1. **Recap**

*1st form of Equality of Opportunity - Meritocracy*

Desirable jobs or positions should be offered to the best-qualified applicants through competitions that no one is excluded from entering.

*Problem:*meritocracy fails to addressunfair inequality ofaccess to qualifications

*2nd form of Equality of Opportunity – Fair Equality of Opportunity*

Access to qualifications should not be influenced by individuals’ socioeconomic background.

*Problem:* FEO allows natural talent to affect access to qualifications, jobs, and social positions. But since natural talent too is undeserved, this seems unfair.

1. **Third form of Equality of Opportunity - Luck Egalitarianism**

*Luck Egalitarianism:*Fairness requires that we redress inequalities (often but not always in welfare) that result from luck rather than from choices people are responsible for.

Luck Egalitarianism (LE) broadens the idea of equality of opportunity in 2 ways:

* LE removes unequal opportunities resulting from unchosen social background and differences in natural talent.
* Typically, LE focuses on equal opportunities for welfare, not just opportunities for jobs and social positions.

Other names: ‘Responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism’, ‘Equality of Opportunity for Welfare’

LE captures two important intuitions about fairness:

* It is unfair for people to be disadvantaged through no fault of their own.
* Fairness requires that people be held accountable for their choices.

Some defenders of LE :

Richard Arneson ‘Equality and Equality of Opportunity for Welfare’ *Philosophical Studies* 56(1) (1989)

G.A. Cohen ‘On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice’ *Ethics* 99(4) (1989)

Shlomi Segall, *Equality and Opportunity*, Oxford University Press (2013)

1. **Objections to Luck Egalitarianism**
2. The liberty objection

LE requires extensive state interference with individuals’ lives to eliminate the impact of unchosen social and natural inequalities.

*Reply 1.* This isn’t as bad as it sounds (e.g. redistributive taxation)

*Counter:* If the principle allows for minor redistributive tax, why not stronger interference? (slippery slope argument)

*Reply 2.* LE enhances the liberty of the unlucky

1. The efficiency objection

Equalizing opportunities for welfare may make everyone worse off

E.g. Redistributive taxation could disincentivize hard work for the talented and qualified.

E.g. Giving jobs to the less talented and qualified may lead to important social functions being performed poorly.

*Reply 1:*Impose an efficiency-constraint on LE

*Counter 1:*this reduces the moral significance of LE (why not just maximise efficiency?)

*Reply 2:*fairness should not be restricted by the attitudes of citizens – virtuous citizens will be motivated by what is right, not what is in their interest

*Counter 2:*perhaps those who are more productive deserve greater reward?

For more on this see: G.A. Cohen *Rescuing Justice and Equality,* Harvard University Press (2008) ch. 2)

1. The epistemic objection

Luck egalitarianism requires an impossible level of knowledge about:

* current levels of well-being for each person;
* whether current levels of well-being result from choices for which people are responsible;
* what we are responsible for (and this raises difficult questions about responsibility, free will, and determinism).

1. The equality objection (AKA the abandonment objection)

Luck egalitarianism abandons those who are disadvantaged because of choices they made

(see Elizabeth Anderson, ‘What is the Point of Equality?’, *Ethics* 109(2) (1999))

*Example 1:* would we refuse NHS healthcare for a helmet-less motorcyclist?

*Reply 1:* We could legally prohibit bad choices e.g. make wearing a helmet mandatory

*Counter:* does the fact that the motorcyclist breaks the laws make a difference to whether we should refuse them healthcare?

*Reply 2:* Insure against bad choices (e.g. make health insurance for drivers compulsory)

*Example 2:* Would we refuse support for those who choose to care for a sick relative at the cost of their own income?

1. **Scepticism about Equality of Opportunity**

Some have questioned whether equality of opportunity is the goal of egalitarianism

*Problem 1 – a dilemma for equality of opportunity*

(See Clare Chambers ‘Each Outcome is Another Opportunity: Problems with the Moment of Equal Opportunity’ *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics* 8(4) (2009))

There are two ways to equalize opportunities.

Either: opportunities are equalized up to a single moment in people’s lives, the Moment of Equal Opportunity (MEO).

BUT: this seems ethically inconsistent, because inequalities after the MEO are unjustified

Or: opportunities are equalized throughout people’s lives

BUT: this encounters insurmountable epistemic and efficiency difficulties

*Reply to the dilemma:* tackle the first horn. There is no ethical inconsistency because inequalities after the MEO are fair

*Counter*: This puts too much pressure on making sure the MEO is perfectly fair

*Problem 2 – equality of opportunity is too vague a principle*

(See Janet Radcliffe-Richards ‘Equality of Opportunity’ *Ratio* 10(3) (1997))

Meritocracy, Fair Equality of Opportunity, and Luck Egalitarianism are all too different for the category ”equality of opportunity” to be meaningful. What makes these theories different versions of the same thing?

**Reply:** the different forms of equality of opportunity are all trying to explain how we can have a *fair* society. Equality of opportunity is thus a particular kind of fairness

**But:** luck egalitarianism does have a different focus (welfare) than the other theories of equality of opportunity (jobs and social positions).

(Also relevant: Andrew Mason ‘Equality of Opportunity: Old and New’ *Ethics* 111(4) (2001))

**Next week: Discrimination**

*Matt Bennett*

*Email* [*mpb74@cam.ac.uk*](mailto:mpb74@cam.ac.uk)

*Website (including teaching materials): drmattbennett.weebly.com*