Sufficiency, Equality, and Pluralism[1]

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Introduction

Justice demands that the benefits and burdens of social cooperation be distributed in a particular fashion, in accordance with some principle(s) of justice. Many political theorists believe that those principles are egalitarian in character. They believe that justice demands that benefits and burdens be distributed equally. But others disagree. For example, one staunch critic of egalitarianism, Harry Frankfurt, has said that egalitarian thought contributes to the moral shallowness of our time and diverts our attention away from considerations of greater importance than equality.[2] In place of principles of equality, Frankfurt favours principles of sufficiency. He argues that "If everyone had enough it would be of no moral consequence whether some had more than others"[3].

Many have followed Frankfurt's lead and defended principles of sufficiency to the exclusion of principles of equality. But recent critical discussion of sufficiency suggests that to be plausible, sufficientarians must capture concerns other than achieving sufficiency in some particular good.[4] If these critics are correct, then sufficientarians must look to combine their principles with others forming a pluralist account of distributive justice. This in turn leads us to ask whether rivalry with equality is, as Frankfurt held, essential to the sufficientarian position and if not, whether and how the two can be fruitfully combined into a pluralist account of distributive justice.

In this paper, I argue that sufficientarians should be pluralists and examine the ways that a fundamental concern with sufficiency can be combined with a fundamental concern with equality. I

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[1] I am grateful to Lasse Nielsen, David Axelsen, audiences at the University of Bayreuth and Aarhus University and I am very grateful to Viki Pedersen for providing a thoughtful critical discussion of the paper at the workshop in Aarhus.
[2] (1987: 23)
[3] 1987: 21)
[4] (Casal, 2007; Shields, 2012)

begin, in Section One, by stating what I take to be the minimum claims that one must make to hold a distinctive sufficientarian position and, drawing on the critical literature, I explain why it is that sufficientarians should be pluralists. In Section Two, I examine two ways that sufficientarians have sought to respond to this critical literature, and account for the injustice of some inequalities, by endorsing multiple sufficiency principles. I argue that these sufficientarian approaches do not avoid the criticisms that motivate pluralism. In Section Three, I set out and examine sufficientarian pluralist views that combine a concern with sufficiency with a concern with priority or equality. Section Four discusses the possible fruitful combination of sufficientarianism and relational egalitarianism. Section Five concludes that contrary to early statements of sufficientarianism the view can and should be combined with egalitarian views.

I Why Should Sufficientarians Be Pluralists?

Sufficientarianism is the view that securing enough of some good has special normative importance. That special importance is captured by its two defining theses.[5] The positive thesis asserts that securing enough is of fundamental importance. The shift thesis asserts that further benefits have lesser, different, or even no fundamental importance, at least from the point of view of distributive justice. This is a broad characterization of sufficientarianism. It is worthwhile noting that the weaknesses of monist sufficientarianism can be traced to extreme versions of each thesis as that this is what motivates a move to pluralism.

Consider sufficientarian views that take the "special importance" of securing enough to consist in attaching to that achievement such great weight that we ought to maximize the number of people

[5] These theses originate from Casal, 'Why sufficiency is not enough', *Ethics* 117 (2), (2007), 296-326.

who secure enough.[6] For these Headcount Sufficientarians, securing enough is so much more important than securing any amount that is less than enough, that we would be justified in denying benefits to the very worst off who cannot reach the threshold in order to benefit those just below the threshold, however small those benefits. This implication of the view is counter-intuitive.[7] The mistake made by those who characterize sufficientarianism in this way is misunderstanding the special importance of securing enough by taking an extreme version of the positive thesis. That special importance does not lie in attaching enormous relative weight to securing just enough. Rather it lies in the, sometimes not enormous, difference that securing enough makes to the way we should weigh the claims of prospective beneficiaries.

By far the most common versions of sufficientarianism endorse an extreme and eye-catching version of the shift thesis, known as the negative thesis. Upper-Limit Sufficientarianism holds that once we have secured enough we no longer have reasons, of justice at least, to be concerned with the distribution of benefits and burdens.[8] However, it too is vulnerable to a powerful objection since it implies that huge and avoidable inequalities in the currency of justice are entirely unproblematic when everyone has secured enough. This is known as the Indifference Objection and it points to the problem inherent to an Upper-Limit Sufficientarian threshold: it is unconcerned with both the least advantaged and with inequalities once the threshold is met by all.

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[6] D. Dorsey, 'Toward a Theory of the Basic Minimum', Politics, Philosophy and Economics, 7 (2008), 432-437; E. Page, Climate Change, Justice and Future Generations, (Edward Elgar: 2006), 85-95; E. Page, 'Justice Between Generations: Investigating a Sufficientarian Approach', Journal of Global Ethics, 3 (2007), 11; J. Roemer, 'Eclectic Distributional Ethics', Politics, Philosophy & Economics, 3 (2004), 273-4, 278-9.

[7] Shields, ' The Prospects for Sufficientarianism'

[8] Axelsen, David V., and Lasse Nielsen. "Sufficiency as Freedom from Duress." Journal of Political Philosophy (2014); Benbaji, 'The Doctrine of Sufficiency'; Y. Benbaji, 'Sufficiency or Priority?', European Journal of Philosophy, 14 (2006), 327–348; H. Brighouse and A. Swift, 'Educational Equality versus Educational Adequacy: a Critique of Anderson and Satz' Journal of Applied Philosophy, 26 (2009), 125-6; Casal, 'Why Sufficiency is not Enough', 298-300 and 310-314; Crisp, 'Equality, Priority and Compassion' and 'Equality and Compassion'; Holtug, 'Prioritarianism', 149-154; R. Huseby, 'Sufficiency: Restated and Defended', The Journal of Political Philosophy, 18 (2010), 178-197; J. Kekes, 'A Question for Egalitarians', Ethics, 107 (1997), 658-669; L. Temkin, 'Equality, Priority or What?', Economics and Philosophy, 19 (2003), 65-66; L. Temkin, 'Egalitarianism Defended', Ethics, 113 (2003): 745-63; K. Widerquist, 'How The Sufficiency Minimum Becomes a Social Maximum', Utilitas 22 (2010): 474-480.

If sufficientarian principles do have a fundamental role in our thought about distributive justice, then we must balance our concern for being distinctively sufficientarian with our concern for being plausible. This means eschewing the most extreme forms of commitment to the idea that achieving sufficiency has special importance, and insisting that securing enough does make a significant difference to our reasons to benefit people. Accordingly, our characterization of sufficientarianism should be general and weak, but nevertheless capture the core distinctive idea of sufficientarianism. I believe it is best expressed, as follows.

> *Sufficientarianism*: we have **weighty non-instrumental** reasons to secure at least **enough** of some **good** and that there is a **discontinuity** in the rate of change of the marginal weight of our reasons to benefit that person further once they have enough.[9]

There is a different and less technical way of putting this, which I will refer to from now onwards: we have weighty non-instrumental reasons to secure at least enough of some good and a different profile of reasons applies to further, supra-threshold, benefits and burdens.

To be distinctive, sufficientarians must claim that our reasons to secure enough are weighty and non-instrumental because their rivals can agree that securing enough food for everyone is instrumentally important, for non-sufficientarian reasons, such as maximizing or prioritising welfare. What is distinctive about sufficientarianism is the change or shift in our reasons to benefit persons once they have secured enough, and not merely because our reasons become uniformly weaker as individuals secure more of some good, as some versions of prioritarianism claim.

[9] Shields, Liam. "The prospects for sufficientarianism." *Utilitas* 24.01 (2012): 101-117.

The search for at least a minimum level of distinctiveness pushes us towards this characterization of sufficientarianism, but concern for plausibility, and in particular avoidance of the indifference objections, pushes us towards pluralist versions of sufficientarianism. To see this, consider the Indifference Objection again. In order to convincingly respond to that objection we must insist that once people have secured enough of some good we still have reasons of distributive justice to be concerned about the distribution of benefits and burdens. As such, we must appeal to some further and distinct principle or currency. So, to avoid the force of the indifference objection, sufficientarians should become pluralists because it is only by doing so that they could capture our intuitions about inequality or the least advantaged once everyone has enough. So, what sorts of pluralists should sufficientarians be?

I should note at this point that I am using the term "pluralist" in an unusual way.[10] I am not referring to value pluralism, the view that there are distinctive and incommensurable fundamental moral values. I am not referring to reasonable pluralism, the view that there are a variety of distinctive ways of life that are legitimate and worthy of respect. Rather, I am referring to pluralism in distributive principles. I will argue that sufficientarians, those who believe that there is at least one sufficiency principle in a complete and sound theory of distributive justice, should also believe that there is more than one distributive principle in a complete and sound theory of distributive justice. I define a distributive principle as having a pattern, scope and a currency component. The pattern specifies how the benefits and burdens should be distributed. The scope specifies over whom it should be distributed in that way. The currency specifies what exactly it is about benefits and burdens that should be distributed in that way across those people. To give an example, a person who believed that sufficiency principles should regulate the distribution of liberty and an equality principle should regulate the distribution of wealth and income would be a pluralist, while a person who believed

[10] I am grateful to Søren Flinch Midtgaard for pressing me on this point.

only that we should secure for all a sufficient level of well-being would be a monist, as many sufficientarians are. Anyone who believes that there is more than one fundamental principle of distributive justice is a pluralist in this sense.[11]

II – A Sufficientarian Solution?

In this section I consider a strictly sufficientarian solution to the problem posed by the Indifference Objection and show their inadequacy. There are two general approaches to making sufficientarianism pluralist so that it avoids the indifference objection without being committed to a non-sufficientarian distributive principle. First, one could hold the view that there are multiple sufficiency thresholds within a single currency.[12] Second, one could hold the view that there are multiple currencies that it is important to have enough of, with only one threshold per currency.[13] Each of these approaches have been attempted recently in the literature and I examine them here and then discuss the approach more generally.

Multiple Threshold Sufficientarianism

The salient features of Multiple Threshold Sufficientarianism are that it attaches quite urgent priority to securing enough at a lower level, such as basic needs, then has at least one more threshold that marks the upper-limit, beyond which indifference to inequality or the least advantaged is appropriate. One of the advantages of such a view relative to monist sufficientarian views is that the separation of the threshold that satisfies the negative thesis from the threshold that satisfies the positive thesis. The level of sufficiency that it is supposedly extremely important to meet is not the

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11 A nice example of a pluralist view is in Roemer, J. "Eclectic Distributional Ethics", but Rawls is also a pluralist in this sense as he endorses at least three distinct distributive principles.

12 Benbaji, 'The Doctrine of Sufficiency'; Y. Benbaji, 'Sufficiency or Priority?', European Journal of Philosophy, 14 (2006), 327–348. Casal, 'Why sufficiency is not enough'; R. Huseby, 'Sufficiency: Restated and Defended', The Journal of Political Philosophy, 18 (2010), 178-197

13 Axelsen, David V., and Lasse Nielsen. "Sufficiency as Freedom from Duress." Journal of Political Philosophy (2014). Arguably Huseby falls within this category too.

level of sufficiency at which indifference begins. Proponents of this view thus overcome an important dilemma, which Paula Casal has pointed out, that is motivated by the intuitions behind the Indifference Objection that monist views are vulnerable to.[14] The dilemma can be expressed as follows: The lower the single threshold is set the more implausible it is to attach the positive claim but the higher the single threshold is the more implausible it is to attach the negative claim to it. It thus becomes highly difficult, if not impossible, to avoid either setting the thresholds too low or too high if there is only one threshold. Several sufficientarians have been motivated to avoid this dilemma. Robert Huseby and Yitzhak Benbaji do avoid this particular dilemma by employing multiple thresholds.[15] But they are not fully successful in avoiding the force of the Indifference Objection, which supports a move to pluralism. For this reason, their attempts are in vain.

While indifference is less counter-intuitive the higher the threshold, it never really ceases to be counter-intuitive where questions of distributive justice arise. Indeed, defences of upper-limit thresholds are strongest where the individuals in the examples are so well off that even large inequalities seem trivial and so not a matter of justice. Consider a case similar to Roger Crisp's Beverly Hills case, where it is possible to benefit either millionaires or billionaires.[16] Such a case, it seems, is outside the circumstances of moderate scarcity where principles of justice are thought to apply.[17] If so, then this view is indistinct from views of justice that deny that there is a point beyond which we should be concerned with inequality, but accept the principle of justice only apply in these circumstances. Alternatively, the case could be within the circumstances of justice but the difference

[14] Casal, Why sufficiency is not enough, 315-316

[15] Benbaji, 'The Doctrine of Sufficiency'; Y. Benbaji, 'Sufficiency or Priority?', European Journal of Philosophy, 14 (2006), 327–348. Casal, 'Why sufficiency is not enough'; R. Huseby, 'Sufficiency: Restated and Defended', The Journal of Political Philosophy, 18 (2010), 178-197

[16] Crisp, Roger. "Equality, Priority, and Compassion." *Ethics* 113.4 (2003): 745-763: 755.

[17] Even if we live in moderate scarcity globally but a particular good is available for distribution only between two individuals or groups who are extremely well off this narrow question of distribution is not one that plausibly falls within the conditions of moderate scarcity and, if there are circumstances of justice, then whatever reasons we have to prefer one sufficiently well off individual or group benefitting are not reasons of distributive justice.

would still seem to matter. For example, it seems in these cases that the difference is between those who have a large share of a particular currency and those who have a much larger share in cases of hyper-inflation. If such differences are very real and not merely an illusion of a distorted currency, then why wouldn't it matter that some do worse than others through no fault or choice of their own in ways that are consequential for their share of the goods that justice is concerned with? No better justification can be given in the case of these exclusively sufficientarian pluralist views than can be given in the case of monist upper limit sufficiency views.

One compelling multi-threshold view is defended by Robert Huseby.[18] By focussing on welfare and contentedness Huseby aims to show that a maximal threshold of subjective welfare can accommodate our intuitions about troubling inequalities above the threshold and thus avoid the force of the Indifference Objection.[19] The reason for this is that our own welfare assessments depend crucially on how well off we are *relative* to others. In other words: our subjective welfare is sensitive to inequality, even inequality amongst the very well off. So, if Sarah is above the threshold and some windfall were to benefit everyone but Sarah, Sarah's welfare may fall below the threshold, even though she is no worse off in absolute terms than she was prior to the windfall. If the threshold is set at contentedness the sufficiency principle identifies as objectionable inequalities that generally cause people to be less than contented, as in Sarah's case. So this view can capture our worries about some inequalities.

The first thing to say is that this advantage only seems to be available to views that endorse subjective welfare as their currency. If instead we care about giving people sufficient objective welfare, resources or capabilities it is unclear how some windfall benefit to all others (in terms of this

[18] R. Huseby, 'Sufficiency: Restated and Defended', The Journal of Political Philosophy, 18 (2010), 178-197

[19] In responding to an objection like the indifference objection Huseby says, "The version of sufficiency that I have presented here is not vulnerable to this objection. It is not blind to all kinds of differences in welfare levels. The relative deprivation of the person left behind in Holtug's scenario, makes it very hard to for her to be content in an environment in which she is considerably worse off than others." Huseby, Sufficiency: Restated and Defended 183

currency) except one person would diminish one's objective welfare, capability or resources in absolute terms below some threshold.

But the second thing to say is that, it is not clear that this view will capture our intuitions about the importance of equality in the distribution of supra-threshold benefits. Many people's subjective welfare is not affected by inequalities in present day societies, even though such inequalities are great and seem morally problematic. This example shows that the concern with inequality is a contingent feature of some people's psychology. People often adapt their preferences to their social situations and their share of welfare. In such circumstances an inequality-generating windfall would not be condemned by the sufficientarian view. While some of these preference adaptations may be condemnable by a supplementary principle, it looks like the reason it is condemnable is that it requires a person to view themselves as not entitled to roughly equal shares of goods, even where everyone is well off. This cannot be captured by a subjective welfarist and since subjective welfarists appear to be the only ones that can secure the advantage of avoiding indifference to inequality associated with sufficiency plus sufficiency views, the advantage comes at a significant cost.

The final and more decisive argument against such views, however, is that it doesn't seem to be correct to say that inequalities in welfare levels can cause insufficiencies in welfare levels unless we are talking about two different types of welfare. There's an endogeneity problem if there is a tight link between sufficiency of welfare and equality of welfare, where sufficiency and equality are distinctive distributive ideals. Consider that if welfare was the fundamental currency of justice and it is distributed in accordance with an upper-limit sufficientarian principle, then it would be compatible with inequality in that same currency. This is just what it means to be an upper-limit sufficientarian. Only if the welfare equality that welfare sufficiency was supposed to secure was in a distinct currency could we hope for such coincidence. If this is our predicament, then we should choose between, or give priority to, one kind of welfare level. By doing this we are currency pluralists and not principle pluralists. This may be best way of classifying Huseby's view, in the end, and I will give that approach a separate treatment, but his view does not help support the Multiple Threshold Sufficiency View in the face of the indifference objection .

Sufficiency in Many Currencies

Another approach that sufficientarians have and may take to avoid the force of the indifference objection and yet resist the appeal of non-sufficientarian distributive principles is to endorse a plurality of sufficiency principles each for a different currency. According to such principles, we should secure "enough" of some currency and then we should be concerned with securing enough of other currencies as well, so we should not be indifferent about distributions once everyone has enough of one currency and if inequalities above the threshold of one currency influence whether people have enough of another, they can condemn this as well.

I will discuss David Axelsen and Lasse Nielsen's attempt to avoid indifference to distributive concerns once sufficiency is achieved.[20] I argue that there is still problematic indifference remaining with the view, which shows theirs is not a view that evades the force of the Indifference Objection.

Axelsen and Nielsen argue that justice requires that individuals are free from duress. A person is free from duress when they are not subject to *significant* pressure or face *significant* obstacles in achieving success in *central aspects of human life*.[21] This entails that inequalities of obstacles or pressures are consistent with full distributive justice so long as they are not *significant* or so long as they are not in relation to *central aspects of human life*. The notion of "significance" is left intuitive, but the notion of "central aspects of human life" is given some definition. They explain that "Central areas of human

[20] Axelsen, David V., and Lasse Nielsen. "Sufficiency as Freedom from Duress." Journal of Political Philosophy (2014).
[21] See 'Freedom from duress, then, entails freeing people from significant pressure in certain central areas of human life, while others are to be considered beyond the scope of justice.'

life, then, are the aspects of life that humans have in common or, in other words, that play an essential role in any human life" or, put another way, justice demands that individuals enjoy freedom from duress in "necessary but not sufficient ingredients of a successful human life."[22] Freedom from duress is not the same as equal opportunity nor is it merely a matter of will that a person faces no significant obstacles or pressure against succeeding. This is important to distinguish the view from both equality of outcome and equality of opportunity, where the most closely related view would be one that states that equality of obstacles or pressures in central areas of life or equality in achievement in central areas of life is what is demanded by justice.

Axelsen and Nielsen argue that insofar as inequalities should concern us it is for reasons to do with insufficiency in one or more of the important central aspects of human life. One reason for this, they argue, is because of positional or relational logics of some capabilities.[23] Having less than someone else in some respect means you cannot have enough in another respect. They give the example of political freedoms.[24] Unequal political freedoms, such as an unequal number of votes, may lead to insufficiency of self-respect. This insufficiency constitutes duress with respect to an important goal. Of course, the view is able to explain that inequalities in material wealth may translate into insufficiencies in important dimensions because they lead to a deficiency in control over one's life or a deficiency in self-respect. This is a great advantage of the view and improves on monist sufficientarian views, but it is far from clear that it can account for the problematic

[22] Axelsen and Nielsen, p. 409-410.

[23] 'One's absolute position may, thus, be determined by one's relative position, in which case a person may become insufficiently free because of relative deprivation—but it is the insufficiency that creates a problem, not the inequality in itself. Indeed, most often when distributive egalitarians point to unjust inequalities, these are actually positionally determined insufficiencies, we claim.'

[24] This point is reflected in our claim that the absolute value of certain capabilities is positionally determined—that is, it is determined by the way they affect (or comprise) one's social position and the relationships in which one stands to others. Thus, when the aristocracy is given two votes while the plebs retain only one, this inequality affects the social basis of self-respect of the plebs and their capability for engaging in respectful relations with their societal peers in an absolute sense. Akin to relational egalitarians and in tune with the notion of positional goods, then, we affirm that an unequal distribution may generate insufficiency and place people under duress but not due to the distributive inequality itself.

indifference to inequalities and the least advantaged that the indifference objection points us to and that pluralism is motivated by.

But other goods might not have such positional logics and inequalities in those goods need not frustrate sufficiency. Nevertheless, I want to claim that equality at least seems to have some normative relevance. In anticipating this line of objection, Axelsen and Nielsen give the example of housing, health and nutrition as goods with respect to which

> "it seems wrong to say that people need *equal* levels of housing, health, or security to be able to lead successful lives. For example, one is not under pressure that would impair any normal person in their pursuit of a successful life simply because one has a less perfectly enhanced health than others."[25]

They are correct about this second point. Inequality in these areas does not always entail, and perhaps never entails, an inability to lead a successful life. However, whether inequality in these areas always entails an inability to lead a successful life is not the relevant question. The relevant question is whether inequalities in those goods conflict with the demands of distributive justice and it is plausible that they do. In constructing a case it is difficult to avoid describing circumstances where there could possibly be spill over effects, that could lead to insufficient in self-respect, for example, that Axelsen and Nielsen could explain. But I shall try to provide one that avoids that problem.

Imagine a society where all housing is identical apart from one factor. Everyone enjoys affordable, spacious, well-insulated, well-maintained and well connected housing with equally large, and sufficiently large gardens. But soil composition in this society varies quite dramatically. Some houses benefit from gardens that drain very well when it rains and are suitable for growing a wide variety of flowers and fruits and vegetables with very little maintenance. They are also suitable for recreational

[25] IBID 420.

activities. Other houses have gardens contain mainly clay soil, which is heavy to move around, does not accommodate flowers and fruits and vegetables and when it rains, and it rains often in this society, the garden remains wet and boggy for a good deal of time and therefore unsuited to recreational activities. Nevertheless, it is not plausible to think that such an inequality in garden quality is a significant obstacle to the flourishing or self-respect of those who have the worse quality gardens. But if a public works program could install drainage or replace much of the clay soil with better quality soil, then justice would plausibly demand that we assist these people rather than do nothing with the available resources. But doing nothing and improving the gardens are judged on a par by Freedom from Duress accounts of distributive justice because they are upper-limit sufficientarian accounts of distributive justice.

We can imagine other cases regarding security where there are avoidable inequalities in risk of anti-social behaviour and other minor crimes and regarding health problems that lead to only minor inequalities in life expectancy. It is more just to address them than not. Of course, it is right to say in reply that these are not our *first* duties of justice. But the theory is not only supposed to explain our first duties but also all other duties of distributive justice, and it seems the Sufficiency in Many Currencies view cannot explain why these inequalities are problematic. But perhaps the specific examples make it hard to see whether the theory offered by Nielsen and Axelsen could not explain the intuitions.

A further example with a more general structure so as to avoid the response that our intuitions are focussing on insufficiency and not the inequality is now worth considering. Imagine obstacles and pressures in society are set up so that additional, but minor, obstacles and pressures randomly face some in society and not others, in securing meaningful work, advancing their career, developing their skills etc. Imagine that this equates to a 98% chance of success for those who do not face the additional but minor pressure and a 90% chance of success for those who do face it. Imagine also that such additional pressure is not targeted at particular historically disadvantaged or persecuted groups but rather is distributed randomly. Surely, if we are able, it is more just to either distribute any additional pressure or obstacles equally amongst the sufficiently well off, resulting in 94% and 94%, or to diminish such inequality to achieve, say, 98% v 97%, when we assume that only pressure diminishing your chance to less than 90% is significant. I think the example here and the one above illustrates the importance of equality even if sufficiency of this sort is fully satisfied. This is just to say that even if the obstacles are not *significant* that would not imply that their removal or diminution was irrelevant to justice.

A General Objection

I now wish to make a final objection which I believe applies to both of these attempts to make sufficientarianism pluralist without adding a fundamental concern with a non-sufficientarian distributive principle, one that has been implicit in the above discussions of both approaches.

Principles of sufficiency state that securing enough is of special importance such that we have strong reasons to be concerned that people secure enough and that once they have secured enough our reasons are of a different kind. Upper-limit sufficientarians, including those discussed in this section, claim that we have no reasons of distributive justice to be concerned with supra-threshold benefits. It is, as was noted in the introduction, an extreme version of the shift-thesis. But the upper-limit threatens to render sufficientarian views that endorse it indistinct. To see why, consider the claim that upper-limit sufficientarianism implies: that once a group of people have secured enough we have no reasons of justice to be concerned with the distribution between that group. But if we have no reasons of justice to be concerned with the distribution between that group, then nothing distinguishes this principle from an maximizing, prioritarian or other principles. They too can endorse the upper-limit. If there are no justice-based reasons to be concerned with the distribution of benefits and burdens beyond level 'L', then we could be prioritarians or maximizers below that level. There is no essential commitment within prioritarianism or maximizing principles that entails a commitment to the never-ending justice-salience of benefits and burdens. Indeed, if we believe that moderate scarcity is one of the circumstances of justice, then all principles of distributive justice will accept that there are circumstances when, because individuals have or can have so much of the currency of justice, that justice ceases to apply.

As such, the upper-limit sufficientarian views which hold both that securing enough is valuable and that once enough is secured we have no reasons to be concerned about the distribution, are not making a claim that cannot also be made by prioritarians or proponents of maximizing principles. For this reason, there is no disagreement between them and no way that this could be a respect in which sufficientarianism is superior to its rivals.

To break it down, see that the upper-limit sufficientarian with many thresholds or many currencies endorses two claims. First is a distributive claim, which states that securing enough, rather than less than enough, is important. Let's say enough is level E. Whatever the level E, prioritarians and proponents of maximizing principles will also endorse this claim because they believe that it is important and valuable to have more rather than less. The second claim is not distributive. It is about the domain of the distributive and not about what should happen within that domain. It states that level E is also the level beyond which benefits and burdens are of no concern for justice. But prioritarians and maximizers can also accept this claim since they *can* accept that the currency of justice is not always justice-salient. Indeed, prioritarians and maximizers about justice are just concerned about prioritizing and maximizing within the domain of justice. Those principles are constrained by precisely the sort of meta-claim the upper-limit sufficientarian makes. So this couldn't be a distinction between upper-limit sufficientarianism and prioritarian or maximizing principles. All of those views operate only within the domain of justice and all of those views endorse the claim that wherever E is it is important to be above rather than below it. For this reason, upper-limit sufficientarianism is not distinct *qua* sufficientarian and so for any upper-limit sufficientarian view we can have a prioritarian or maximizing view that offers the same guidance. Therefore, upper-limit sufficientarian views are not genuine rivals to those views and so cannot be the most plausible views of distributive justice.

In order to be distinctive sufficientarians have to accept and leave space for their being supra-threshold benefits that are justice salient. They also have to accept that with respect to those supra-threshold justice salient benefits all possible distributions are equally just. Without that commitment, their view is not distinct. This is a further, structural reason, why the attempts to rescue sufficientarianism by becoming pluralist without endorsing non-sufficientarian principles fail. Sufficientarians must accept that there are justice-salient supra-threshold, benefits and that entails that some other principle must regulate their distribution. In other words, sufficientarians must be a principle pluralist and include some non-sufficientarian principle.

III Sufficiency and Equality or Priority

As well as noting that sufficientarians should be genuine pluralists about the distributive considerations that apply to the currency of justice, we should also note that the force of the indifference objection was, even by the sufficientarians discussed above, taken to derive from intuitive concerns with unjust inequality. For this reason, we should suspect that coupling sufficientarianism with equality is a promising approach, contrary to Frankfurt's early remarks. Here I briefly discuss the combination of sufficiency with priority and sufficiency with equality before, in the next section, considering how, and how well, sufficiency can be accommodated within a relational egalitarian framework of distributive.

Sufficiency Plus Priority

There are some reasons for thinking that combining sufficiency with prioritarianism is more plausible than a purely sufficientarian pluralist view.[26] Sufficiency plus Priority avoids commitment to an upper-limit, but these views face some problems that are similar to those faced by Sufficiency plus Sufficiency. First, indifference to inequality is possible on the Sufficiency plus Priority view, though not indifference to the least advantaged once enough is secured. A default in favour of equality may seem more plausible above a threshold. Two types of example are pertinent to whether inequalities are troubling above the threshold, even if due priority is given to the least advantaged. First, cases whether large benefits accrue to some people and exacerbate inequality do seem problematic. For instance, the transmitter room cases. In this sort of case, at least if the victim of the transmitter room cases is at least sufficiently well-off, we may be a lot less concerned with aggregating benefits and more concerned with equalizing. Second, and the flip side of the first case, are we concerned about waste above the threshold insofar as it would promote equality? This question is a difficult one to answer, but it seems a lot less troubling to waste benefits above the threshold than below. So whatever force the anti-waste objection has it has less here. Moreover, if benefits are generally fungible, then the worry that we might have to favour equality at a low threshold level rather than inequality with everyone at a much higher level, goes away.

Second, and a slightly more difficult problem is that, a proponent of Sufficiency plus Priority would struggle to explain why we should have different types of priority apply to those above and below the threshold. One explanation is that we have different reasons, and I think this can be defended,

[26] Campbell Brown

but it draws attention to a general worry which is that if, by making our view more plausible we make it more closely resemble prioritarianism, then why not endorse monist prioritarianism? Sufficiency plus equality seems to have a much more secure claim to being distinct from monist prioritarianism than does sufficiency plus priority.

Sufficiency Plus Equality

Sufficiency plus equality views are able to capture intuitions about inequality above sufficiency, which seem to motivate pluralist views, and they do so better than sufficiency plus sufficiency, which often takes inequality in a non-fundamental currency to be the object of our concern with inequality. Instead, we can say that we should give each enough, and then distribute equally. Of course, this view then faces a levelling down worry and a possible waste-based version of the indifference objection. Much will turn on what version or what aspect of indifference we have most reason to worry about, which I won't be able to address here, but would basically re-run equality or priority debates for supra-threshold rather than all distributions.

The thing to note, however, is that some people are unconcerned about levelling down and would be less concerned about it at a higher level and if it is within a general pluralist account of justice anyway, it could avoid the force of the strongest levelling down objections. Whereas, those drawn to prioritarianism, could prefer that to sufficiency plus priority and sufficiency plus sufficiency views.

IV Relational Equality

If we are genuinely disturbed by the indifference to inequalities that is implied by versions of sufficientarianism, and are reluctant to endorse a version of equality that is vulnerable to levelling down, then relational egalitarianism may offer a framework within which indispensable sufficiency principles can be found and the indifference objection resisted. My aim in this section is to show both that relational egalitarianism seems committed to non-instrumental sufficiency principles and can offer persuasive responses to the indifference objection. In achieving this aim I will have shown that sufficiency and equality can, and should, be fruitfully combined, contrary to Frankfurt and others.

Relational egalitarian views identify our concern with equality as a concern not with distributions, fundamentally, but with equal social relations. It has been noted that these views are compatible with and even imply sufficientarian distributive principles.[27] Relational egalitarians have often argued that sufficiency, and an ability to meet our basic needs in particular, is a key requirement of political morality.[28] When the achievement of sufficiency is unequally realised in a society it cannot be said to have achieved relational equality. The existence of privilege and affluence alongside poverty and insufficiency constitute an unequal social relation, one that would be inconsistent with any persuasive ideal of relational equality. So, there is room for non-instrumental sufficiency principles consistent with commitment to relational egalitarianism because valuable equal social relations cannot be achieved if some (avoidably) lack enough of some goods. But now we must ask what resources this relational egalitarian and sufficientarian pluralist view has to respond to the indifference objection.

Often relational egalitarians are concerned with establishing certain negative claims, identifying conditions that relational equality is incompatible with. Other times they are concerned with establishing more positive claims, identifying necessary conditions of relational equality. And once the sufficiency-requirements of equal social relations are achieved relational egalitarians these considerations provide resources to respond to the indifference objection faced by all versions of upper-limit sufficientarianism in a compelling way.

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[27] Martin O'Neill, 'What Should Egalitarians Believe?, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 36 (2008), pp. 119-156; John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: a restatement*, (Cambridge, Mass, 2001), pp. 130-131; T. M. Scanlon, 'The Diversity of Objections to Inequality', *Lindley Lecture*, (1997), re-printed in his *The Difficulty of Tolerance: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 202-18.

[28] Anderson, "What is the point of Equality?"; Anderson, "How should egalitarians cope with market risks?"

In explaining the ideal, Samuel Scheffler claims that our conduct should be informed by the idea that everyone's life is equally important and that all members of society have equal standing. He gives examples of oppression, heritable hierarchies (of social status), castes, class privilege and rigid stratification and undemocratic distributions of power as things to which relational equality is opposed. It is sensible to think that relational equality is non-instrumentally linked to these examples. It is sensible to think that heritable hierarchies and oppression are not merely opposed because they make relational equality less likely to be achieved, or to be achieved at a higher degree. They are opposed because they constitute relational inequality. Thus, whatever reasons we have to eradicate these features of societies are non-instrumental. The same can be said of heritable hierarchies and class privilege. Such hierarchies are consistent with sufficiency of many areas. The pernicious hierarchy between the destitute and the very well off would not exist. But there are other hierarchies that can exist between those just getting by and those who are extremely advantaged and powerful. This suggests that it is not only insufficiency that threatens social relations and this provides resources to respond to the indifference objection.

Scheffler insists that people are entitled to make some claims simply in virtue of their citizenship and status. Society is social cooperation between individuals of equal standing.[29]

[29] "Equality, as it is more commonly understood, is not, in the first instance, a distributive ideal, and its aim is not to compensate for misfortunate. It is, instead, a moral ideal governing the relations in which people stand to one another. Instead of focusing attention on the differing contingencies of each person's traits abilities, and other circumstances, this ideal abstracts from the undeniable differences among people. It claims that human relations must be conducted on the basis of an assumption that everyone's life is equally important, and that all members of a society have equal standing. As Anderson insists, in defending a version of this ideal, equality so understood is opposed not to luck but to oppression, to heritable hierarchies of social status, to ideas of caste, to class privilege and the rigid stratification of classes, and to the undemocratic distribution of power. In contrast to the inward-looking focus of luck egalitarianism, it emphasizes the irrelevance of individual differences for fundamental social and political purposes.. As a moral ideal, it asserts that all people are of equal worth and that there are some claims that people are entitled to make on one another simply by virtue of their status as persons. As a social ideal, it holds that a human society must be conceived of as a cooperative arrangement among equals, each of whom enjoys the same social standing. As a political ideal, it highlights the claims that citizens are entitled to make on one another by virtue of their status as citizens, without any need for a moralized accounting of the details of their particular circumstances. Indeed, it insists on the very great importance of the right to be viewed simply as a citizen, and to have one's fundamental rights and privileges determines on that basis, without reference to one's talents, intelligence, wisdom, decision-making skill, temperament, social class, religious or ethnic affiliation, or ascribed identity." P. 22

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"People may claim equal rights as citizens, but the interpretation and application of those rights will often depend on features of their individual circumstances. And special circumstances may at time give rise to special rights." P. 22.

Meeting everyone's basic needs is important on the relational equality view, but we need not be indifferent above the threshold or to manna from heaven. All goods must be distributed in a way that maintains our equal social status, with due weight given to considerations of sufficiency.[30] If such benefits were distributed in a way that entrenched existing power inequalities or even by a process that neglected to weigh the interests of each possible beneficiary they would tend towards a relational inequality. So there are various relational egalitarian reasons that would constrain inequalities in distributions way beyond sufficiency, such as in Beverly Hills-type cases, and they would admit that the fundamental reason is one of equality.

Carina Fourie identifies relational equality as necessarily opposed to hierarchies of social status and discusses two ways in which these hierarchies might manifest themselves.[31] She describes hierarchies of social status as a way of ranking people and opposition to such ranking is the central

[30] "Clearly, for example, people whose basic needs have not been met – people who lack adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, or medical care – cannot participate in political life or civil society on a footing of equality with others, or can do so only with great difficulty. Even if basic needs have been met, a society cannot be considered a society of equal if the resources that individual have available to pursue their most cherished ends is left entirely at the mercy of market forces." P. 23

[31] "I describe social equality as consisting of, at least, one necessary condition – an opposition to hierarchies of social status – and identify a distinction between what I refer to as direct and indirect social inequalities." P. 109

concern of relational equality.[32] She also has more to say about what such hierarchies are. A status hierarchy occurs as an expression of an unequal relationship, specifically a relation between inferiors and superiors. The inferiority supervenes on the inequality of the relationship.[33] This consists of an evaluation and an expression of this evaluation.[34] Without the expression, evaluations of inferiority are unproblematic suggests Fourie. Indeed, as she says, it is difficult to see how this could generate an unequal relationship between two people if it is never expressed (vocally or otherwise).[35] But showing indifference to inequalities above the threshold, as upper-limit sufficientarians do, can *express* disdain and disrespect. Note that the upper-limit sufficientarian attaches no positive weight (in terms of justice) to benefitting the least advantaged or anyone else, even though hierarchies can emerge amongst those who have enough if inequalities are great, for example.

Finally, Christian Schemmel argues that the relational egalitarians should build their positive theory on an understanding of the attitudes expressed by institutions in their treatment of citizens.[36] Schemmel argues that attitudes can be attributed to institutions and not merely the individuals that work within them and that some such attitudes are non-instrumentally unjust.[37] The reasons why these attitudes are unjust is not because they tend to produce maldistribution, as defined by any particular principle of distributive justice. Schemmel notes the attitudes of contempt, neglect,

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[32] "An opposition to ranking people according to hierarchies of social status appears to be the central tenet of social equality." P. 111

[33] "A status hierarchy occurs when a behaviour, social practice or policy expresses a particular kind of unequal relationship between a person or group of people, and others. More specifically, it is a relationship between inferiors and superiors. In this relationship, one person is deemed to be an inferior in relation to another p[person who is either directly deemed to be a superior or who, by virtue of their relationship to an inferior person, automatically becomes superior. P. 111

[34] "Social equality, then, expresses an ideal where people stand in equal relation to each other rather than being treated as better or worse, inferior or superior. When someone is considered to be an inferior, this consists of both 1) an evaluation and 2) an expression of that evaluation." p. 112

[35] "While the aspect of evaluation, and not differentiation per see, is a necessary component, on its own it is insufficient to delineate social inequality – if I evaluated someone as inferior or superior but this never found any sort of expression, it is difficult to see how it could result in an unequal relationship between people." P. 113.

[36] Schemmel, Christian. "Distributive and relational equality." Politics, philosophy & economics 11.2 (2012): 123-148.

[37] 137-142

inferiority, disregard and disrespect.[38] Such attitudes can be expressed in any numbers of ways, but they can certainly be expressed consistent with society realizing sufficiency, even at a high level. If there remain benefits that are important for helping people flourish in the central areas of human life or simply help them in terms of capability or welfare then they can be distributed in ways that express contempt or disregard or disrespect, for example. If the institutions fail to benefit the least advantaged among the sufficiently well off and instead benefit the most advantaged this can show disregard and contempt and disrespect.

In another paper Schemmel argues that relational egalitarians cannot be upper-limit sufficientarians and defends a default in favour of equal distributions as a requirement of relational equality.[39] More specifically, Schemmel argues that relational egalitarians should endorse a presumption of equality in distributions and this would apply even once sufficiency is achieved. He explains

> "if the basic structure has to display egalitarian concern for participants in the enterprise of cooperative production that it regulates, then this means that it has to aim at distributing advantages and disadvantaged that are socially produced equally, unless there are sufficient reasons for an unequal distribution."[40]

This presumption, and even any counterveiling reasons, would provide positive reasons always to distribute benefit and burdens in some particular way, they would exclude the possibility of indifference that upper-limit sufficientarianism endorses. Although Schemmel focuses on socially produced goods, and that is enough to establish my claim that sufficientarians and relational egalitarianism can be fruitfully combined, we might extend this presumption of equality to manna

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[38] 141

[39] See Why Relational Egalitarians Should Care about Distributions p. 369 fn 10 and 11 where Schemmel explains that relational egalitarians cannot be upper-limit sufficientarians about distributions.

[40] IBID P. 371

from heaven too, certainly in the absence of any counter-veiling reason to do otherwise. Again, this presumption would offer resistance to the indifference objections.

So combining sufficiency with relational egalitarianism can to address injustice can be fruitful because sufficiency can account for distributive injustice and insufficient but relational egalitarianism can account of the fact that above that threshold there are still constraints of just on the reasons for distributing further benefits and burdens and taking other political actions.

V Conclusion

In this paper I have motivated the need for sufficientarians to become pluralists in order to defend an indispensable role for sufficientarianism in a sound account of the demands of justice. I have provided some examination of the ways in which sufficientarians may be pluralist. I concluded that two views that have sought to address the indifference objection in this way have not fully succeeded and suggested a fruitful combination with equality may be an attractive way to go.

Generally I am concerned that the indifference objection isn't going to go away unless you simply accept the need for non-sufficientarian principles to supplement sufficientarian ones. Partly because I worry that in response to any counter-example you either say 1) these inequalities aren't relevant to justice – therefore indistinct from prioritizing or maximizing if we eschew the head count claim or 2) these inequalities can be explained by sufficiency. But sufficiency has to leave space for morally important surplus to be distinct and if it is morally important, then it should be distributed fairly. This is the line of argument that it is possible to generally advance regardless of currency or number of thresholds, though in the above I have focussed on actual views. Finally, we do well to note that there may be a way of fruitfully combining the attraction of sufficientarianism and concerns about inequalities by seeing sufficiency principles are part of the distributive approach grounded in relational egalitarianism.