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Nielsen, Lasse

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What is Wrong with Sufficiency?

Lasse Nielsen
University of Southern Denmark
Email: lasseni@sdu.dk

Abstract *In this paper, I identify the core idea of the sufficiency view in order to formulate a generic sufficiency principle, from which I elaborate possible coherent specifications of sufficientarianism. I then test these specifications against two different formulations of the widely shared “ignorance of inequality objection” against sufficientarianism—a benefit-driven and a burden-driven formulation. I argue that deficiency-pluralist sufficiency views are better capable of responding to this objection than deficiency-monist views. However, I end by showing how the problem of unequal distribution of burdens involves an overlooked threat to the sufficiency view, in any specification, and I suggest a preliminary strategy for how to deal with this threat.*

I. Introduction

There is currently a heated theoretical debate concerning the prospects of the sufficiency view—i.e. the view that justice is fulfilled when everyone has enough. (Knight 2015; Segall 2016; Nielsen 2016; Shields 2016; Fourie and Rid 2016). In this paper I develop what I see as the strongest version of the view, by going back to the central idea of the view in its most abstract and generic form, and I show how this idea can be fleshed out in different but equivalently coherent ways. I then test these different specifications of the generic view against the most widely shared objection to sufficientarianism—the ignorance of inequality objection—and I argue in this

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regard that what I call deficiency-pluralist sufficiency views fare better than its competitors. However, the sufficiency view in any specification still faces one serious intuitive problem, namely that it does not cope well with unequally distributed burdens in societies where no absolute deficiency exists. This, the paper concludes, marks what is at this stage wrong with sufficiency.

The argument proceeds as follows. The second section introduces the driving intuition of sufficientarianism and formulates a generic version of the sufficiency view. It then elaborates different more specific ways of fleshing out distributive theories upon that generic view, and an important distinction between deficiency-monist and deficiency-pluralist versions of the view is introduced. The third section discusses the widely shared *ignorance of inequality objection* in a benefit-driven form by employing a “manna from Heaven” case. The section argues that the generic sufficiency view need not yield to this problem, and furthermore that the deficiency-pluralist sufficiency view is not only able to respond probably but can also provide insightful explanation of the normative content of the intuitions that the objection appeals to. The fourth section raises the problem of unequal distribution of burdens in form a “manna from hell” problem, as a further problem for the sufficiency view that has been largely neglected in the literature but that seems to emphasize a stronger objection. This problem calls for more theoretical development of the sufficiency view if it is to remain its candidacy as a plausible standard for distributive justice.

II. The Sufficiency View

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In its most generic formulation, the sufficiency view is the view that justice or morality is concerned with securing enough for everyone. Most famously, this view has been proposed by Harry Frankfurt in the formulation that, “what *is* important from the point of view of morality is not that everyone should have *the same* but that each should have *enough*” (1987; 2015: 7). On the basis of this intuition, Frankfurt formulated what he called “the doctrine of sufficiency” which manifested his status as the founding father of the sufficiency view. Frankfurt’s now famous statement strongly highlights the driving idea of the sufficiency view, that what matters to justice is the elimination of absolute deficiencies, not aiming for equal distribution.

Several political philosophers and ethicists have followed this cue from Frankfurt and have accordingly embraced the sensible appeal to the generic view. This has given rise to a number of important instantiations of this intuition in the writings on justice. Joseph Raz anticipated the same idea in his very influential work, *Morality as Freedom*, where he argued that our political concern is motivated by a concern with “the hunger of the hungry, the need of the needy, the suffering of the ill, and so on” (1986: 240).

Upon Frankfurt’s canonical statement and Raz’s further instantiation, we can now capture sufficientarianism as a generic principle about when a distribution is just.

The generic sufficiency view

Justice is fulfilled when absolute deficiencies are eliminated regardless of whether inequalities persist beyond that point

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The grounding works of Frankfurt and Raz have been further developed by a number of theorists. In instance, it has been developed by Roger Crisp into distributive theory building on a compassion-catering sufficiency principle—that relevant deficiencies are eliminated for a particular person at the point below which compassion for that person enters (Crisp 2003). Similarly, Martha Nussbaum has fleshed out her well-known objective list of central human capabilities as a form of thick specification of the generic idea of a sufficiency view, in that her ten listed capabilities are examples of spheres in which any relevant deficiency are unacceptable from the perspective of justice (2000: 78-80; 2011: 33).

The generic formulation thus embraces all the above mentioned intuitive statements found in the literature developing the sufficiency view and it seems also to pinpoint the main intuitive driver of the view. The view is ecumenical both in terms of not holding any commitment to a specific metric or currency of justice, and in being compatible with some versions of fleshing out the ideal of equality without commitment to distributive equality, such as the relational egalitarian views of Anderson (1999) and Scheffler (2003) but also, importantly, as Martin O’Neill’s “Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism” (2008).

However, in addition to simply capturing the intuition of pioneering sufficientarians in a way compatible with some forms of egalitarianism, broadly conceived, the generic view commits to a specific threshold-catering distributive view. It implies that there must exist, at least theoretically, some absolute threshold, or number of thresholds, representing the relevant point(s) of elimination of deficiency such that justice is immediately disturbed by people being located below that level, whereas

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inequalities above that level are irrelevant to justice (Casal 2007). This, of course, raises the further question of what counts as an absolute deficiency. The problem is that however one chooses the specific definition of relevant absolute deficiencies, there will always be some inequalities beyond this category that might also seem, intuitively, to be a disturbance of justice.

A possible way for sufficientarians to respond to this concern is to refuse to specify the threshold further and simply stick to the generic idea. This of course limits the political applicability of the view, and therefore also implies feasibility constraints on sufficientarianism, but it is questionable to which degree it presents a central theoretical problem. As argued by Nielsen in the defence of the vague ideal of autonomy-catering sufficiency, although what level of resources, welfare and opportunities that together constitute the threshold might be theoretically difficult to specify, because absence of deficiency can take indefinite forms, the *presence* of deficiency will almost always have a very specific outlook (Nielsen 2016: 210). Thus, even just in light of the generic sufficiency view, significant shortfalls from the relevant threshold could be quite easily identified.

This abstract idea of a threshold might be enough for sufficientarians in many cases, since the whole gist of the view is to oppose the very present instances of deficiency—i.e. the hunger of the hungry, the need of needy, and the suffering of the ill—rather than to determine a specific definition of what that deficiency is. This response latches on to an upcoming trend of incomplete theorizing about justice within the literature of political philosophy, such as suggested by Amartya Sen (2009) and most recently Jonathan Wolff (2015), who pursue the so-called “manifest

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injustice thesis” (Wolff 2015). Central to this approach lies the core idea that we do not need a full-fledged theory of justice—and thus nor do we need a complete technical definition of what counts as absolute deficiencies—in order to identify clear cases of injustice.

Although this way of defending the generic sufficiency view without specifying it further have some merits, it makes the position vulnerable to the widely shared concern that setting the threshold is problematically arbitrary (Arneson 1997; Casal 2007, Knight 2015). Some defenders of the sufficiency view reply that although this is essentially correct, it is not necessarily a problem. In instance, Soran Reader compares the generic idea of a sufficiency threshold to the distinction between the categories of “night” and “day” (Reader 2006). And just like we can easily employ the conception of night and day as divided by a threshold, without setting a specific cut-off point between them, sufficientarians can employ the vague idea of a threshold representing the point where absolute deficiency is eliminated to guide judgements about justice without defining any positive account of what that threshold essentially comes down to.

However, sufficientarians need to be able specify the threshold further than this for the view to be theoretically coherent and plausible. Of course, they can employ the generic ideal whenever there is need for an ecumenical discussion of sufficientarianism, but if unable to specify the view further, we would never be able to tell the distributive guidance of the view in particular cases. We might say that the sufficiency view would then, although still a philosophical doctrine, not be a *political philosophical* doctrine.

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But in specifying the sufficiency threshold, sufficientarians face the hard dilemma of identifying a reasonable balanced and theoretical plausible level for the relevant well-being metric (Casal 2007). If defining a very high threshold they seem to underestimate the objective importance in eliminating urgent deficiency. If, for example, the relevant threshold is based on a high standard of personal welfare such as preference satisfaction, it seems that we have certainly undervalued the importance of eliminating deficiencies such as hunger, deprivation, suffering etc. On the other hand, setting a very low threshold—e.g. set at the level of basic needs fulfilment—makes the sufficiency view vulnerable to being ignorant of seemingly very unjust inequalities that are above this threshold. It seems, thus, that there might not be any specific threshold point that will serve to fit a plausible account of distributive justice.

The recent theoretical development within the framework of sufficientarianism has provided a number of different ways to set the threshold. Robert Huseby restates sufficiency as a multiple-threshold scheme with one lower threshold set at the fulfilment of basic needs and an upper threshold set at reasonable contentment (2010). The ingenuity of this two-tier view is that it deals directly with the abovementioned dilemma, and in a quite plausible manner. First, since the basic need threshold takes priority over the contentment threshold, there will be no problem with undervaluing the importance of urgent deficiencies. And second, since being at a welfare-level of reasonable contentment surely seems to provide intuitive ground for not having a justice-based claim for further redistribution, it is not implausible to ignore inequalities above that level. Thus, in sum, Huseby's view can be expressed as

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an interpretation of the generic sufficiency view in the following sense. Justice is concerned with eliminating absolute deficiencies rather than inequalities, but within the category of absolute relevant deficiencies, we must distinguish between subsistent-relevant deficiencies (below the lower basic need threshold) and contentment-relevant deficiencies (below the upper contentment threshold), and the former takes absolute priority over the latter. Hence, it is clear that Huseby's specific version adheres to the generic sufficiency view, but moreover that it is in general a quite plausible further specification of sufficientarianism that helps to bolster its theoretical justifiability.

A similar strategy has been pursued by Yitzhak Benbaji (2005, 2006). But, where Huseby suggests an upper and a lower threshold scheme, Benbaji's sufficiency view involves several utility-thresholds. Benbaji's view effectively comes down to an at least three-threshold scheme involving a lower point below which personhood is absent, and then a pain threshold and a luxury threshold (2006). The distributive principle that Benbaji refers to and that feeds on the generic sufficiency view is the formulation that, "benefitting people matters more, the more priority lines there are above the utility level at which these people are, the more of those people there are, and the greater the size of the benefit in question" (2006: 343). Like Huseby's view, Benbaji's further development of the generic view enables sufficientarianism to cope with the dilemma of setting the threshold.

Another strategy for developing and specifying the sufficiency view further that has gained a good deal of attention has been proposed by Liam Shields (2012; 2016). Shields argues that instead of committing to a specific cut-off threshold above which

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inequalities are irrelevant, the gist of the generic sufficiency view should be interpreted as a merge of a sufficiency claim stressing the importance of securing that people have enough of some goods, and then a *Shift Thesis* stating that, “once people have secured enough there is a discontinuity in the rate of change of the marginal weight of our reasons to benefit them further” (Shields 2012). Although this interpretation of the view does not settle for a more specific threshold definition, it does in an important way render the sufficiency view more plausible. What it does, effectively, is to resolve the dilemma by allowing for a more modest threshold level—set at some non-specified level of resources—than would otherwise have been acceptable, since the Shift Thesis enables sufficientarianism to object to inequalities above the threshold while still remaining loyal to the central driving intuition of the generic sufficiency view. Like Huseby and Benbaji, Shield has certainly succeeded by bringing progress in the general development within the framework of sufficientarianism, and his version of the sufficiency view has been widely accepted as a plausible way to defend sufficientarianism.

Huseby’s, Benjabi’s, and Shields’ views are similarly indebted to the reasoning of foregoing sufficientarians such as Frankfurt, Raz, and Crisp, and they are all valid interpretations and further developments of the generic sufficiency view. And although importantly different in the specific outlook of their accounts, all of them are versions of what I shall call deficiency-monist sufficiency views. This does not imply that they are monist views in all relevant respects. In fact, they all accept some form of pluralism. Employing a recent framework from Carina Fourie (2016), we can distinguish between *pattern-pluralism*, implying that more than one distributive

pattern is needed in the distributive view, and *external-pluralism*, implying that there are relevant issues of justice which are not captured by the distributive view. Importantly, these two types of pluralism are not mutually exclusive, which is to say that you can reasonably defend both. All these views are pattern-pluralist views. That is, all of them subsidise the simple threshold-pattern by a further distributive pattern, namely priority to the worse-off below the threshold. That is, below the threshold, benefitting people matters more the further they are below the threshold. This is the least interesting form of pluralism, since, as Benbaji and Shields note, all plausible sufficiency views should subscribe to it.

Although pluralist in a specific pattern-related way, all the above interpretations of the sufficiency view are deficiency-monist views, or what Benbaji calls homogenous views (2006). That is, they all believe that whatever a relevant deficiency is, it can be captured by some singular category or metric of value aspects such as welfare (Huseby 2010), well-being (Benbaji 2006), or goods (Shields 2012).

The deficiency-monist view

The relevant absolute deficiencies can meaningfully be captured by some singular metric of value aspects.

We may distinguish between a weaker and a stronger form of deficiency-monism. The stronger form implies that there is some metric of value aspects on which every relevant value can be aggregated so that every person's level or state can be, in theory, compared. It is certainly this stronger version that recent critics such as

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Shlomi Segall (2016) and Carl Knight (2015) attach to the sufficiency view—they criticise utility-based sufficiency—but it is also at least to some extent the view that theorists like Huseby and Benbaji hold. But there is also a weaker version, implying agnosticism about the truth of deficiency-monism for the sake of focusing on the pattern-question without having to settle on a specific metric of justice (welfare, resources, opportunity or capabilities). That is, this weaker version allows deficiency-pluralism in principle for the sake of making their argument more ecumenical, but assumes deficiency-monism in order to discuss the specifics of sufficiency as a distributive patterned ideal. This weaker version, I take it, is the version that best captures Liam Shields' position.

In opposition to the deficiency-monist sufficiency views, I can identify deficiency-pluralist sufficiency views.

The deficiency-pluralist view

The relevant absolute deficiencies cannot meaningfully be captured by some singular metric of value aspects.

This is, for example, the view expressed in Martha Nussbaum's capability-based human entitlement theory (2000; 2006; 2011), and the view developed more recently by David V. Axelsen and Lasse Nielsen (2015). Like Huseby and Benbaji, Axelsen and Nielsen propose a multiple threshold view, but whereas the former two suggest various thresholds on a deficiency-monist vertical scale—that is, on different levels of welfare or well-being—what Axelsen and Nielsen argue, is that there are multiple

thresholds *horizontally*. That is, instead of understanding the threshold level as a specific point in reference to one—an aggregated point cover all—value aspects, we need to determine the specific relevant threshold for each particular value aspect. In fact, they believe that we can hardly make any sense of setting thresholds at all without taking into account the specific substantial meaning of the value of the aspect in question. Consequently, in setting the thresholds, Axelsen and Nielsen argue that we should understand the substantial value content of the specific aspect and the distributive logic that this aspect calls for. Most importantly, we should distinguish between *positional aspects*, who's absolute value depends on one's relative stand on that aspect compared to others, and *non-positional aspects*, where this is not the case (Nielsen and Axelsen 2016).¹ The point of this distinction is essentially to understand the incompatible meaning of sufficiency in relation to these different-typed aspects. For non-positional aspects, they argue, a simple threshold-logic applies because since the value of this aspect for a person is independent of what others have, there will be some level above which it is reasonable to say that people have enough to establish that our reasons for further distribution has ceased. Health is a non-positional aspect. Thus, on their account, it makes sense to say that in regard to health there exists some level, above which we cannot reasonably require additional redistributions in regard to health resources from others. But positional aspects, such as social and political aspects, require an equal distribution because having less than others in this regard is always involving the presence of an absolute

¹ Setting aside “quasi-positional aspects” (such as education) referring to non-positional aspects that have a direct spill-over relation to positional aspects.

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social deficiency. This is so, because no one could live sufficiently good lives if victimized by persistent inequalities in the social space. Or to put it differently, as they exemplify in regard to the challenge of discrimination, a person who suffers discrimination faces significant pressure against succeeding in capabilities integral to functioning in a social setting. Aspects that are fundamental to his identity (such as race or religion) are treated as inferior, significantly increasing the probability that his social status and self-worth will be compromised (Axelsen and Nielsen 2015).

This, they rightfully state it, is a very relevant absolute deficiency. Thus, on this account, *inadequate* health is one type of a relevant absolute deficiency, whereas *unequal* political or societal status is another, but both are equivalently, but incompatible, types of absolute deficiencies (Nielsen and Axelsen 2016). Thus, although the implied demand for social equality seems to render the view more egalitarian, both inadequate health and unequal political or societal status can be explained as injustices in reference to the deficiency-pluralist development of the generic sufficiency view.

Although the sufficiency view is so far highly undertheorized in comparison to egalitarian views, still more needs to be said in order to capture the full picture of different versions and interpretations of it.² In this section I have not taken the space to do that. Rather, I have merely fleshed out the common driving intuition of sufficientarianism build upon different instantiations in the literature. On this basis, I

² For a very useful collection of works elaborating and discussing the sufficiency view, see Liam Shields' sufficientarian-bibliography on his personal webpage:

<http://liamshields.com/teaching-and-study-materials/>.

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have formulated a generic sufficiency view purposed to capture the driving force for all versions of sufficientarianism. Then, I have elaborated briefly upon four different specified developments of the sufficiency view, respectively suggested by Robert Huseby, Yitzhak Banbaji, Liam Shields, and finally David V. Axelsen and Lasse Nielsen. I have shown how these differ in certain ways, although all of them are validly compatible with the generic view, but also that they importantly differ in that the first three of them are deficiency-monist, whereas the latter fleshes out a deficiency-pluralist alternative. In the next section, I present a critical point that has been raised against sufficientarianism and that I think still needs further answers. I argue that this problem only applies to specific, and in my view implausible interpretations of sufficientarianism, and that the generic sufficiency view is not threatened by this attack. In section IV I raise another potential problem—of how to distribute burdens above the threshold—that I think is more critical to the generic sufficiency view. If I am right, this problem is the most likely candidate to show what is wrong with sufficiency. I then give some preliminary suggestions of possible ways to enable the sufficiency view to cope with this problem.

III. The Manna from Heaven Problem for Sufficiency

Let me turn to the most important objection to sufficientarianism. This objection is sometimes called *the ignorance of inequality objection to sufficiency*, and can be found in various versions (Temkin 2003; Casal 2007; Knight 2015; Segall 2016). Imagine that sufficiency is already achieved. That is, imagine that we live in a society where there are no absolute deficiencies on any account. Thus, everyone

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possesses enough resources; enjoys a sufficiently high level of welfare; has the needed capabilities and opportunities for a dignified and meaningful human life. On all measures, the assumption is, everyone has *enough*. In this case, the sufficiency view implies that inequalities are irrelevant from the point of view of justice. That is, the fact that some people are better off than others does not give rise to justified complaints and demands for redistribution as long as the worse off are also above the relevant threshold. But this, egalitarians argue, is highly counterintuitive—especially when the difference between the best-off and the worst-off is significant. As Paula Casal has forcefully put it, sufficientarianism, if consistent, should be ready to accept not only insignificant variations in resources and welfare but also inequalities between the superrich and the people who barely have enough (Casal 2007).

So, to exemplify, consider the following scenario. Suppose that we live in a society, *Plentia*, where everyone is sufficiently well-off. No one is suffering from poverty, hunger, or destitution, and there is no discrimination, social exclusion, or oppression. Everyone is living decent human lives in total absence of absolute deficiency. However, there is one third of *Plentia* that is significantly and dominantly better-off than the rest—that is, they are much richer in resources; have more subjective welfare and thus live better lives. Now, suppose that all of a sudden, some very valuable benefit is given as an act of nature to the society of *Plentia*. Call that *the manna from Heaven distribution scenario*. Imagine, for example, that *Plentia* is a volcano-island society, with the rich third living on the west coast, and the non-rich group living on the east coast, and that suddenly the volcano erupts during a storm so that it covers only the west coast areas of the island in a very especially fertilizing

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volcanic ash that will increase the production of the land for years to come. As a consequence, this will make the rich third much better off than they were before and thus the inequality between them and the non-rich even bigger. Can this distribution of additional benefits to Plentia really be in accordance with justice? This seems suspiciously counterintuitive, and many would find it to speak against sufficiency and in favour of egalitarian or prioritarian distributive theory.

However, there is a number of ways that sufficientarians could reasonably respond to this problem. Firstly, they could employ a reasonable high threshold such as Huseby's contentment-based threshold (2010) or Benbaji's higher utility threshold (2005), which makes it much less counterintuitive to ignore inequalities above. Recall that Huseby and Benbaji are multiple threshold views and are thus capable of referring to a very high threshold, without being vulnerable to undervaluing more urgent deficiencies. However, the very high welfare-based threshold comes with the downside of making justice immensely demanding—that is, demanding in the sense that one can now require redistribution in order to reach personal contentment. In other words, it would weaken the reasoning for the positive part of the view in the moral importance on reaching the threshold.

Secondly, they could exchange the strong negative implication of the generic sufficiency view with something like Shields' Shift Thesis—that the reasons we have for redistribution between two groups above the threshold is significantly less weighty than the reasons we have for redistribution across the threshold. Although Shields' view is then in a weak sense consistent with the general strand of the generic view, it parts from it in solving the manna from Heaven problem, because the Shift

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Thesis acknowledges that we do have good reasons for redistributing from the better-off to the worse-off even when everyone is above the threshold.

Liam Shields' Shift Thesis solves some of the problems that arise for sufficientarians. Yet it comes with a downside for sufficientarian theory more generally. Namely, that although it provides a valid strategy for sufficientarians to apply in order to better cope with specific issues, it requires them to leave sufficientarian reasoning. Put more bluntly, although Shields' theory is importantly grounded within the broad scope framed by of the generic sufficiency view, the reasons we have for redistributing in the manna from Heaven distribution scenario if we adopt the Shift Thesis *cannot* be sufficientarian. They must be based on egalitarian or prioritarions arguments. Consequently, Shields hereby explicates his pattern-pluralism by incorporating a non-sufficientarian patterned rule for distribution above the threshold and thus his view becomes more of a hybrid-view than a full-fledged sufficientarian view. This of course is no problem for any individual theorist, but it is a problem for *sufficientarianism*, because Shields' strategy for solving the problem proves the scope of the generic sufficiency view inadequate. That is, if we need to look outside sufficientarianism to find a suitable reply to the ignorance of inequality objection, this obviously restricts our confidence in the justification of sufficientarianism as a theoretical framework in general. Thus, in my opinion, Shields' view holds much promise as a singular application of distributive theory to distributive policy, but any valid sufficientarian response to the ignorance of inequality problem must come from elsewhere.

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A more promising sufficientarian solution comes from the deficiency-pluralists. Recall that deficiency-pluralist sufficiency view was defined in the coupling of the generic sufficiency view with the deficiency-pluralist definition of absolute deficiency so that, a state of affairs is just when absolute deficiencies are eliminated, where the relevant absolute deficiencies cannot meaningfully be captured by some singular metric of value aspects.

Now, theoretically, sufficientarians do not worry about inequalities *per se*. They are motivated about eliminating deficiency rather than inequality. But on the deficiency-pluralist account, social deficiencies are importantly different from non-social deficiencies in that they involve clear elements of positional aspects—i.e. the absolute value of which is dependent on what others have. Clear examples of deficiencies in a non-social aspect such as health functioning are grave suffering, malnutrition, low life-expectancy etc. Examples of deficiencies with a clear social dimension are exploitation, oppression, discrimination, domination etc. So the latter, not the former, hinges on specific social relations between people in a society or community. Now, if sufficiency is to be interpreted as claiming a threshold where everyone has adequate personal resources and opportunities—e.g. such as health functioning—but also sufficient social resources and opportunities, which is implied by the deficiency-pluralist views such as Nussbaum's, and Axelsen and Nielsen's, then we have strong reasons to eliminate social deficiencies such as exploitation, oppression, discrimination, and domination. And, since large material inequalities between societal groups very often coincide with these kinds of deficiencies, and always comes alongside an arbitrary threat of domination and other forms of social

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imbalances in power, we should oppose large inequalities in resources even when everyone is far above the threshold. This, however, is not because inequality is bad or unjust, but because large material inequalities bring about social deficiencies and thus will effectively bring some people below the threshold on some social aspects of objective importance.

Let me go back to the manna from Heaven case, where the rich third in *Plentia* is now much better off than the non-rich. Setting aside hybrid-views, for the reasons mentioned above—that they do not employ sufficientarian reasoning in their reply—deficiency-pluralist views give the same initial reply as deficiency-monist views. That is, they claim, if the rise in inequality does not bring along any deficiency, then justice should deem the eschewed outcome of the volcano eruption irrelevant. But, importantly, the deficiency-pluralist would maintain, this would require not only that the manna from Heaven given to the rich third would not cause any of the non-rich to fall below the threshold in terms of resources or welfare, but also that it would not result in any other form of absolute deficiency, such as most relevantly social deficiencies in form of dominance, oppression or eschewed political influence. Given how grave inequalities in wealth affect social relations and well-being under non-ideal circumstances (Marmot 2004; Wilkinson and Pickett 2010, Gilens 2012; Woll 2016), this is actually quite difficult to imagine. But as an ideal-theoretical hypothetical example, a deficiency-pluralist sufficiency account helps us elaborate what the manna from Heaven case requires in order to maintain a just outcome. Besides the absence of hunger, poverty, deprivation, destitution etc.—which have all been ignored here because *Plentia* is an above-threshold case—deficiency-pluralist

sufficiency also requires elimination of social deficiencies such as there being no social exclusion, no exploitation, and absence of domination which implies that the rich would not benefit from imbalances in power, social bargain capacity, societal status or political influence. Recall, however, that this is not due to the intrinsic importance of equality, but because such societal inequalities are immanent instances of absolute social deficiencies. If all this is taken into account, and if we therefore imagine that none of this is the case in the instance *Plentia*, then it is much less clear that justice should be disturbed by the additional benefits arbitrarily given to the already better-off. Deficiency-pluralism thus not only provides a better answer than deficiency-monism to the ignorance of inequality objection in the manna from Heaven scenario. It also gives a much stronger explanation for when and why the generic sufficiency view can allow agnosticism about inequalities, because it elaborates upon the various forms relevant absolute deficiencies can take.

IV. The Manna from Hell Problem for Sufficiency

In the preceding sections I have defended the sufficiency view against the ignorance of inequality objection in a benefit-driven form. I have argued that this objection, although seemingly intuitively disturbing, is merely an alleged problem for the generic sufficiency view and that it only poses a real problem for specific interpretations of this view. In this section I wish to propose what I see as a *stronger* version of this objection to the generic sufficiency view. Based on this problem I do not want to conclude that sufficientarianism should be abandoned—in fact, I still consider the sufficiency view to hold a stronger candidacy than its competitors for

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providing the foundation for a full-fledged theory of distributive justice. Rather, the problem I raise implies merely that there are special and rare cases where the generic sufficiency view provides implausible answers and thus that more theoretical development is called upon for this issue to be properly addressed.

The issue that I have in mind is a burden-driven version of the ignorance of inequality objection, which Paula Casal briefly mentions in her intuition of justice as requiring, “that when a natural disaster such as a tsunami strikes, it is the wealthiest who should make the greatest donation” (Casal 2007: 311). To flesh out the problem in a bit more detail, let me turn back to the image of our country, *Plentia*. Some sufficientarians might object that *Plentia*, as described here, is far from reality, because in real life large inequalities will inevitably result in some absolute deficiencies in the social sphere. This is a valid response that reminds us of the importance of the deficiency-pluralist version of sufficiency, but we need to take account of this hypothetical scenario nonetheless on the assumption that no such deficiency is present. To be sure, according to the sufficiency view, no one has a claim for redistribution in *Plentia*. Now, assume that some very costly burden falls upon the citizens of *Plentia*. This burden is unforeseen and there is no one to hold accountable for it. It is no one’s fault. It is simply the inverted case of the *manna from Heaven distribution scenario*. Thus, we can call it *the manna from Hell distribution scenario*. How should the costs of such a burden be distributed between the citizens of *Plentia*?

Suppose the manna from Hell burden falls directly upon the shoulders of everyone else than the rich. Imagine, for example, that in the volcano-island society of *Plentia*,

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with the rich third living on the west coast, and the non-rich group living on the east coast, the volcano erupts during a storm that covers only the east coast areas of the island in a very destructive type of ash that will be devastating to the fertility of the land and thus decrease the production on these lands for years to come. As a result, the non-rich is now much worse off than they were before and, moreover, the inequality between them and the rich third has increased.

The east-coastians request that the government enforce that the much richer west-coastians at least take part in the process of cleaning up, but as it stands, the sufficientarian government is struggling to come up with a consistent line of reasoning for why they are obliged to do that. Like with the manna from Heaven case, there is nothing in the sufficiency view that helps to solve this manna from Hell case, but in contrast to the former the intuition of an injustice is much stronger in the latter case. Even granting all the qualifications on the importance of social equality that the deficiency-pluralist view provides to the sufficiency view, the manna from Hell case still seems intuitively to pose a significant problem. That is, even if the volcano ash is in no way threatening any social relations or other positional value aspects in *Plentia*, it still seems an unacceptable implication for justice, that the rich third of the population can dismiss taking any part in rectifying the unfortunate consequences of the natural disaster.

Egalitarians have a ready reply. The rich should take on the burden, or at least more than their fair share of the cost of the burden, because equality is valuable and inequality is bad. Although egalitarians need not accept levelling down as an all things considered strategy for moral improvement, at least in this case, the answer is

obvious. Since the manna from Hell is now there and must be distributed, the rich should carry most of its costs, because, if for no other reason, if the burden falls upon the worse-off, it will increase inequality, which is bad.

Prioritarians have an equally plausible response. The rich should to a large degree bear the burden, because, on all levels of welfare, resources or freedoms, benefitting the worse-off has priority. That is, even though everyone in *Plentia* is faring well better than the people whom the priority view is typically concerned about, it is a straightforward implication of their view that the costs of the manna from Hell should fall upon the better-off group than on the worse-off group. Like egalitarians, prioritarians promptly provide the intuitively right answer.

Sufficientarians stand without reply here. If they share the intuitive reaction—that it is unjust to let the worse-off carry the burden—the manna from Hell case poses a serious problem for their theory. Of course, they might insist that this intuition is false; that it is simply a status quo bias that we react more strongly to burdens than to benefits, and that we should therefore simply maintain that there is no claim of justice for redistributing the consequences. If this is accurate, the sufficiency view will be immune to the manna from Hell case, if what I have argued in response to the manna from Heaven case is correct. That is, on the assumption that the sufficiency view can plausibly be defended against the manna from Heaven problem by elaborating the underlying deficiency-pluralism, like I have argued above, it follows from the difference between benefits and burdens being a status quo bias, that the same appeal to deficiency-pluralism can plausibly defend the sufficiency view against the manna from Hell problem.

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But if it is not status quo bias, then sufficientarians need to say more than this. They might add that this is a very specific and small problem and thus even if it is correct, it is not a problem that as such grounds a rejection of sufficientarianism. That might be so, but maybe the manna from Hell problem has more broad political implications than it seems a first sight. Assume that the burden that falls upon the citizens of *Plentia* is not something removable—like the natural phenomenon of volcano ash—but some group of people in dire need for help. Instead of the volcano eruption scenario, imagine that the sufficientarian government in *Plentia* has unanimously decided to help the citizens of their neighbour society *Deficia*, whom are all below the threshold. Helping the *Deficia* citizens is very costly, and the rich and the non-rich in *Plentia* cannot agree about how to distribute this burden. Being only a third of the full population, the rich are only willing to bear a third of the total cost. The non-rich, however, argue that since the rich are much better-off than the rest, most of the burden should fall upon them. The sufficientarian government of *Plentia* is unable to solve this dispute. Going through the literature on sufficientarianism, on which the constitution of *Plentia* is grounded, they find no arguments to support either side. Yet again, intuitively, it seems so obvious that the richer third should bear at least more than their fair share of the cost of helping the needy neighbour citizens.

So, it seems that once we flip the manna from Heaven distribution scenario around to involve the distribution of burdens rather than benefits, the intuitive ground for an equal distribution is much stronger. Note that this is not a problem for all sufficientarians. Liam Shields' Shift Thesis handles this problem in the same way as it deals with the manna from Heaven distribution scenario. But, as mentioned, this

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strategy is open to Shields because he has already partly left the sufficientarian framework and thus has become a hybrid-view theorist, and hence this provides no solution that helps render the generic sufficiency view any more theoretically plausible.

How does the deficiency-pluralist version deal with the manna from Hell problem? It is not clear that it can actually help much. As it is already assumed in the hypothetical case that there is no absolute deficiency present of any kind, there seems to be no reasons in favour of allocating according to wealth. One could say that we should not put this extra burden on the non-rich due to the future potential of spillover from material inequality to social deficiency but this is, at best, an indirect reason that does not seem to adhere to the strong intuitive reaction we have against the outcome of the manna from Hell scenario. Thus, it seems that no interpretation of the generic sufficiency view is able to cope well with this problem, and that more theory development is called for in order to escape the counterintuitive implications of this specific case.

One promising path for developing the sufficiency view in order to cope better with the manna from Hell problem is to incorporate or refer to the value of fraternity or community. That is, one possible feature that explains the relative strength of the intuition against the outcome of the manna from Hell scenario is that the value of community is more threatened by the rich group's rejection to help bear the collective burden than it is in the case where the rich group rejects to share the additional benefits. The instantiation of the value of community here can be fleshed out in reference to G.A. Cohen's idea of the communal value as found outside the

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scope of distributive justice (2009). To be clear, it might be that not sharing your additional material benefits with your communal fellows similarly poses a threat to the internal value of the community and thus that the manna from Heaven case is also somewhat problematic on that account. Cohen explicitly believes this. In reference to the deficiency-pluralist sufficiency view, it is more questionable. That is, taking into account that everyone is beyond any relevant threshold so that no social or non-social deficiency is present, it seems reasonably questionable whether wealth inequalities would pose a threat to any value internal to the collective community. But not taking a fair share of the bearing of collective burdens is beyond any doubt endangering the value of community (if any such value exists). Thus, it seems that the option of referring to the existence of communal value as a separate non-distributive aspect is available to the sufficiency view.

Alternatively, if one wishes to stay within the scope of distributive justice, it seems similarly open to the sufficiency view to adopt something similar to Kimberley Brownlee's account of a human right against social deprivation (Brownlee 2013). To be sure, this is an already implied element of the deficiency-pluralist versions such as that of Axelsen and Nielsen (2015; 2016), so it seems on that note a sensible path to pursue. Brownlee refers to the value aspect of social inclusion which is not that different from parts of Cohen's communal value, but it differs in the way of justification. That is, where Cohen emphasizes the separateness of this value to distributive equality, Brownlee argues that there is in fact a right not to be socially deprived based on the intrinsic value of social inclusion. This value—i.e. the intrinsic value of social inclusion—might be threatened by a significant subpopulation's

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dismissal to bear their share of collective burdens, and it seems thus reasonable to refer to this value as within the framework of a deficiency-pluralist sufficiency view.

Brownlee herself believes that the right against social deprivation plays a significant part in what defines the relevant threshold for the effective opportunity for leading a decent human life. So, the question is whether the intrinsic value of social inclusion can justify considering not having the better-off take part in collective duties if they fall upon the worse-off. This question, calls for more comprehensive theorizing than I can provide here. My modest point here is simply that this seems a promising potential path for bolstering the generic sufficiency view in order to cope with the mana from Hell problem. If this path is followed further and thus the sufficiency view developed accordingly, it might show that there is essentially nothing wrong with sufficiency. As it stands, though, I cannot fully reach this conclusion. My conclusion maintains that what is wrong with sufficiency is, that it does not satisfactory deal with the problem of how to distribute burdens in societies where no absolute deficiency exists and that, unless further developed in order to cope with that, the generic sufficiency view cannot qualify as a plausible full-fledged theory of distributive justice.

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