

Theories of justice and equality by michael walzer

Law



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The absence of X's advantage over Y is called a "blocked exchange" which in practice maintains boundaries between social institutions and practices. Inequities in one area are acceptable but cumulative and overlapping inequalities are not permissible. An accumulation of these inequalities can be the result of two different processes:

The influential position within one sphere can be used to gain access to a similar position in a different sphere. The notion of complex equality is aimed mainly at eradicating the possibility of this kind of exchange.

Power positions within two (or more) different spheres originate from a single common cause. This would imply that Citizen X has one single characteristic, which makes him excel both in works of literature, as in politics and in economic entrepreneurship. The theory of complex equality does not explicitly address this as a possible cause of cumulative inequalities (Hooghe, 1999, p. 211).

In summary, Walzer's complex of equality i...

The notion of "overall equality" should not be taken literally for;

a.) a higher ranking official cannot be offset against a lower ranking in another sphere and b.) in reality, it will be possible to find individuals who consistently outrank others across important spheres so that they are overall better off than the others.

Theoretically, if spheres are independent of each other (and the variables that determine rankings in different spheres do not co-vary), it is mathematically or statistically plausible that inequalities would cancel each other out if these can be reduced to a common denominator or metric. In contrast, under simple equality, the variables determining rankings in different spheres will more often than not correlate significantly, so that

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even, theoretically, overall equality will not prevail. It should also be noted that Walzer does not rule out the possibility of a particular individual becoming dominant in all spheres and thus, that overall inequality will triumph over complex equality but he believes that as long as the boundaries between spheres are policed efficiently, this is highly unlikely (Van Wyk, 2005, p292).

Prof. Walzer thinks that domination is not derived from dominant human beings but it is mediated by a set of social goods. He claims that " we have to understand and control social goods; we do not have to stretch or shrink human beings" (Walzer, 1983, xiii). So, instead of reducing distributive justice to some simple principle of egalitarian form, Walzer openly acknowledges the plurality of principles of justice and seeks to make this very pluralism the basis of equality (Miller & Walzer, 1995).