

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88382-5 - Are Liberty and Equality Compatible?

Jan Narveson and James P. Sterba

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Are Liberty and Equality Compatible?

Are the political ideals of liberty and equality compatible? This question is of central and continuing importance in political philosophy, moral philosophy, and welfare economics. In this book, two distinguished philosophers take up the debate. Jan Narveson argues that a political ideal of negative liberty is incompatible with any substantive ideal of equality, while James P. Sterba argues that Narveson's own ideal of negative liberty is compatible, and in fact leads to the requirements of a substantive ideal of equality. Of course, they cannot both be right. Thus, the details of their arguments about the political ideal of negative liberty and its requirements will determine which of them is right. Engagingly and accessibly written, their debate will be of value to all who are interested in the central issue of what are the practical requirements of a political ideal of liberty.

Jan Narveson is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Waterloo. His previous publications include *The Libertarian Idea* (1989), *Moral Matters, Second Edition* (1999), *Respecting Persons in Theory and Practice* (2002), and *You and the State* (2008). In 2003, Professor Narveson was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in recognition of both his scholarly work and his lifelong promotion of music in his home cities of Kitchener and Waterloo, Ontario.

James P. Sterba is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. His previous publications include *Justice for Here and Now* (1998), *The Triumph of Practice over Theory in Ethics* (2005), *Does Feminism Discriminate Against Men? A Debate* (2008 – co-authored with Warren Farrell), and *Affirmative Action for the Future* (2009). Professor Sterba is past president of the American Philosophical Association (Central Division) and of several other philosophical associations.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88382-5 - Are Liberty and Equality Compatible?

Jan Narveson and James P. Sterba

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For and Against

General Editor: R. G. Frey

For and Against offers a new and exciting approach to the investigation of complex philosophical ideas and their impact on the way we think about a host of contemporary moral, social, and political issues. Two philosophical essays explore a topic of intense public interest from opposing points of view. This approach provides the reader with a balanced perspective on the topic; it also introduces the deep philosophical conflicts that underpin the differing views. The result is both a series of important statements on some of the most challenging questions facing our society and an introduction to moral, social, and political philosophy. Each essay is compact and nontechnical, yet avoids a simplistic, journalistic presentation of the topic.

Other books in the series:

Douglas Husak and Peter de Marneffe, *The Legalization of Drugs*

David Schmidtz and Robert E. Goodin, *Social Welfare and Individual Responsibility*

Gerald Dworkin, R. G. Frey, and Sissela Bok, *Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide*

Christopher Heath Wellman and A. John Simmons, *Is There a Duty to Obey the Law?*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88382-5 - Are Liberty and Equality Compatible?

Jan Narveson and James P. Sterba

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Are Liberty and Equality Compatible?

Jan Narveson

and

James P. Sterba



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-88382-5 - Are Liberty and Equality Compatible?
 Jan Narveson and James P. Sterba
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
 São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by
 Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521883825

© Jan Narveson and James P. Sterba 2010

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
 no reproduction of any part may take place without
 the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2010

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Narveson, Jan, 1936–
 Are liberty and equality compatible? / Jan Narveson, James P. Sterba.
 p. cm. – (For and against)
 ISBN 978-0-521-88382-5 (Hardback)
 1. Liberty. 2. Equality. 3. Social justice. 4. Social ethics.
 I. Sterba, James P. II. Title. III. Series.
 JC575.N37 2010
 320.01'1–dc22

2009051491

ISBN 978-0-521-88382-5 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
 accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to
 in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such
 websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page ix</i>
1 Introduction <i>Jan Narveson and James P. Sterba</i>	1
PART I	
2 Equality is compatible with and required by liberty <i>James P. Sterba</i>	7
1 The practical requirements of liberty	7
2 Other attempts to show that libertarians should accept welfare or equality	39
3 Objections from libertarians to my argument from liberty to equality	61
4 My argument again and its future prospects	117
PART II	
3 The right to liberty is incompatible with the right to equality <i>Jan Narveson</i>	123
1 The issue framed	123
2 The “social contract” approach to moral philosophy	182
3 The grounds for welfarism considered	221
4 Conclusion	249
PART III	
4 Response to Narveson <i>James P. Sterba</i>	253

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88382-5 - Are Liberty and Equality Compatible?
Jan Narveson and James P. Sterba
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

viii CONTENTS

5	Response to Sterba <i>Jan Narveson</i>	260
	<i>Select bibliography</i>	267
	<i>Index</i>	275

Acknowledgments

Practically, this book would most likely never have been conceived except for the efforts of Peter Bornschein, at the time an undergraduate student at Albion College, now a promising graduate student in philosophy, who decided that he and his classmates could benefit from a debate about the ideals of liberty and equality. After this debate at Albion gave birth to the idea that Jan Narveson and I should do a book together, we took a proposal to Hilary Gaskin, Philosophy Editor at Cambridge University Press, who skillfully helped us turn our proposal into the book that you have before you.

Philosophically, my argument in the book has been developing for many years and has benefited enormously from interactions with many different people. Let me thank just some of those who have personally had a significant impact on my thinking: Gillian Brock, John Christman, Jerry Gaus, Carol Gould, John Hospers, Eric Mack, Tibor Machan, Thomas Nagel, Robert Nozick, Susan Okin, Thomas Pogge, Douglas Rasmussen, John Rawls, Jeffrey Reiman, Daniel Shapiro, Henry Shue, John Simmons, Peter Singer, A. Tara Smith, and Philippe Van Parijs. Of course, Jan Narveson deserves special thanks for his deep generosity over the years in helping me to better understand his own libertarian view, which has, I believe, thereby enabled me to better conceive and defend my own. And, as always, my partner and fellow philosopher, Janet Kourany, bears some responsibility for the strengths and weaknesses of my argument.

James P. Sterba

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88382-5 - Are Liberty and Equality Compatible?

Jan Narveson and James P. Sterba

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Philosophically, my part of this book owes its origins to my acquaintance with many writers, classic and modern: especially to David Gauthier, who stoutly denies that he is a Libertarian, and to Thomas Hobbes.

I would also like to thank Jim Sterba, with whom I have had so many lively exchanges and who engages unfailingly and with admirable civility on this important issue. Otherwise, I am sure that my views were influenced in some general way by my parents, assorted uncles and aunts – honest, hard-working people who asked little of others, and gave much – and to my brother Robert (Bud, to all who know him) whose opposition on almost everything has continually challenged my views. And finally, to Jean, my wife and partner of nearly four decades now, to whom I owe greatly.

Jan Narveson