

ERC Consolidator Grant

REAL – *Rights and Egalitarianism*

Duration: 2019-2024

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REAL opens up new perspectives in moral and political philosophy by closing the rift between analytical theories of rights and egalitarian theories of distributive justice. There is a perception in both the academic and public discourse that pursuing egalitarian economic policies is incompatible with a commitment to rights. Socialist thinkers have traditionally been sceptical of rights, and contemporary egalitarian theories are often silent about them. At the same time, theories that take rights seriously either neglect the distributive dimension or suggest that egalitarian redistribution may infringe on individual rights. Egalitarianism and rights thus appear to be inhospitable to each other. This project seeks first, to understand what explains this divide and second, to demonstrate that it can be bridged.

REAL is motivated by the thought that a theory of justice would be more action-guiding if it could translate its recommendations into moral and subsequently legal rights. It thus aims to show that egalitarianism is not only compatible with a commitment to rights but that they are mutually supportive. The project will critically examine theories of rights and egalitarian theories of justice and adopts an analytical approach that blends arguments from political and legal philosophy, normative ethics and axiology in order to provide a novel and solid framework that integrates the two and advances current debates in these areas.

The project consists of 3 sub-projects.

1. **Sub-project 1** will examine theories of rights and the extent to which they might have implications that are inequalitarian. The question is whether there is anything intrinsic to the nature of rights that might rule out an egalitarian account of distributive justice.

There are several intermediate objectives here:

- a) to provide an account of rights that explains their special normative force or status;
- b) to refute the view that the interest theory of rights has egalitarian implications;
- c) to refute the view that the choice theory is not compatible with an egalitarian justification for rights.

2. **Sub-project 2** will examine the most prominent contemporary egalitarian theories and seek to uncover the reasons why egalitarian theories are hostile or, at best, silent about rights. The focus will be primarily on egalitarianism about distribution of economic goods, or distributive equality. Second, the egalitarian theories envisaged here are those that regard equality as valuable in itself and aim at an equal distribution rather than at reducing existing inequalities.

What this sub-project is expected to reveal is that what is missing from the literature is a deontic theory of (luck) egalitarian justice, i.e. a theory that can generate duties owed to individuals that would support an egalitarian distribution. Offering such a theory is the objective of the third sub-project.

3. **Sub-project 3** builds on the conclusions of the first two sub-projects and completes the framework that integrates the two perspectives. The objective here is to propose a blueprint for a rights-friendly theory of (luck) egalitarian distributive justice with global scope.