

Different goods can come to different people, at different times, with different probabilities. How do those facts combine to determine the overall goodness of an outcome? Investigating that foundational question in normative ethics—call it the question about *the structure of the good*—is the broad topic of my research. In particular, I investigate the sub-question of whether and how the unequal distribution of goods among persons detracts from the goodness of outcomes. In a secondary strand of my research, I then put this foundational work in normative ethics to use in applied ethics. There are a variety of personal and policy choice contexts in which equality and fairness are salient normative considerations. In this secondary strand of my work, drawing on the results of my theoretical investigations, I try to clarify the ethical issues at stake in these real-world controversies. By pursuing these parallel lines of inquiry in normative and applied ethics, I aim to improve our understanding of what the ideals of fairness and equality demand of us. In what follows, I sketch the more specific research projects that fall under each heading.

A. (Normative ethics) Explaining inequality's badness

It is clear that at least some inequalities can be instrumentally bad—that is, bad in virtue of their causal upshot (e.g., because of their corrosive effects on democratic institutions) or in virtue of how they were caused (e.g., by failures to satisfy a duty of equal concern). It is far less clear how it could be that, as egalitarians believe, some inequalities are non-instrumentally, or in themselves, of moral concern. Egalitarians have spilled a great deal of ink in identifying *which* inequalities could most plausibly be claimed to be of non-instrumental moral concern. Comparatively little work has been done in explaining *why* certain inequalities are non-instrumentally morally objectionable. This question—call it the *explanatory challenge* for egalitarianism—is for two reasons important. First, any moral view is more acceptable the better that the claims it involves or entails can be, in turn, explained and defended. Second, egalitarianism has some particularly surprising implications. My prior work on egalitarianism serves as a good illustration. My “The unit and currency of egalitarian concern” (Journal of Moral Philosophy, 2019) argues that inequalities with respect to some of the individual constituents of wellbeing can be a site of independent egalitarian concern, even if people are equally well off overall. This implication of egalitarianism cries out for explanation. My “Inequality: do not disperse” (Utilitas, 2020) argues that inequality, if it is non-instrumentally bad, must be an impersonal bad. This result deprives egalitarians of one way to explain the source or basis of egalitarian concern. And my “Egalitarianism and the levelling down objection” (Ratio, 2018) argues that the egalitarianism is acceptable only if it can be housed within a nonconsequentialist moral theory. To determine whether there is a plausible basis for doing so, one needs to know what is the source of a moral concern for inequality. For these reasons, answering the explanatory challenge is of central importance in determining whether there is reason to accept egalitarianism.

My current focus is a pair of major, related papers in which I address the explanatory challenge for egalitarianism. These two papers draw on and develop the core insight of my doctoral thesis. The first, “How might inequality's badness be explained?”, proposes and defends a systematic framework for thinking about explanation within ethics. The second paper, “Explaining inequality's badness” draws on this framework to defend a novel explanation of certain inequalities' non-instrumental badness. The central idea is to argue that certain inequalities stand in a metaphysically intimate relation—the metaphysical constitution relation—to a distinct normative consideration, unfairness. As a result, the badness of the latter can explain the badness of the former. This constitutive-explanation strategy is difficult to make good on. To succeed, it has to tread a narrow path between unattractive alternatives. It must be shown that inequality and unfairness are closely connected *enough* to vindicate the egalitarian claim that inequality is more than merely instrumentally bad. But it must also be shown that inequality and unfairness are not *so* closely connected (e.g., by simply being identical) that the badness of the latter could not explain the badness of the former. But corresponding to the

strategy's difficulty is its great promise. If successful it delivers a genuinely informative explanation of inequality's badness and amounts to a decisive refutation of the familiar criticism that a non-instrumental concern for inequality is groundless. A third planned paper—"Unlucky inequality of welfare and inequality of opportunity of welfare"—argues for the subsidiary thesis that egalitarians cannot escape the explanatory challenge by identifying opportunity for welfare as the currency of egalitarian concern. Assuming this project is successful, the longer-term project of which it is a part is to assess the comparative merits of the resulting egalitarian view against competing views in distributive ethics.

B. (Normative ethics) Other questions about the structure of the good

In the past two years, I have begun broadening my work in theoretical ethics beyond my focus on inequality. In these more recent projects, I investigate a range of related and/or more general questions about the structure of the good. One project concerns the ethics of so-called 'backlashes'—i.e., cases in which our attempts to do some good (e.g., by reducing unfair inequalities) are met by others doing more ill, for the very reason that we tried to do some good. In my "Backlash ethics" (in progress), I investigate this question, arguing that sometimes one ought to ignore the prospect of such a backlash, on the grounds of the importance of a certain kind of moral harmony.

A second project concerns axiological conservatism—the view that there is reason to preserve particular existing bearers of value over and above the reasons given by the value of which they are the bearers. Building on my "Conservatism reconsidered" (2021, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*), which gives a novel defense of axiological conservatism, in this project I investigate the contours of conservatism, with particular focus on the question of whether the reason to preserve an existing bearer of value survives the loss of the value that it bears.

Finally, a third project investigates the connections among goods, reasons, and oughts. Building on our "Wrongfulness rewarded?" (2021, *Synthese*), which argues for a surprising limitation on our normative powers to reward, in this project we investigate whether there are redundant reasons—i.e., reasons that count in favor of an action but do not even partly explain its deontic status. This project is joint work with Ben Schwan (Case Western Reserve University).

Taken together, the broad theme that emerges from these projects is that the structure of the good is surprisingly complex. That result is noteworthy in itself. It also coheres with my defense of inequality's badness. If—bracketing issues concerning inequality—the structure of the good were not complex, that might cast doubt on egalitarianism; if, by contrast, we have independent reason to believe that the structure of the good is complex, then the truth of egalitarianism is in one way less surprising.

C. (Applied ethics) Fairness in healthcare, education, and in algorithmic use

In this second, applied-ethics strand of my work, my focus is on three policy contexts—education, healthcare, and policymakers' use of algorithms—in which fairness is a salient normative consideration but in which it is often unclear which policy option is favored by fairness. (Indeed this is a core theme both in my "How far can political liberalism support reforms in higher education?" (*Social Theory and Practice*, forthcoming) and "Justice in higher education: lessons from the case of highly selective universities" (*Theory and Research in Education*, 2017).) In a series of planned future papers, I put some of the theoretical results discussed in A and B above to work in answering this question. The intended result is to diagnose and clarify the sources of real-world normative disagreement about significant policy questions.

Building on the pair of published papers on educational justice papers above, which focus on institutional obligations of justice, one planned project investigations the justice-given obligations of parents under unjust circumstances. A second project investigates the egalitarian credentials of algorithms that purport to operationalize a concern for egalitarianism, and asks what is the fundamental bearer of algorithmic unfairness. This project is joint work with Clinton Castro (Florida International) and Ben Schwan (Case Western). A third project explores whether and why fairness in healthcare allocation requires chances of receiving scarce healthcare, and (if so) what kinds of chances.