ideal is not prominent in the majority of actual political doctrines, largely because it conflicts with other equally ultimate ideals. Most of the influential ethical and political views seem to be forms of compromise between principles which, in their 'pure' form, cannot co-exist, 324–6 **I** In conclusion equality is one of the oldest and deepest elements in liberal thought, and, like other human ends, cannot be defended or justified, for it is itself what justifies other acts. Equality is neither more nor less 'natural' or 'rational' than any other element which enters into ends which men pursue for their own sakes. Many policies and views of life, not obviously connected with equality, have (in fact) been surreptitiously smuggled in under its cover, in order to share in its prestige. But to isolate the pure ore of egalitarianism proper, from those alloys which the admixture of other attitudes and ideals has at various times generated, is a task for the historian of ideas and outside the purpose of this discussion, 326

'Equality' (contribution to symposium with Richard Wollheim),  
*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1955–6), 301–26

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**A** Preamble. 'Everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one' is the heart of the doctrine of equal rights. The formula is vague, ambiguous, neither self-evident nor universally believed; and it depends neither on the doctrine of natural rights, nor on that of positive rights, since it could be held for purely utilitarian reasons; nor is it imposed by the arbitrary will of a sovereign. Equality has been closely connected with belief in human rights, and is historically and psychologically intertwined with that belief,

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**B** Egalitarianism is a specific application of the principle that similar cases should be accorded similar treatment. This in practice means that uniform treatment should occur in those aspects of life which deeply matter to individuals. This is tantamount to saying that it is ‘natural’ or ‘rational’ to treat every member of a given class as one treats any member of it, and ‘unnatural’ or ‘irrational’ to break this rule. This formula can easily be reduced to nullity by

(a) accounting for all cases of unequal treatment by citing special circumstances to justify this; and

(b) by representing unequal treatment of members of any class as being equal treatment of them when viewed as members of some other class.

Such *reductiones ad absurdum* can be avoided only by making clear what considerations are relevant in each case; and this will itself depend on differences of value and purpose on the part of individuals or groups, which will in turn depend on unpredictable differences of situation. The method of the application of general principles to given situations can thus never in principle be exhaustively provided or justified, 302–4 108–9

**C** This position comes to saying that where there is equality of treatment no reason need be given for this; for it is ‘natural’ or self-justifying. Only inequality calls for justification. If I divide a cake among ten persons, to give each one-tenth is ‘self-evidently’ right; and needs no defending; only other ratios of distribution call for special reasons. This is the notion of equality as *intrinsically* rational or intrinsically just. This acceptance of the canons of uniformity, regularity, similarity, symmetry as *eis ipsis* superior to their opposites rests upon two further notions, namely those of rules as such, and of equality as an end desirable in itself, 304–5 109–11



**D** All rules, as such, entail equality. To enforce a rule is to promote equality of behaviour or treatment. This is true of moral, legal, religious, political rules, rules of teams, clubs etc. It follows simply from the proposition that rules do not allow of exceptions. So far as rules are necessary for the survival of any society, the equality entailed by them is coextensive with social morality as such, i.e. with the existence of any system of social behaviour. Rationality is then identified with a minimum degree of consistency of behaviour, required by any human association. Social morality may then be conceived as an interrelated network of mutually consistent rules. I may then be able to criticise such a political or moral system on at least three grounds. I may say:

(a) that the rules are broken for no sufficient reason, i.e. exceptions are protested against as such, equality demanded for its own sake; or

(b) that the rules concerned are bad because they are in conflict with other rules aimed at producing greater equality; or

(c) that the rules are deplorable because they are rules, i.e. because they promote the ideal of social equality, which is deplored as such. This is a direct attack on equality as a way of life, 305–11 **111–17**

**E** What is an egalitarian society? A wholly egalitarian society is one in which dissimilarity is reduced to a minimum. A society can be condemned for inequality because in it some are richer or stronger or freer or more famous than, or are in some other way markedly different from, others. This may derive from belief in natural rights. Alternatively, such condemnation may take the form of regarding all inequalities as irrational. Theoretically this last may extend not merely to inequalities of wealth or power, but to the existence of any form of authority, say that of the conductor of an orchestra. A pure egalitarian wants a society in which any differences which may tend to produce inequalities are removed. He will prefer a society in which men are as similar as possible, physically, mentally, emotionally etc. It may be thought that such a society is in practice unrealisable; or that violently tyrannical

measures would be necessary to bring it about. But this is not relevant to the concept itself. Such extreme equality – the maximum similarity of a body of all but indiscernible human beings – may never have been put forward as a serious ideal; but *those* parts of equality that have in fact been demanded are specific *modifications* of this idealised model, which for this reason is of central importance, 311–15 **118–21**

**F** Such modifications are:

(*a*)<sup>2</sup> orthodox *liberal* doctrines according to which, provided that men are (*a*) equal before the law, and (*b*) governed (in some sense) by their common consent, and (*c*) possess a minimum of civil liberties protected by the principle ‘one man one vote’, no further interference (say economic) should be permitted. It is plain that to insist upon such initial political or legal equality is to be influenced by ideals *other* than mere equality. Even such an egalitarian as Condorcet thinks that enlightened government can be secured only by elites armed with greater power than the governed. Elites are justified by the need, not for equality, but for creating a society in which certain other ends can be attained – e.g. happiness, virtue, justice, progress in the arts and sciences, etc. Condorcet supposes all these things to be compatible and indeed interconnected. The fallacy here, and its springs, 315–19 **122–6**

**G** It seems to follow that equality is *merely one end among many*, an ultimate principle whose compatibility with other equally ultimate principles cannot be guaranteed, but will depend on the concrete situation. The demand for equality often takes the form of a belief in ‘fairness’. Equality and fairness are closely bound up. Fairness is defined negatively as not breaking a rule, where the advantage of so doing depends on its being kept by others. Examples of cases where fairness is not compatible with maximum social happiness and other values. Desire to be fair is connected with moral sensitiveness, of which one of the criteria is liability to qualms of

<sup>2</sup> Apparently the only item in a list of modifications of the idealised model. Perhaps ‘Such modifications include orthodox ...?’

conscience at the prospect of certain types of action. Fairness, with equality, emerges as an end in itself, whose claim may, in a given situation, be rejected or reduced in favour of the claims of wholly different ends or visions of life. We choose as we choose, because one solution seems to us to embody a blend of satisfaction of claims and desires which we prefer as a total pattern to the blend provided by some other solution. Into such blends, versions of equality, equity, fairness etc. enter in various not easily analysable, nor exhaustively classifiable, ways, 319–24 **126–31**

**H** Examination of those who regard equality neither as one among many ends nor as an ultimate goal, but as *proceedings of the Aristotelian*, since they oppose all rules as such, and desire an unsystematic society, ruled by the arbitrary will of an inspired leader, or the unpredictable movement of the ‘spirit’ of a nation, race, party or Church. Such anti-egalitarianism is not as rare as some liberals and socialists assume, or as unsuccessful in its conflicts with the traditional Western principles of equality, justice, natural rights and a minimum of civil liberties. Belief in equality is a deep-rooted principle in human thought, but the notion that it is as self-evident to all sane men as that ‘red is different from blue’ – which the defenders of ‘natural law’ (and Locke at times) hold – is incorrect, as the subsequent career of egalitarianism has shown. As for extreme egalitarianism, which requires the minimisation of all distinctions between men, and the maximisation of assimilation and uniformity – this ideal is not prominent in the majority of actual political doctrines, largely because it conflicts with other equally ultimate ideals. Most of the influential ethical and political views seem to be forms of compromise between principles which, in their ‘pure’ form, cannot co-exist, 324–6 **132–4**

**I** In conclusion, equality is one of the oldest and deepest elements in liberal thought, and, like other human ends, cannot be defended or justified, for it is itself what justifies other acts. Equality is neither more nor less ‘natural’ or ‘rational’ than any other element which enters into ends which men pursue for their own sakes. Many policies and views of life, not obviously connected with

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**Posted in Isaiah Berlin Online and the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library 19 April 2024**