



# The Equal Society: Essays on Equality in Theory and Practice

George Hull (ed.)

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Issues around equality have become of critical importance in our globalised world. Thomas Piketty in France and Paul Krugman in the United States are among many contemporary economists who have stressed the centrality of the impact of inequality on the welfare of nations and peoples. The rise of right- and left-wing populists like Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders is a visible manifestation of the political impact of inequality.

This volume therefore comes at a propitious time. The product of an international conference of philosophers held in Cape Town in late 2014, its 14 contributors examine a wide range of practical and epistemic issues related to equality and inequality.

It is clear that the concept is contested. Part One, which is devoted to theories and approaches, asks many important questions: What does equality mean? Is it a pattern of the distribution of goods and services or is it a set of relationships? What is to be distributed? How is it to be distributed?



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The authors, all leading experts, discuss traditional theories, such as those of Immanuel Kant and John Rawls, and explore the insights of contemporary theorists including Christian Schemmel and Amartya Sen. In today's world of "winner-takes-all" and the "global village", these are vital issues.

Unfortunately, the authors make little contribution to public policy or contemporary political debates. Although Part Two is titled "Putting equality into practice", the chapters are largely conceptual, theoretical, and argued at a high level of generality. The book thus represents a dialogue between philosophers. For policy-makers and the general reader, alas, the discussions will have limited relevance. I would argue that the context within which inequality is created and perpetuated is critical to understanding and that purely theoretical analyses have limited practical value. For this we will have to wait for the publication of a more policy-oriented study that locates key issues within the context of political choices and technological change. [NA](#)