1. **First form: meritocracy**

Meritocracy is also known as “careers open to talents” (this is a phrase form John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*).

Proponents of meritocracy include:

David Miller, ‘Deserving Jobs’ *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 42(167) 161-181 (1992)

George Sher, ‘Qualifications, Fairness, and Desert’ in *Equal Opportunity* ed. Norman Bowie (Boulder: Westview, 1988), 113-127.

(See also George Sher, *Desert*, Princeton University Press, 1989, Chapter 7)

*Meritocracy maintains:* desirable jobs or positions should be offered to the best-qualified applicants through competitions that no one is excluded from entering

“Best-qualified applicants” are those with the highest level of ability or disposition to contribute positively to performing the task at hand

*What is the point of meritocracy?* To avoid discrimination (in e.g. employee recruitment) on the basis of age, disability, gender, sex, sexuality, race, religion etc.

1. **Justifications of meritocracy**
2. Meritocracy is efficient

*The efficiency argument:*Giving jobs and positions to the best qualified means that each job will be performed by those most capable of performing it

This is a *forward-looking*and *consequentialist*justification

*Problem:*consequentialism will sometimes lead us to hire those who are *not*the best qualified

E.g. John and his wealthy grandmother vs. Jane the expert mechanic

1. Meritocracy fairly rewards people for past-performance

*The past-performance argument:*Hiring the best qualified is a way of rewarding people for their past performance

This is a *backward-looking*justification

*Problem:*it is possible to be the best qualified for a certain job without having performed the job well previously (see David Miller, ‘Deserving Jobs’)

*Example:*Salieri vs Mozart

1. Meritocracy respects agency

“When we hire by merit, we abstract from all facts about the applicants except their ability to perform well at the relevant tasks. By thus concentrating on their ability to perform, we treat them as agents whose purposeful acts are capable of making a difference in the world.” (Sher, ‘Qualification, Fairness and Desert,’ p. 119-120)

*Problem 1:* Is selecting according to qualifications the only way of respecting agents? We could also select according to need

(See Andrew Mason, 'Equality of Opportunity, Old and New', Ethics, 111 (2001): 760-81. http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1086/233572. Reprinted in his Levelling the Playing Field (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199264414.001.)

*Problem 2:*The idea of respect may be too vague to help us here

(See Richard Arneson, ‘Luck Egalitarianism and Prioritarianism’ *Ethics* 110.2 (2000) pp.339-349)

1. Meritocracy grants people what they deserve

(Adapted from David Miller ‘Deserving Jobs’)

1. In a fair society, jobs would be allocated to workers whose actual contribution-value is proportional to their salary
2. Fairness requires that our hiring practices maximise the chances of our society being fair in the way described in I
3. The best-qualified candidate is most likely to perform the job perfectly
4. A person performs a job perfectly iff the value of their work is equal to the value of the designed contribution of the job
5. The value of the work done by the best-qualified candidate is most likely to equal the value of the designed contribution of the job. (from III and IV)
6. Grant that in our society jobs are created with salaries proportional to their designed contribution-value (in accordance with I (a) )
7. The contribution-value of the work done by the best-qualified candidate is, if hired, most likely to be proportional to their salary (from V and VI)
8. We ought to hire the best-qualified candidate (from II and VII)
9. **Objection to meritocracy**

*The Unfairness Objection I*

In societies with significant inequality, people start with unequal opportunities to develop qualifications. This inequality is undeserved.

Applying a principle of desert at the level of competition for a position fails to respond to this deeper unfairness

e.g. Bernard Williams’ Warrior Class Case

See Bernard Williams 'The Idea of Equality', in P. Laslett and W.G. Runciman, eds., Philosophy, Politics and Society (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), pp. 110-31. Reprinted in his Problems of the Self (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 230-49, also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511621253.016

1. **Second Form: Fair Equality of Opportunity (FEO)**

FEO combines two principles:

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

*Fair Background:*Access to qualifications should not be influenced by individuals’ socioeconomic background

“Those with the same level of [natural] talent and ability, and the same willingness to use them, should have the same prospects of success regardless of their initial place in the social system” (Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, sec.12, p.63. See Also Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*,section 13)

*Benefits of FEO*

* Seems fairer than meritocracy, dealing with unequal access to qualifications
* FEO retains the importance of individual responsibility

*Possible policy recommendations:*public funding for schools, redistributive taxation, good quality social care for children

*The issue of priority:* which should take priority: Meritocracy or Fair Background?

1. **Objections to FEO**

*The Family Objection*

Family can have a strong influence on capacity to develop qualifications

If FEO is committed to redressing social inequalities that affect our qualifications, then it appears to be committed to extreme regulation, or perhaps even abolition, of the family

But is such a radical proposal a problem for FEO?

*Some would say yes* on the grounds that this would constitute an unacceptable interference with individual liberty

*Some would say no* on the grounds that there are additional reasons for radically overhauling the institution of the nuclear family

e.g. ala Plato we might argue that a strong community requires we extend the bonds of familial relations to all – that we see everyone as “brothers” and “sisters”

e.g. some feminists argue that “liberty of the family” protects objectionable inequality and subjection of women

*The Unfairness Objection II*

FEO allows natural talents to influence access to qualifications, jobs, and social positions

But natural talents are:

* Unearned
* Unequally distributed

*Answer 1:*Complement FEO with a third principle (Rawls)

*Answer 2:*Natural inequalities are morally different to social inequalities

*Answer 3:*Abandon FEO in favour of a fairer theory of equality of opportunity

**Next week: Luck Egalitarianism and Equality of Opportunity Scepticism**

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