ABSTRACT. We reply to discussions of *Equality: From Theory to Action* by Harry Brighouse, Joanne Conaghan, Cillian McBride and Stuart White. We find many of their points helpful and treat them as a useful contribution to a continuing dialogue on egalitarianism.

KEY WORDS: egalitarianism, equality, institutional design, political strategy, social justice, social systems

Our primary hope in writing *Equality: From Theory to Action* was to contribute to the global movement for a more egalitarian world. We are therefore strongly encouraged by the seriousness with which our commentators have treated our work and with their generally positive responses to it. Since it is central to our understanding of the equality movement that no one knows all the answers and that the movement draws strength from diversity, we wish to engage with these commentaries in a spirit of solidarity. What we say in this short response is therefore meant as a contribution to a dialogue which we hope others will continue.

*Equality* was written in three parts, addressing The New Equality Agenda, Putting Equality into Practice, and Strategies for Change. All four of our commentators have focused on aspects of the second part, and so we follow this focus here. Since their comments overlap to some degree, we have chosen to respond to them thematically, in the order in which we address these themes in our book.

In our discussion of policies for promoting economic equality, we concentrated on the potential of neocorporatist institutions to address the issue of economic inequality and presented, as an example, the type of intervention they might use to control inequality in primary incomes. Neocorporatist institutional planning,
through the social partnership process, has been the core of macro-economic policy in Ireland since 1987. As Stuart White points out, this proposal is far from the only strategy available to egalitarian policy-makers, and we welcome his discussion of policies for promoting the crucial objective of greater equality of wealth. Indeed, we recognise that paid employment is only one aspect of income and that income inequality is primarily generated through the concentration of ownership of wealth (77). Our modest proposal is a starting point, not the end of the line.

Although the policies White canvasses are very interesting and have real potential for attacking unequal wealth, they do little to address issues of unequal power in capitalist economies. Indeed, he seems to be favourably disposed to the idea of keeping the management of businesses ‘firmly out of the hands of politicians or civil servants’. While we acknowledge that some forms of public ownership are open to criticism, we view this kind of remark as too complicit with the neoliberal attack on public services to be passed over lightly. One of the advantages of neocorporatist planning is precisely that it operates at a national level to constrain the power of the capitalist class and that it can be, and has been, used to introduce elements of democracy into the governance of capitalist firms and to defend the public sector from the neoliberal agenda. Despite Rawls’s imprimatur, it is hard to see how the idea of a ‘property-owning democracy’ could make a major impact on the fundamentally unequal power relations embedded in capitalist economies.

Turning more generally to the theme of democracy, White raises the question of whether there is ‘a tendency to ignore or unduly downplay certain tensions between egalitarianism and respect for pluralism’ on account of our reluctance to use state power to democratise churches and other bodies. But our primary aim in Chapter 6 is to say something about what a participatory democracy would look like, not how to bring it about. We believe that the democratic ethos of a truly egalitarian society would be incompatible with hierarchically structured religions, and that therefore

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