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## Essay 42

# A Schutzian Approach to the Problem of Equality-Inequality



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## Abstract

“Equality” is one of the most prevailing value in modern society. It is almost taken for granted that equality has to be guaranteed, advanced, and achieved in any sphere. As such, the idea of equality continues to be one of the basic principles of modern social theory since J. J. Rousseau discussed it.

Equality is, however, not a definitive but a “sensitizing” (H. Blumer) and “empty” concept, i.e., it might take on various connotations. Many scholars interested in the problem of equality-inequality as a social phenomenon therefore have made efforts to fulfill it with some contents. Their discussions tend to adjust their focuses on “Equality of What?” (A. Sen), examine various types of equality, and draw a conclusion on which type of equality has to be given higher priority over others, founded on some basic assumptions taken for granted. One assigns higher priority, for example, to “equality of resource,” another to “equality of capability,” a third to “equal opportunity to the welfare,” and a fourth to “equal access to the advantage,” and then there is no way to reconcile to each other.

Empirical researches led by such discussions might accumulate many data and findings in quantity, but could not develop an adequate theory of equality-inequality, and could not also deepen understanding of the social phenomenon of equality-inequality. In this respect, we had better, I think, consult Schutz’s contribution to the Fifteenth Symposium of the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion held at Columbia University in 1955.

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This essay aims to examine the significance of Schutz's phenomenologically oriented discussion about equality to the inquiry into a problem of equality-inequality in particular, and the significance of his phenomenologically oriented social theory in general.

## Introduction

The problem of equality is one of the oldest problems which has been discussed from various perspectives and various disciplines. But recently, new types of inequality are occurring, e.g., those involving so-called globalization and internet communication. Although they are making the artificial national borders meaningless, and making it possible for all people to share common information, they are producing new inequalities, for example, "technological minorities" through computer literacy or illiteracy. The problem of equality is taking on greater significance. This paper is dedicated to a search for an adequate way to approach the problem of equality.

### I. How Has the Problem of Equality-Inequality Been Treated?

(1) "Equality means to treat similar people in a similar way." This famous definition of equality by Aristotle is absolutely true. No one can refute this definition as such. This definition, however, gives no statement about equality in any actual sense and can not be applied in actual and concrete cases. Both the denotation and the connotation of this definition depend on the denotations and connotations of the terms of "similar people" and "similar way" which constitute the definition, and the latter can be extended or limited or modified with no restriction. Thus, we could interpret any social relations as either equal or unequal relations consistently with this definition for no other reason than that every one is the one and only in the strict sense and is different from any other. The Aristotelian definition of equality, which depends on the assumption that "Nature has made all men equal," is intrinsically empty.

(2) After Aristotle, many philosophical and ethical discussions have been dedicated to fulfilling such empty terms as "similar people" and "similar way" with more substantial and general contents. Those discussions bring out the issues of which kinds of different people might be treated justifiably in which

different kinds of ways. It seems to me, however, that there is no agreed and shared answer to these questions as of now.

(2-1) But one opinion seems to be shared in common among various literatures on equality: that there are two aspects or phases in saying that people are treated equally. The one is equality in terms of opportunity (equality of opportunity) and the other is equality in terms of outcome (equality of outcome). Equality of opportunity is focused on equal chances for “each person” to realize their own capacities or to get benefits or rewards, and equality of outcome is focused on the equal distribution of “valuable resources” to “each person.” Since the focus of the former is on chance, it can be called formal equality. In contrast, equality of outcome can be called substantial equality.

(3) In the initial stage of modern society, these two equalities could be pursued at the same time without contradiction. Late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in France, for example, the bourgeoisie, which appeared against the status-society named Ancien Régime, encouraged by the Enlightenment, especially the conception of human rights, began to demand equal rights to participate in politics (equality of opportunity). On the other hand, seen from the point of view of the nation-state, equal distribution of resources was one of the immediate and primary goals to be pursued (equality of outcome), because the homogeneous citizen was required for the management of the burgeoning state. In this era, these two demands were pursued in company with each other.

(3-1) However, when a system of distribution of resources was established and instituted enough to maintain a minimum standard of “ordinary” living in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a contradiction appeared between these two equalities. The guarantee of equality of opportunity led to inequality of outcome. For example, the conditions of unregulated competition (equality of opportunity) are inclined to lead to oligopoly, which results in inequality of outcome. Then discussions are required, on the one hand, about how to achieve equality of opportunity in reconciliation with equality of outcome, and on the other hand, about “equality of what” (Sen 1992). It can be said that the aim of these discussions is to establish the normative principles according to which concrete social relations can be judged in terms of equality-inequality.

(4) As for sociology, various empirical researches have been carried out in various spheres, for example social stratification, race relations, education, marriage, or gender relations. Most of them do not concern themselves with the normative principles of equality in themselves. Instead, presuming explicitly or tacitly some normative principles coined and elaborated by philosophical or ethical discussions, or the secularized common-sense notions of such

philosophical or ethical principles, they ask which research methods and which quantitative indications or scales are suitable for ascertaining whether the social relations under investigation are equal or unequal. The aims of their researches are to identify and ascertain in what sense the social relations are equal or unequal, and which factors are artificial “imposing barriers” to achieving equality (cf., Harrison 2000, 371-72).

(4-1) However, empirical researches on equality carried out by objective and quantitative indications have their serious limits, I think.

(4-1-1) First, since there is no agreed conception of equality in any field, there is also no agreed objective indication of equality or inequality.

(4-1-2) Second, if some indications or scales are invented for measuring equality or inequality in a certain field, there is always a serious problem left. It is a problem about their adaptation to social phenomena. A quantitative indication or scale can be adopted only when social phenomena have been already articulated or circumscribed before adaptation. However neither quantitative indication nor scale speaks of how to articulate or circumscribe social phenomena. I can actually find two empirical researches, both of which use the same indication of unequal distribution of income, named “Gini’s coefficient.” They collected their quantitative data correctly through their own empirical researches in accordance with a scientific method, calculated Gini’s coefficient from such data, and gave conclusions about Japanese society. The one said that in Japan there could be found a tendency toward inequality of income since late in the 1980s (Tatsuki, 1998), and the other said that from 1979 to 1994 there could be found no tendency toward inequality of income in Japan (Ohtake, 2000).

(4-1-3) Third, if the same data is used for making a judgment on equality, there is still a possibility for the different conclusions drawn. I have also two works which use the same data collected from the same research project, a very big project named “Research on Social Stratification and Mobility in Japan” carried out in 1995. This is a research using sampling methods and questionnaires. These two works exclusively depend on the same quantitative data and reach to opposite findings. That is, the one says that there can be found a marked tendency toward a reproduction of the “intellectual elite” in Japan (Sato, 2000), that is, we have a closed system of social mobility in Japan, and the other says that such a “reproduction” story is rather ungrounded (Seiyama, 2000).

(4-2) I would like to add that all of these scholars are very serious and honest, and they make no mistakes in the use of “scientific” methods and reading

the data. My opinion is that it is a result from the limit inherent in the quantitative method in general that they lead to the contradictory findings. Some positivists often insist that the quantitative data should speak for themselves. However, data can deliver no discourse by themselves. It has to be realized honestly and modestly that it is the scholar's interpretation which lets quantitative data talk about something.

(5) As shown above, different ideas and researches result in various and sometimes contradictory findings on equality. Then, it has to be asked radically which stance or perspective is best to be adopted in such circumstances? My opinion is that it is important to take into full account that the problem of equality occurs not on the religious and scientific spheres but on the social sphere. Equality-inequality is a social phenomenon which we, actors on the social scene, experience in the process of social interaction with others in everyday life-world. Thus, scholars interested in equality-inequality have to realize honestly that their own constructs are "constructs of the second degree, namely constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene" (Schutz 1953, 6). Then the task of social scientists is, first of all, to describe the way in which actors experience equality-inequality on the social scene in their everyday life-world. I will try to do this in a following section.

## II. How do People Experience Equality-Inequality in the Everyday Life-World?

### A. Everyday Experience of Differences between the Others and Myself

(1) I, the wide-awake grown-up man (Schutz 1953, 7; Husserl 1962, 145-146) know in the natural attitude that I am the one and only in the strictest sense.

(1-1) This means I know that I am different from all the others in many respects, and everyone is also different from each other in many respects. For example, I am "middle-aged" and he is "young." The size of my shoes is 25 cm and my friend A's size is 26 cm. I can run 100 meters in just 11 seconds, and my friend B runs in 14 seconds.

(1-2) Furthermore, I know that I am different from others not only in the individual type, but also in the social type. For example, I am a "Japanese" and he is an "U.S. citizen." I am a "university professor," and he is a "bank employee." I am "married," and he is "unmarried."

(1-3) Moreover, I know how to typify the other and myself in a given situation. In other words, I know what kind of typification has to be adopted in which case. For example, I know the case in which I have to recognize and treat him as an “U.S. citizen,” and in which case as a “young man.” I assume that this holds true for the other. This means that typification is relative to the definition of the situation.

(1-4) When I recognize myself as a “university professor,” I recognize him not as an “U.S. citizen” or “unmarried” but as a “bank-employee.” However I can also recognize him as an “U.S. citizen.” At that time I recognize myself, consciously or unconsciously, as a “Japanese.” This means that self-typification corresponds to the typification of the other by myself (Schutz 1953, 19).

(1-5) However, even when I recognize myself as a “professor” and the other as a “bank-employee,” the other might not necessarily recognize me as a “professor.” He might recognize me as a “Japanese” or a “middle-aged male.” This means that the typification of the other by myself does or does not correspond to the typification of me by the other. When the correspondence between them does actually occur, there is much chance in interaction between the other and myself to proceed smoothly in an expected way. This does not mean, however, that such a correspondence is a necessary or a sufficient condition for successful interaction. When such a correspondence does not occur, in contrast, our interaction will have much chance to meet with some obstacles to smooth the process.

(2) I also know that some systems of typification have their own hierarchical order, and other systems have not. As for the former, I know the hierarchical order as well. A system of typification of occupations can be taken as an example of the former. I know that, generally speaking, the “university professor” is rated higher than the “bank-employee.” In contrast, there is no hierarchical order between the “Japanese” and the “U.S. citizen.” To say there is no hierarchical order must be distinguished clearly from saying that the “Japanese” and the “U.S. citizen” are ordered in the same hierarchical level.

(2-1) I know that there might be a hierarchical order between the systems of typification. For example, in modern society, the high ranked types in the system of occupations might be rated higher than the high ranked types in the system of physical abilities.

(3) I know that I, a “university professor,” am expected to act in a way other than he, “bank-employee,” does, and might be treated in a way other than he would be. This means that each social type carries along a particular expectation and a particular way to be treated.

(4) I know or assume that the way to typify the others and myself, the hierarchical orders within and between systems of typification, the different expectations for action and the different ways to be treated according to the different typification, all of them are not unique to myself, but shared by all the members of my society. More precisely, those who share them are assumed tacitly to be members of that society.

(5) As long as the story mentioned above (from 1 to 4 in this section) holds true, I might not experience inequality. To be treated in a different way is not always inconsistent with the idea of "equality." If I recognize that I am grasped in a certain individual or social type and treated in a different way than my friend is treated, I do not realize that I am treated unequally. Then, I have to ask in which moments does experience of equality or inequality appear?

### B. Everyday Experience of Equality-Inequality

(1) What I would like to point out first of all is that it is only through interaction with others, or more precisely, through the others' attitude toward me and/or the others' reaction to my action that I experience equality or inequality. Without interaction neither equality nor inequality appears. This holds true for me who experiences equality or inequality not as the person concerned but as a third party.

(2) It might not be necessary to say that all interactions are not necessarily moments for making equality or inequality appear. In so far as I am treated by others in a certain way, and I recognize this as different than the way in which some one is treated who I think has to be treated in the same way as myself, I might possibly experience "inequality."

(3) Such experience of "inequality" is, however, not enough for the problem of equality-inequality to appear. Even though I experience such possible "inequality," I do not identify it as a real inequality to be removed, when I realize and persuade myself that such a different treatment of me could be justified on some reasonable grounds. For example, I thought formerly he was the same kind of man as me, but considered from such and such perspectives, he proves to be a different kind of man from me in such and such respects, and I have to accept the different treatments as reasonable. H. Blumer is right in saying that "[a]s long as a social arrangement is accepted as authoritative and legitimate, however much it may be disliked and however harsh may be its effects.....they [people] continue to endure inconvenient,

discomfort,.....accepting the social arrangement as a natural part of the order of life”(Blumer 1978, 9). Conversely, only when I think there are no justifiable reasons or grounds for being treated in a way other than the others are, I experience the problem of equality-inequality.

(4) From the considerations above, I would like to point out firstly two circumstances concerning equality. The one is that the problem of equality is the problem of inequality in the sense that the problem of equality emerges through experience of inequality in social interaction. And the other is that equality cannot be experienced in itself. It is realized only through an improved state of affairs after experience of inequality.

(5) Second, It can be said that one of the most important themes in the discussion of the problem of equality is the matter of the justification for being treated in a different way. Indeed, many researches have been dedicated to this theme. Discussion here does not concern this theme itself. Instead, I would like to point out here that as for the problem of such justification, two topics have to be distinguished. The one is what grounds are accepted as reasonable ones for justifying different treatments, and the other is what grounds are accepted as reasonable ones for avoiding the alleged reasonable grounds for justifying different treatments.

(5-1) Two topics just mentioned are or are not in symmetric relationship, i.e., the one is or is not the other side of the same coin. If they are in symmetric relationship, research on equality can be reduced to “finding facts,” that is, judging and deciding whether inequality actually occurs or not in a given social relation. And then an equal state of affairs is expected to be achieved just by removing artificial “barriers.” Such research can be carried out only when certain criteria or principles (for example, a system of law) can be presupposed for judgment, and the same criteria can be adopted for judging both equality and inequality. It is also assumed in such research that there are already and always two kinds of states of affairs, equal and unequal.

(5-2) But here a statement by Schutz has to be taken into account seriously and honestly. It is that “[s]trictly speaking, there are no such things as fact, pure and simple. All facts are from the outset facts selected from a universal context by the activities of our mind. They are, therefore, always interpreted facts.....[T]hey carry along their interpretational inner and outer horizon” (Schutz 1953, 5). Paraphrasing this statement, no criterion or no principle for judging equality could be presupposed out of situations in which social interaction actually occurs, and a criterion for judging equality could be different from a criterion for judging inequality. Therefore, the two topics mentioned

above are not always in symmetric relationship. Following the Schutzian statement, research would be focused not on “finding facts” but finding the “interpretational” or “constitutional” process of facts.” If this is the case, the goal of bringing about equality consists not only in the removal of existing obstacles but also “in the creative determination of new directions” (Schutz 1956, 287).

(5-3) As for the grounds for justifying the different treatments and the grounds for avoiding the alleged reasonable grounds for the different treatment, both of them might vary depending on perspectives from which they are approached. The socially approved grounds might or might not be accepted by the person concerned, and vice versa. This means that research on equality and inequality has to give careful consideration both to the subjective point of view and to the objective point of view toward different treatments. Schutz’s statements on discrimination as a kind of inequality are taken seriously into account namely that “discrimination presupposes both imposition of a typification from the objective point of view and an appropriate evaluation of this imposition from the subjective point of view of the afflicted individual” (Schutz 1957, 261).

(6) There is, however, another topic to be investigated for the discussion on equality before inquiry into the ways of justification for the different treatments. This topic concerns the moments in which the reasonable grounds for justification in themselves are turned to and made problematic. These grounds in themselves are mostly taken for granted in everyday life, and this means that these grounds themselves are not made problematic in most cases. People live their own everyday life without turning to the ways of justification for their being treated differently. It can be said that my expression of “I know that” frequently used in the Part A of the Section II in this essay can be changed into the expression of “I take it for granted that.”

(6-1) In everyday life, the process of inquiring which kind of ground is adopted for justifying the different treatment and the process of turning to the grounds in themselves occur simultaneously. More precisely, they are in a reflexive relationship. However they have to be distinguished from each other. This distinction is a corollary of the Schutzian distinction between “selection” on the one hand and “deliberation and choice” on the other hand. Schutz says that “[t]his situation of doubt, created by the selection of the actor in his biographically determined situation from the world of taken for granted is what alone makes deliberation and choice possible” (Schutz 1951, 78). In the following section, let me briefly consider the moments in which the grounds for justifying different treatments in themselves are turned to and are made

problematic, i.e., the problem of justification in itself comes out of the world of the taken for granted situation.

### III. In Which Moment Do the Grounds for Justification Emerge from the Taken for Granted Situation?

(1) Before entering into discussion about the topic of the moments in which the grounds for justification in itself is turned to, I would like to point it out that this topic is open to empirical researches. The coming-out moments of the grounds for justification are considerably varied according to person, situation, society, history, and culture. For example, the “same” interaction might be the coming-out moment for the person or might not be the moment for the other person. Furthermore even for the same person, the “same” interaction might be the moment in this situation, and might not be the moment in that situation. (In these examples, the term “same” means that the interaction can be seen as the “same” from the objective point of view of the third party.) Because of such circumstances of the coming-out moments of the grounds for justification, the data on equality collected by quantitative empirical researches tend to be incommensurably separate from each other. The data of this kind could be accumulated in the quantitative sense, but could not be in the qualitative sense, that is, there might be little expectation to deepen or widen our understanding of the phenomenon of equality-inequality in the quantitative empirical researches.

(1-1) In order to evade such insufficient situation of the empirical research, it might be necessary to take into account that every datum is extracted or constructed in terms of a scheme of reference, no matter whether this comes under one’s notice or not. There is no such thing as a datum pure. Every datum carries a “subscript” referring to the problem under investigation (Cf., Schutz 1953, 5; 1957, 234). As is well known, Schutz calls such a circumstance of the constructs, i.e., data and types just mentioned above, the “principle of relevance.” (Schutz 1943, 84).

(1-2) The “principle of relevance” holds true for all constructs, that is, subjective and objective “common sense” constructs and scientific constructs. However, the social scientific constructs have an additional characteristic, because the goal of social science is to understand and/or explain not the world of science but the social world, which people understand and/or explain in terms of common sense constructs before social science does so in terms of the

scientific constructs. Social scientific constructs have to refer to the common-sense constructs. They are “constructs of the second order” (Schutz 1953, 6). This is one of the most famous insights of Schutz.

(1-3) Social sciences really have to refer to the common sense constructs. And especially in a discussion about the moments in which the grounds for justifying different treatment themselves are turned to, the fullest attention has to be paid not only to the socially shared constructs but to the subjective constructs used by the persons concerned, because inequality mostly comes out in everyday life through people’s experience of their being treated differently. Considering this point, let’s turn to the moments for the grounds for justification to be turned to.

(2) There can be considered two kinds of moments in which the justifying grounds are turned to. The one is the moment in which the person is treated in social interaction in different ways than the same person was or has been treated before. This is the case in which social interaction cannot proceed in an anticipated way. The problem arises unexpectedly. The other is the case in which the persons turn to the justifying grounds in spite of their being treated in the same way as they were or have been treated before. In this case, social interaction does proceed smoothly, and the problem is intentionally brought out.

(3) As for the first case, two kinds of moments could be distinguished. Taking recent two cases in Japan as examples, I will describe these two moments briefly.

(3-1) The one is the case concerned with a “foreigner” in Japan last year. He has had no experience in being rejected in enjoying a public place. So he came to a pay-bathhouse and was going to pay an entrance fee at the entrance gate without any idea whether he was to be rejected or not. But he was unexpectedly rejected. Then he turned to the reason why he was rejected.

(3-1-1) In this case, he shared a self-typification by himself (I am a “foreigner” in Japan) with the person in charge. He considered and expected that this kind of typification was irrelevant to enjoying a public bathhouse. But the type “foreigner” was relevant to the person in charge. In this case, although self-typification by himself corresponds substantially to the typification of him by the director, this typification is judged or interpreted by different systems of relevance. His turning to the justifying ground was led by a conflict between his and the director’s system of interpretational relevance.

(3-2) One example for the other can be cited from the case involving sumo wrestling in this year. A champion in the Osaka tournament is customarily given a certification of commendation at the wrestling ring by the Governor of

Osaka Prefecture. A female was elected as a new governor in the last election. This was the first time for a female to be elected as a governor. Taking office, she arranged her schedule as a “governor” to come and give a certification at the ring according to the custom, i.e., in the same way as all former governors had done. However her plan to give a certification by herself was unexpectedly rejected by the Japan Sumo Wrestling Association for the reason that the “female” is closed to the ring by tradition in the field of sumo. And then she turned to the grounds for justifying a different treatment in the field of sumo.

(3-2-1) Although a female governor was treated actually in the same way as all females had been treated, she was treated in a different way than all former governors had been treated. The social type, “governor,” was topically relevant to a governor, and the social type “female” was topically relevant to the Sumo Association. The Governor’s turning to the justifying grounds was led by the conflict between self-typification by herself and typification of her by the Japan Sumo Wrestling Association

(4) As for the second case, one example could be cited from the case with the Japanese naming system for the married couple. There is a provision in the Civil Law Act in Japan that a married couple has to adopt the same last name (#750). Although in this Law Act, the couple is allowed to adopt either last name, wife’s or husband’s last name, almost all couples have taken it for granted that a wife abandons her last name and bears a husband’s last name. Following such a customary way of naming, they have carried out their everyday life smoothly. But about ten years ago, some wives began to cast doubt on not only this custom but also the provision about the way of naming. They brought forward a claim to use their own last names formally after their marriage. They turned to the grounds for justifying a different treatment between the “wife” and the “husband.”

(4-1) Their doubts and claims might not derive from the troubles with their familial interaction or kinship. They might rather bring trouble into smooth familial and kinship relation. One of the origins of their doubts and claims can be considered to be in changes in social settings, for example, the increase in the number of working wives and the penetration and spread of the feminist ideas. Their turning to the justifying grounds was not led by the conflict between a self-typification and a typification by the other, like the two cases just mentioned above. It was led rather by a change in self-typification in itself or a change in connotation of self-typification, which were caused in accordance with changes in social setting.

#### IV. Concluding Remarks

(1) My description in this essay is really very rough. There are many topics left to be investigated empirically and the theoretically. But I can say one thing with confidence that the problem of equality-inequality occurs in the world of everyday life. It appears from and against the taken-for-grantedness through social interaction. The realm of the world as taken for granted or the field of unproblematic “proves to be broken asunder by a novel experience not subsumable under the so far unquestioned frame of reference” (cf., Schutz 1970, 25; 1951, 74).

(2) A “novel experience” is not only imposed on. It is intrinsic as well, because each element of the taken-for-grantedness “has necessarily an equivocal characteristic of indeterminateness,” (Schutz 1951, 75), and therefore our life world is “essentially opacity” (Schutz 1970, 152). It is the reason why the person can bring the problem of equality-inequality into the world of taken for granted. And it is a corollary of the statement that all facts “carry along their interpretative inner and outer horizon” (Schutz 1953, 5).

(3) If it is the case with experiences with equality-inequality, and my description in this essay holds true for such experiences, Schutz’s insights founded on his “constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude” can be extremely useful for research on the problem of equality-inequality in everyday life-world. I say not only his focused and excellent essay titled “Equality and the Meaning Structures of the Social World.” I say also that if research on equality-inequality is to be adequate (in Schutz’s sense), the research especially has to take into the fullest account his ideas on the conceptions of “subjective and objective meanings,” “typification,” “relevance,” and “knowledge.” I hope this essay can show the reason why these conceptions elaborated by Schutz are significant for research on equality and inequality.

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