

Equality, Community, and Democracy

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Notiz für Momentum: Warum ist dieser Essay auf Englisch? Es handelt sich nicht um ein „recycletes“ Paper, sondern der Text ist extra anlässlich des Momentum-Kongresses geschrieben. Ich habe mich für Englisch entschieden, (a) weil der Diskurs, auf den implizit und explizit Bezug genommen wird, im Englischen stattfindet und (b) aus der Motivation heraus, diesen Text, falls er einer kritischen Diskussion u.a. auf Momentum standhält, in überarbeiteter Form breiter zugänglich zu machen.

Abstract: This essay develops an argument to defend equality and community as values fundamental to democracy. It is argued that democracy is based on political equality and freedom and that political equality requires distributive equality. A potential objection that redistributive policies reduce freedom is rejected as premature and unpromising. The value of community, so it is further argued, is important for democracy to stabilize both the condition of political equality as well as democracy itself.

G. A. Cohen, egalitarian philosopher at Oxford, whose unexpected death in 2009 constitutes an enormous loss for contemporary political philosophy and egalitarian activists alike, has argued that the ideal of socialism is fundamentally based on the norms of socialist egalitarian justice (as radical equality of opportunity) and on the value of community. I shall build upon this choreography by making the case for distributive equality and community as two fundamental values to democracy. A further fundamental value is freedom – a value which shall only be implicitly endorsed when defending redistributive policies against a potential freedom-based objection. Political civil freedoms remain untouched as critical values for democracy. Economic freedom, however, cannot, by definition, remain untouched. This, and the reason why private property rights should not be confused with freedom, shall be explored explicitly. This matter and why democracy requires distributive equality at all, will be subject of the first part of this essay. In the second part, I shall try to argue why the value of community is so important to democracy.

I. Democracy requires Equality

In this first part of the essay, I argue that democracy requires distributive equality. This argument is based, first, on the premise that political equality is a defining feature of democracy, and second, on the argument that political equality can only obtain if there is distributive equality in a relevant sense. A common potential counter-argument in the name of freedom is rejected by reference to a critical discussion of the use of freedom in this counter-argument.

(i) Democracy (crudely) defined

For the sake of clarity, the definition of democracy that shall be used in this essay is relatively crude and general. Further definitional details do not constitute, as I contend, the central grounds of this debate. I think it is sufficiently sharp for our purposes to define democracy as follows:

- (1) A democracy is a political system based on (a) political equality, (b) collective self-determination and (c) freedom.

Note that this is a definition of the *ideal* of democracy. The conditions (a) to (c) have to be met by reality (in a relevant sense) if democracy is supposed to be in place. They serve as necessary conditions criteria. Democracy is thus not meant as denoting actual political systems that are commonly described as “democracies”, or it is only denoting them in so far as they actually do meet the above stated criteria.¹

An important issue is to decide what we mean by “in a relevant sense”. I highlight this additional condition in order to make clear that we face problems here of drawing the lines in gradual questions: When are citizens politically equal *enough* in order for the condition to be satisfied? When is distributive equality *sufficient* to guarantee political equality as argued here? I deal with this issue in the end (v) of section I.

(ii) The concept of political equality

We are interested here in political equality as one necessary condition of democracy (as defined in (1) above). What is political equality? We shall approach this by asking in what sense it is to be a defining feature of democracy. The latter question, so I think, ultimately asks in what sense political equality provides normative appeal to the idea of democracy.

An answer to that can be found in the character of the state. The state as a monopoly of coercive force is at first glance inimical to individual freedom.² The fact that state power is supposed to be binding for every citizen requires justice in the way this power is generated if it is to be called democratic. Creating justice in the generation of state authority is providing legitimacy to the rule of law and its enforcement. Political equality is one element of this legitimacy, because only under political equality each citizen has an equal share in the generation (and continuous revision) of law.

It is on this background of basic political theory that we may understand the idea of political equality. The classic slogan of political equality is “One person, one vote”. So having equal voting rights is the standard notion of how citizens have equal shares in the generation of law. However, it is fairly obvious that modern politics involves other channels of influencing the legislative results than voting, think of lobbying, PR campaigns but also civil society protests. Thus, a translation of the slogan “One person, one vote” into modern politics, might involve a more open definition of political equality as follows:

(2) Political equality is an equality of opportunity for every citizen to have (ultimately) equal weight in decision-making-procedures.

¹ Further note, that we can deal with ideal type democracy at different levels and with reference to specific polities. In this essay, I shall restrict myself to the general realm of the principles underlying democracy. It is one feature of democracy that it may apply to various levels and institutional forms. Democracy in a modern state may well look different to democracy in a small village, and they may vary across different modern states and small villages. Democracy can apply to a corporation or a single state institution as well as to a group of people spending their leisure together. In short: democracy depends on context. However, I think the three necessary conditions capture its essence in all cases pretty well.

² This seems to me the reason why especially the third stated necessary condition of democracy, freedom, is important. Further note that I say “at first glance”, because I think freedom is restricted by any social order in one or the other way – so that the state is not per se more inimical to freedom than the absence of it. But it nonetheless contains its own characteristic element in itself inimical to individual freedom, namely the *monopoly* of coercive force.

This definition includes voting, but it can also be understood to include a wider range of channels, through which citizens can influence politics. Note that it is not the equality of *opportunity* that is the crucial egalitarian dimension of democracy, but the equality of opportunity to have *equal weight* in a decision-making procedure. It is the latter in which “One person, one vote” carries its normative appeal. The former, equality of opportunity, reflects the important value of not being obliged to get involved in politics, the right to abstain from politics. The attribute “ultimately” indicates that we may still have an element of indirectness, which creates political inequality in the immediate sense (say, by representation), but which is rooted in an equality of weight in decision-making-procedure (when it comes to delegation/election).

There is an intrinsic tension in definition (2), to which I briefly want to draw attention. As just mentioned, the equality of opportunity implies the important right to abstain from politics. Now the equality of weight is reasonably to be measured when everyone makes use of his or her rights to equal weight. This implies that the effective equality is distorted once some citizens make use of their right *not* to participate. I think this intrinsic tension between the right to equality and the right to abstain does not constitute a fundamental problem to our definition and its purpose, not only because the inequality might tend to be relatively small, but more so because it is a self-chosen inequality that can always be overcome by individual choice to “re-enter” the political arena. The inequality of weight that is of interest here is that which goes beyond this self-chosen inequality: The *inequality of opportunity* to have equal weight.

I think the general *idea* of political equality as defined in (2) is, among democrats, fairly uncontroversial. What might be controversial seems to me the question of scope. How broad or narrow do we consider political equality? Is the idea of political equality, as defined in (2), only applied to legal status of a person (narrow condition), or does regard the effective chances of influencing legislative results (broad condition)? For example, is political equality only violated, if some citizens’ *votes* are weighted unequally, or in an extreme case of the narrow version, if some citizens don’t have a vote at all, while others do?³ Or is it, in the broader sense, also violated, if the weight citizens have in decision-making differs due to other factors that go beyond voting and formal status, for example if one group of citizens organizes an expensive lobbying campaign which is not feasible to other citizens because they lack the means for that?

If we are to take the freedom-inspired normative appeal of political equality (as derived above) seriously, I think we have to adopt the broad condition, one which locates the realm of political equality in an understanding of politics beyond the narrow voting process. The reason for that lies in the nature of modern politics, and should become clear along with the argument for *distributive* equality as a precondition to political equality.

(iii) Why political equality requires distributive equality

So let us proceed to consider this argument. I argue that democracy requires distributive equality. This argument is based, first, on the now familiar premise that political equality is a defining feature of democracy, and second, on the argument that political equality can only obtain if there is distributive equality in a relevant sense. Note distributive equality is *not*

³ In practice, the dividing line usually goes along with the definition of “citizen” – so that the issue of political equality (narrow) becomes that of not all *persons* living in a state being counted as *citizens*, with whose status the right to vote goes along. Here, we are not concerned with that because here we are concerned with the relation between political and distributive equality.

understood as a *sufficient* condition to political equality. The core of my argument is that political equality requires distributive equality.

There are two different ways in objecting to this position. One is to question that distributive equality (and producing it qua redistributive policies) enhances political equality. The other is to argue that redistributive policies, independently of their effect on political equality, can only be feasible at the cost of other values, such as freedom. Given that democracy, according to our definition (1), requires not only political equality, but also freedom, the second objection may hold that political equality should at best be partially served, in balance to freedom (the liberal position), or shall be abolished completely as a goal of policy (beyond the narrow legal equality) because it is per se too inimical to freedom (the libertarian position). It is important to see that the second objection does not go against the argument that political equality itself is enhanced by distributive equality. I shall therefore postpone the second objection to a later stage (ii) of this section.

Let us first consider why distributive equality should enhance political equality at all. Most people think the satisfaction of basic needs for each citizen is sufficient for realizing political equality, so that he or she can physically participate in voting, stand for election, voice opinions or demonstrate. Others add that some basic education is required so that people understand politics, both in the sense how they can participate and in the sense how they are able to form their political preferences and judge political outcomes. So even the narrow view on political equality may embrace some minimalist distributive policies. My point here is that political equality in its broader sense requires *more* equality than those minimalist redistributive policies. I argue that inequality of resources⁴ in itself is inimical to political equality. I give two reasons, of which the first is of principle, whereas the second is empirical.

(a) Significant differences in resources allow individual citizens as well as groups of organized interests to disproportionately influence the political process and thus screw up the principle of political equality.

In short, the argument is that money can buy influence and that if money is distributed unequally, those in control of larger amounts of money have access to more political weight. In practice, the channels of buying influence with money are typically not corruption (which can also be put aside for conceptual reasons – as this is per definition illegal)⁵, but indirect influencing of political decisions especially by means of lobbying activities and attempts to influence public opinion through PR campaigns (“deep lobbying”). Those activities are costly and thus more, or to a larger extent, accessible the better endowed citizens or groups of citizens are.

Let me first put the above claim into perspective: The good news is that politics cannot be equalized to money. You cannot calculate an exchange rate between money and political

⁴ Which is dependent both on wealth and income, but in effect simply on what amount of money a person has at her disposal at one point in time as well as across his or her lifetime.

⁵ This does not mean it is irrelevant in practice: As soon as law against corruption is not effectively enforced, the anti-political-equality-potential of corruption increases with distributive inequality, which does not say that under complete distributive equality, corruption did not produce political inequality.

outcomes.⁶ People's preferences are not only susceptible to PR machineries but also to the ideas and normative appeals behind political proposals and outcomes.⁷ Likewise, politicians can be, more often than widely perceived, rational and responsible individuals, with their own mind and opinion.

The point is that resource advantage, even if not one to one, still is a prime source of political inequality. It is undeniable that resources matter in politics, because the production of ideas and policies is costly, as much as the attempts to convince citizens of those ideas are costly. Money matters in electoral campaigning (just consider the US as an extreme case), in party financing (from extravagant party conventions to monthly printed matters), in lobbying (at all levels, direct and "deep" PR campaigns), and even in civil society organisations (for whom money is critical to their existence, even if their main political resource is non-monetary: credibility). Often, the way money makes politics is very subtle and involves seemingly harmless things as nice receptions for decision-makers or unspecific PR-activities that help building long-term relationships.

Against this and in favour of a narrow view on political equality, the argument often goes that as long as the inequality of resources in the "production of politics" was transparent, it would not matter: in the end, citizens went to the ballots and here the rule of the game prevailed: "One person, one vote."

But this tends to overlook three issues: first, regulation, such as transparency requirements, aimed at rectifying political equality, will always drag behind reality or be insufficient under a structural asymmetry of resources to organize influence. Consider the attempt to regulate US campaign finance: Now we have Super-PACs that exist in a sphere beyond regulations for electoral campaign financing. It is hard to imagine a kind of regulation that effectively and sufficiently prevents loopholes through which concentrated resources can find their way to circumvent political equality.

Second, the technical quality of the production of political ideas matters. Those political proposals which have been designed carefully and professionally will in political practice have an advantage over ideas and proposals that are outlined less elegantly. And this is not only independent of the underlying normative intentions, but it is also detached from the potential technical viability. It is a consequence of the facts that producing political proposals is costly and that politicians face serious time and "brain capacity" constraints in a world of extremely complex decisions. This might be alleviated by providing representatives with more resources, but I think it cannot be sufficiently overcome given the complexity of modern politics and the impossibility of individuals to process all necessary information.

Third, all experience with product marketing teaches us, that people are susceptible to manipulation, and those who put most money in developing marketing strategies and campaigns for "political products" will have an advantage. It does not mean that they always get what they want. Politics is not a linear, predictable business. But as much as this might constitute good news, it also means: successful resource-intensive campaigns to change public discourse can

⁶ Albeit with a professionalization of a lobbying and PR industry, we are not too far away from something alike. Consider reports about the return on investments in lobbying, as this one for example: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2001015,00.html>.

⁷ Just as people do not only support policies that reflect their individual material interests.

have pivotal effects in the outcomes. Inequality of resources creates unequal opportunities to buy such pivotal changes. The more equal resources are distributed, the less this can be a source of unequal opportunities to influence decision-making procedures.

(b) Earners of low incomes not only relatively lack resources, but there seems to be a tendency for them to lack social capital and self-consciousness in order to participate on a par in the political process.

In contrast to the resource-based argument (a), the social capital-based reason, why distributive inequality harms political equality, is more subtle. It involves questions of social status, class and even less tangible issues like tastes, which Pierre Bourdieu calls “distinctions” (“die feinen Unterschiede”). Pinning down the exact causal factors may involve more speculation than factual arguments. Despite not being able to lift the burden of empirical proof, it seems to me most plausible that besides education it is social status that is key to explaining the inequality gap in political participation. Also, the educational divergence itself cannot be separated neither from resource inequality nor from social status.

But however we try to make sense of the “black box” of sociological explanations, empirically, the picture is clear: there is strong support for the assertion that less well-endowed citizens participate less in democratic procedures, no matter through what channel, be it voting, party activities, civil society organizations membership or participation in protests.⁸ So even if one is not able to explain this sociologically, or willing to accept our explanative attempt (b), the empirical evidence for the inequality gap in political participation remains in place. And this one is hard to refute.

One might object that causality is unclear. Although the most plausible explanation, which I have supposed in (b), seems that lack of participation is explained by poverty and inequality (be it for social capital reasons, for reasons of immediate resource inequality or for other reasons), causality might run the other direction. But note this would not question redistributive policies: If poverty and inequality were *explained* by the lack of participation of the poor, then redistributive policies would not only correct the negative effects (rather than the initial cause) of political inequality, but they would also prevent further regress.⁹

But more likely, there are at least reinforcing dynamics (i.e. causality runs both directions), in which case redistributive policy is an important remedy to act counter a long-term stabilization of political and distributive inequalities. So objecting to redistributive policies on the basis that they might not improve political equality seems an unpromising route for the opponents of redistribution. They might do well, and usually do so, to change the level of argument and bring in their favourite point, freedom, in order to oppose redistribution.

⁸ Compare for example Bödeker, Sebastian (2012): Soziale Ungleichheit http://www.otto-brenner-shop.de/uploads/tx_mplightshop/2012_02_07_Boedeker_AP_01.pdf.

⁹ Another route might be to say whatever has caused political inequality, redistribution will not affect political participation at all, not even in the long run. This amounts to saying that there is a third root cause why people are poor and why they do not participate, unless one (strangely) thinks the strong relationship between participation and relative poverty is accidental or unless one is willing to argue for something like a lock-in situation. I think this is a hardly tenable position. One may argue about how long an expected change takes after inequalities are reduced, and about additional requirements, such as improvements in education. But it does not seem to me a promising route to object to redistributive policies on the basis of questioning its beneficial effects on political equality.

(iv) Against the freedom-objection

It is a well-known objection to equality: that whatever noble ideal it be, and in this case whatever beneficial it might be to political equality, it comes at a cost: that pursuing it reduces freedom. As Cohen, a reproduction of whose thoughts¹⁰ is attempted here, points out: Even liberals, who may have sympathy for egalitarian goals, embrace this view. Whereas *libertarians* completely (or mostly) reject redistribution and give priority to freedom, liberals try to balance both values: a bit of redistribution, but not too much, in order to protect freedom. By arguing so, they (often only implicitly) embrace the idea that redistributive policies reduce freedom.

I think political philosophers owe a huge debt to Jerry Cohen to have pointed out that this argument relies on a misuse of the concept of freedom, due to which it is biased against redistributive policies. Exposing the “conceptual chicanery” (Cohen) it involves, reopens the discussion with far reaching consequences, as this essay is trying to show at the case of democracy.

As regards democracy, the freedom-based argument against redistribution goes as follows:

- (1) A democracy is a political system based on the ideals of (a) political equality, (b) collective self-determination and (c) freedom.
- (3) Redistributive policies enhance political equality.
- (4) Pursuing political equality through redistributive policies reduces freedom.

Given freedom is also a necessary condition of (1), (4) places limits on (3), according to liberals, or it forbids (3) at all (or at least beyond all which is necessary to create the narrow, formal political equality), according to libertarians. So at least some degree of political inequality is an evil to be accepted for sake of freedom.

Before reproducing Cohen’s critique of the freedom-objection, it seems useful to me in the context of democracy to distinguish different types of freedom, although I do not think that this distinction fundamentally matters. Ultimately, the definition of freedom used in the second part (b) of this section, captures the special case I shall draw attention to in the first part (a).

So if we are, for a moment, to distinguish political or civil freedoms from freedom in general, a good part of freedom-based objections may already be discharged. Political or civil freedom shall here then include the standard liberal human rights, such as freedom of speech, to assemble, to vote, freedom of press, etc. Note that the private property right is *not* included in this list, but it shall have to wait for part (b).

(a) Political freedom, as just defined, is not constrained by redistributive policies as long as they come by democratic means.

The key here is that I am defending a value, not a strategy. Equality remains something to be reached by democratic means and it is a challenge for political campaigning within the political system to convince citizens of the superiority of this ideal.

¹⁰ Cohen, G. A. (1995): *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality*, (henceforth: Cohen, SFE) Ch. 1-3; Cohen, G. A. (2011): “Capitalism, Freedom and the Proletariat” and “Freedom and Money”, in: *G. A. Cohen – On The Currency of Egalitarian Justice and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, Ed. M. Otsuka.

Those who are afraid that redistribution will involve a totalitarian regime seem to think that the (imperfect, think of Scandinavia or Japan) coincidence of (relatively) egalitarian societies with totalitarianism implies that distributive equality can only be feasible under totalitarianism.¹¹ I think this is a polemical assertion serving the privileges of the better off. It may be informed by the biased use of freedom which shall be exposed in (b), but typically this would not even be explicitly argued, but simply claimed.

Recall that in this essay redistributive policies are *justified* by enhancing democracy, which makes it absurd to equalize those policies with totalitarianism. Now, I admit that pursuing distributive equality under circumstances of distributive and political *inequality* is a tough task, since those who would have to give up wealth have more power to prevent such policies. Also recall of (iii)-(b) that political and distributive inequality may well be mutually reinforcing. But the challenge of circularity remains *strategic*, instead of being a conceptual or normative one. Calling the goal of redistribution anti-democratic is in itself an anti-democratic assertion, as it tries to exclude from democratic options what, so I argue, is a reasonable democracy-enhancing policy objective, as long as it is achieved democratically.

(b) Freedom, as absence of interference, is not per se reduced by redistributive policies, but may, while being reduced for some, be enhanced for many.

The definition of freedom entailed in (b) is the very simple definition of non-interference with someone's actions. Consider four examples: I am free to do A, if no one uses coercive force to prevent me from doing A. Likewise, I am not free to do A, if I am prevented from doing A. I am also free not to do A, if I am not forced to do A – as much as I am unfree not to do A if I am forced to do A. Freedom defined this way is often called “negative freedom”. I am not sure whether I find the positive/negative distinction helpful at all; at any rate, in this debate I certainly do not see how it could be helpful or clarifying in any sense. So when I speak of freedom, I use it in the sense of (negative) non-interference.

The crucial point of this argument is *not* to deny that redistributive policies reduce freedom for some. The point is that *any* distribution of privately owned resources implies a distribution of freedom and unfreedom, and for that reason, a general statement about the change in freedom by redistributive policies is not possible without further ado.

It is fairly undisputed that, under a regime of private property rights, if I own something privately, it makes me free to use it (as long as I do not interfere with others' rights). But the immediate consequence of this, a “banal truth” (Cohen)¹², is often overlooked: which is that the freedom I have over some privately owned resource goes along with the unfreedom of others over it. If I own this piece of land, I am free to walk on it - but you are not (unless I give you permission). Money is a crisp and crucial case of this resource-based freedom: If I have money to buy some P at a market, I am free to do so. If I do not have that money, I am unfree to get P. Cohen brings the example of a women not being free to visit her sister in Glasgow because she lacks the means to buy the train ticket. If she is to board the train, she can expect to “be

¹¹ It goes beyond the scope of this essay, but I think in fact totalitarianism is conceptually incompatible with egalitarianism. It would be more precise to speak of the (imperfect) coincidence of societies with smaller Gini coefficients with totalitarianism.

¹² Cohen, SFE (see n. 10 above), p. 55-56.

physically prevented from crossing that space”.¹³ Only the failure to perceive this obvious truth seems to explain the misuse of freedom in the debate concerning redistribution.

For any regime of property rights entails a distribution of entitlements to and restrictions of freedom. And it is false to claim that not interfering with private property rights by definition minimizes state interference, because even if the state does not interfere with the property-entailed freedoms, it reduces the freedom of non-owners by protecting the private property.

The libertarian assimilation of ownership rights and freedom is based on a conceptual circularity. The right of private property informs the libertarian (and liberal) definition of freedom: There is no interference with my freedom, as long there is no interference with my ownership rights. But that non-neutral definition of freedom itself is based on a neutral account of freedom: that is simply non-interference. Just that the neutral account of freedom is conceptually not available to an assimilation by ownership rights, as those, as much as they may entail *some* (neutral) freedom (the owner’s), also bring about (neutral) *unfreedom* for non-owners.

Note that all this is not an argument saying redistribution is a freedom-maximizing policy (although I believe it is, or at least one crucial element), but it is, far more modest, aimed at rejecting the freedom-based objection against redistribution. If we accept that privately owned resources have both sides, a freedom and an unfreedom side, the question of redistribution and its effects on freedom, the very “negative freedom” liberals and libertarians tend to make use of, is open for debate again.

Now, by all modesty concerning this argument, I still think it is fair to claim that it turns the tide against opponents of redistribution, given that by its very nature, inequality concentrates the resource-based freedoms on less people. But be that as it may, the main point to drive home here is this: Our argument for redistribution to enhance political equality is not that easily refuted by a freedom-based objection. It follows that the definition of democracy does not contain a conceptual tension between its necessary conditions of political equality and freedom.

(v) The relevant sense

As noted in the beginning, there is the issue of questions of degree. How do we draw the line when it comes to deciding whether the condition of political equality is met? When are citizens politically equal enough for democracy or when is distributive equality sufficient for political equality? For sure, it is just because these are questions of degree that gradual improvements in equality move us closer to the ideal and should be welcome. But still it remains a question of interest, from when on we may say: now there *is* political equality and every citizen has an equal opportunity to an equal share in the democratic process.

In my argument I have circumvented this issue by claiming that the status quo is such that the *violation* of political equality is hard to refute. By arguing that distributive *inequality* was a key factor to political *inequality* I have concluded that redistribution will contribute to approaching the ideal of political equality. Now as concerns the question “how much?”, I think there is no

¹³ Cohen, Freedom and Money (see n.10 above), p. 176. A Hayek-loving lecturer once told me: “She could take a plane, as that might be cheaper nowadays.” This cynical comment shows how the ordoliberal/libertarian outlook seems to make blind to perceive these trivialities.

ultimate answer. It seems to me near impossible to define a threshold from which on there *is* political equality.

But I do not think that this in any way questions the desirability of the defended policy objective of redistribution. It is rather a reminder of what the human world is like: that is, complicated. Asking for too simple ideals runs the danger of being naïve, even though clarity requires that we simplify wherever plausibly possible. As long as we acknowledge that, I think we can work around it by using clearly defined conditions and ideals as benchmarks for testing the status quo.

In that spirit, a pragmatic way seems to me to ask whether the conditions set up here are met *in a relevant sense*. The relevant sense is, as it were, a reminder of the fact that not everything can be defined down into stone and eternity. It depends on the context of politics and institutions, and it depends on the level on which we are considering the ideal of democracy. The “relevant sense” requires participants of the debate to acknowledge the “sense” of the ideal, which is tentatively captured in definition (2).

Note that this implies that ultimately, the task of testing reality against our ideal is an intersubjective one.¹⁴ But, the more relevant the case, the clearer a violation of our ideals will be and thus the sharper our condition of the “relevant sense”. If one person can make donations to an electoral campaign that have more impact than a multitude of others could afford, it seems clear that political equality is violated in a relevant sense. Finally, acknowledging that our task is an intersubjective one, affirms why it is so important to draw attention to another key component of democracy, one which shall be in the centre of the next part of this essay.

II. Democracy and Community

This part of the essay is more speculative, but I think it is pointing at a challenge that is no less relevant to democracy. I argue that a shared value of community is an important element of democracy. The justification of that is split into two parts. In a first part, I refer to Cohen’s argument relating community and equality. Here community is understood as justificatory community. In a second part, I argue why democracy itself makes a shared sense of community essential. Here community is a broader ethos of sharing one democratic polity.

(i) Democracy demands a shared sense of community because of equality

It has been argued in Part I that democracy requires political equality and that political equality requires distributive equality. In his argument for socialism¹⁵ G. A. Cohen points out that some inequalities that might be permissible on the grounds of socialist justice still violate a shared ethos of community, which, according to Cohen, grants that those inequalities should not be permitted from a socialist perspective. One might be tempted to follow that equality *requires* community. But I am not sure about that – because note that Part I of this essay also justifies equality beyond justice and thus disburdens community from being a necessary condition for equality. But I think it is fair to claim that community *stabilizes* equality.

¹⁴ From a perspective of the “politics of discourse”, this implies that this approach is vulnerable to political inequalities, but note (a) that this problem increases with inequality in our status quo - which again implies that the violation of our ideal will become the more obvious, and hence less prone to “issues of degree”. Further note (b) that this is a general problem: anyone who is not willing to accept the premisses or conclusions of our argument can just refuse to accept them or to enter deliberation at all.

¹⁵ Cohen, G.A. (2009): “Why not socialism?”

Consider the example Cohen gives to illustrate why community plays an important role for distributive equality, even when the equality in question goes beyond the realm (or even possibly violates¹⁶) of principles of justice:

I am rich, ... you are poor ... You have to ride the crowded bus every day, whereas I pass you by in my comfortable car. One day, however, I must take the bus, because my wife needs the car. I can reasonably complain about that to a fellow car-driver, but not to you. I can't say to you: "It's awful that I have to take the bus today." There's a lack of community between us of just the sort that naturally obtains between me and the fellow car driver. And it will show itself in many other ways, for we enjoy different powers to care for ourselves, to protect and care for offspring, to avoid danger, and so on.

I take Cohen's point as that without mutual understanding of one another's economic circumstances, there is no social fundament for doing politics with one another. We simply do not understand the worries and complaints of one another if our daily resource constraints fundamentally differ. We may want to call this a lack of "justificatory community"¹⁷. Now Cohen's interest here is socialism, and he traces the equality socialism requires to principles of justice *and* community. We arrive at community via democracy: we have argued that democracy requires equality and we take from Cohen's point that if we have inequality, democracy will also suffer from a lack of community, and that community will stabilize equality, which is beneficial to democracy. Without a shared sense of community, our ideal of political equality, because it is based on distributive equality, lacks the social fundament of mutual understanding. We have thus argued why democracy demands community via equality.

(ii) A shared value of community is a crucial requisite for democracy itself

I shall now add an argument why I consider a shared value of community as a crucial requisite for democracy itself. Here, community is less to be understood as "justificatory community" but as community in the sense of belonging together and sharing a common polity.

This argument is rather detached from the preceding course of the essay in as much as it refers to cultural developments within "Western" democracies¹⁸. It claims that the modern democratic state here is confronted more than ever with the challenge to procedurally blend a diverse society democratically into one polity. This is known as a classic challenge of politics, the tension of "e pluribus unum", but posed more urgently than ever due to a widening range of policy areas and an increasing social differentiation.

Social differentiation is occurring in as different areas of life such as workplaces, cultural identity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, ideas of a good life etc. I do not question at all that these dimensions of *diversity*, in contrast to resource *inequality*, should be emphatically welcomed as an expression of an increasing cultural freedom. But it should be acknowledged that increasing diversity poses a challenge to create political outcomes binding for all.

The challenge for democracy is even greater as this arguably coincides with a political fragmentation. We can observe a decreasing relevance of the classical institutions of corporatist

¹⁶ Compare Cohen, Socialism (see n. 15 above), p. 37.

¹⁷ Compare Vrousalis, Nicholas (2012): "Jazz Bands, Camping Trips and Decommodification: G. A. Cohen on Community", in: *Socialist Studies* 8.

¹⁸ Note that this is the empirical concept of "democracies" mentioned in I-(i), whereas "democracy", to which this is regarded as a challenge, continues to be the ideal as defined in part I.

democracy (such as trade unions, political parties or, possibly, the church). Another reinforcing factor might be an increasing individualism and more autonomous lifestyles. People are less willing to commit themselves to political organizations. The question is, how can citizens create mutually binding rules of self-government if there is not some kind of political connectedness, some consensus of democratic self-government, according to which citizens accept democratic procedures and their results as legitimate?

As has been argued in the previous section II-(i), political and distributive equality are important ingredients to such mutuality, and they become ever more important if other, cultural and life-style related sources of shared realities cease to exist. But equality alone cannot provide the basis for democratic self-government among free equals.

What malicious friend-enemy projections have historically too often served for, can, so I argue, in a much more benign way be replaced by a shared notion of community. Such shared value serves to stabilize the democratic field and enables a diverse society to create policies and rules of self-government without washing away conflicts in substance. I have in mind a binding element, a layer of some kind of democratic consensus, or, as Habermas has called it, a “constitutional patriotism”, that is thin enough to incorporate the welcome diversity, but which is strong enough to keep the one polity together. In that function it not only makes collective politics possible, but also stabilizes mutual tolerance and the granting of rights and dignity.

We may look at it as if the conditions stated in definition (1) were the formal building blocks, but that they only come to life if the binding force of a shared value of community lives up to these formal requirements. One specific dimension of this community is the equality-related “justificatory community” of II-(i). The other, procedural notion of community of II-(ii), a constitutional patriotism, is the layer which creates and stabilizes the democratic field. Both have in common that they require people to, as Cohen puts it, “care about, and where necessary and possible, care for, one another, and, too, care that they care about one another”¹⁹.

It seems to me striking in the light of much right-wing informed political discourse, but also hardly surprising as someone who has sympathy for the ideal of socialism, that community and equality, two norms, Jerry Cohen has identified as fundamental to socialism, might turn out to be two fundamental norms to democracy alike.

¹⁹ Cohen, *Socialism*, (see n. 15 above), p. 34-35.