

# The Equating of the Unequal

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**Abstract:** Equality and inequality are basic elements of law, justice and politics. Equality integrates each of us into a common sphere by distributing rights, duties and chances among us. Equality turns into mere indifference as far as we get overintegrated into social orders. When differences are fading away experience loses its relief and individuals lose their face. Our critical reflections start from the inevitable paradox of making equal what is not equal. In various ways they refer to Nietzsche's concept of order, to Marx's analysis of money, to Lévinas's ethics of the Other, and to novelists like Dostoevsky and Musil. Our critique turns against two extremes, on the one hand against any sort of normalism fixed on functioning orders, on the other hand against any sort of anomalism dreaming of mere events and permanent ruptures. Responsive phenomenology shows how we are confronted with extraordinary events. Those deviate from the ordinary and transgress its borders, without leaving the normality of our everyday world behind. The process of equalizing moves between the ordinary and the extraordinary. What makes the difference and resists mere indifference are creative responses which are to be invented again and again.

**Key Words:** equality — indifference — normality — ordinary/extraordinary — response

It is easy to play off equality against inequality, inequality against equality. The association of equality with leveling, the loss of distinctions, or indifference, or of inequality with injustices and privileges, is enough to drive one's respective adversary into the corner. Tried and tested fronts develop when one transfers laudable inequalities into a past to be preserved, or (transfers) laudable equalities into a future to be created. Yet as it is well known these cultural and social-political animosities in the meantime have become so brittle, to the extent that one leaves the option for one side or the other up to mere chance or the like. The colors of political parties in some cases approach,