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Scanlon, T. M. 2018. *Why Does Inequality Matter?* Uehiro Series in Practical Ethics. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

T. M. Scanlon has established himself as one of the most important contemporary scholars of distributive justice, and his work is worth attending to. In this short but dense book, he walks the reader methodically through a variety of arguments about social, economic, and political inequalities, and evaluates the moral arguments regarding them. In the process, he makes the case that there are many good reasons to care about inequality but that not all inequalities are necessarily unethical. Scanlon is a relational egalitarian. He argues that inequality matters because it undermines or violates some important relationship or duty. He also condemns economic inequalities that are not the result of open and necessary institutional arrangements that benefit all. That is where his unified theory ends, however, because Scanlon stresses that the differences between different inequalities should not be glossed over. The inequality between managers and workers is not objectionable for the same reason as gender inequality, for example. In the end, the egalitarian principles that the author endorses are varied and nuanced.

This is a book by a philosopher written for other political philosophers. Nevertheless, as an economist I appreciated the book greatly, even though it contains conspicuously few *p* values, case studies, or real-world examples. Analytic philosophers tend to work in thought experiments, and Scanlon is no exception. His book is useful, however, because he makes distinctions where we often elide important differences. Inequalities of different kinds are often mutually reinforcing, and a given disparity might be wrong for multiple reasons. As a result, social scientists and humanists often write about inequality as if it is a monolithic thing that can be reduced to a question of power. This is a common error, but an error nonetheless. Egalitarian thinking can be precise, and it can be varied, and scholarship like Scanlon's will aid us in making these important distinctions.

After a helpful overview in his introductory chapter, in chapter two, he considers whether inequality might not be wrong because it violates the principle that all people deserve equal concern. He focuses on cases when the government has deprived some people of services or disadvantaged some citizens. The third

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chapter considers inequalities of status, a discussion certainly relevant to the way we think about poverty.

In his fourth chapter, he considers whether inequality can be justified by having a fair procedure. Scanlon describes the goal of "equality of opportunity" as a defense of some inequalities with strict conditions: the privilege must be essential to a necessary position, the procedure must be fair and open to all, and finally, no wrong can be done to prevent some from having the qualifications for the position. He also develops a condemnation of racial discrimination and defends affirmative action policies. In chapter five, he moves to the topic of "substantive opportunity." The challenge of creating opportunity is that wealthy parents can invest in their children to give them an advantage in schooling and the economy. Scanlon suggests that we examine the institutional sorting mechanisms that encourage it, from hiring decisions to school admissions.

In the sixth chapter Scanlon focuses on political power, both as an issue of the ethics of political leadership and opportunity. The seventh chapter addresses property, taxation, and coercion, considering the concerns of libertarian critics of redistribution. He does not accept that there is a kind of property right prior to an institutional/legal framework that one can appeal to in making judgments about laws. In the eighth chapter Scanlon rejects all arguments about whether the rich or poor "deserve" some amount of wealth, since in each case the use of the word "desert" is just shorthand for an underlying conception of justice that should be examined.

In the tenth chapter Scanlon applies the principles he has developed to the problem of increased income inequality. He briefly examines some specific economic evidence about institutions and distributional patterns and concludes that much of the growth of inequality in the United States is likely not justified. Scanlon finishes the book by highlighting the varied nature of the conclusions that he draws about inequality.

One overarching lesson of the book is that all attempts to make debates about inequality clean and simple must fail for two reasons. The first highlights the strength of the book, the second, a weakness. The strength of the book is in the author's thorough consideration of such a wide collection of moral arguments. It turns out that most people's moral intuitions about inequality do not withstand Scanlon's scrutiny. Even those who ultimately agree with him may find their reasons for doing so need further examination.

The weakness of the book also stems from the fact that Scanlon is not fully prepared to consider economic, political, and sociological evidence in any great detail. Many of the arguments about inequality depend on some empirical facts about the world. Does redistribution limit productivity? Is CEO pay the result of elite collusion? Can a "good education" provide economic opportunities? Are consumption norms set by the rich or the middle class? Scanlon sometimes draws on good research, but he never subjects conclusions to broad review. Too often, Scanlon assumes an answer and moves on. For a philosophy book that is primarily concerned with moral arguments, this is forgivable. For a topic like this one, though, the argument is weakened by the lack of attention to conflicting evidence

about so many of these questions. For a topic like inequality, drawing firm conclusions probably requires pretty deep interdisciplinary work.

Overall, this book is excellent. If social scientists want to pick up one book that covers the philosophical terrain efficiently, this is probably the best book on the market. Undergraduates outside of philosophy classes will probably find the book too dense to use beyond a chapter or two, and academics who pick up the book should already be somewhat familiar with philosophical ethics and theories of justice to get the most out of the book.

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