The Value of Equality and Egalitarianism

Lecture 2

Brute luck and equality of opportunity
The plan for today...

1. Sufficiency

2. Offensive and expensive tastes

3. Luck egalitarianism

4. Equality of opportunity
§1. Sufficiency
Sufficiencyarianism...

‘With respect to the distribution of economic assets, what is important from the point of view of morality is not that everyone should have the same...

...but that each should have enough.’

(Harry Frankfurt, *Equality as a Moral Ideal*, p.134)
‘...absolute priority is to be given to benefits to those below the threshold... Below the threshold, benefiting people matters more the worse off those people are...

Above the threshold, or in cases concerning only trivial benefits below the threshold, no priority is to be given.’

(Roger Crisp, *Equality, Priority, and Compassion*, p.758)
Why do we think it is a bad thing that while some people are quaffing fine wines at High Table...

...other people can barely afford to pay their rent...

Egalitarianism helps us to explain this moral conviction...
But sufficientarianism provides an equally good explanation of this moral conviction...

It is bad thing that some people don’t have a sufficient quantity of resources/well being, etc.

And clearly things don’t have to be this way.
The Beverly Hills case...

We can either give Château Lafite 1982 to *ten rich people*...

...or we can give Château Latour 1982 to *ten thousand super-rich people*...
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<th>The ten rich people</th>
<th>The ten thousand super rich people</th>
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<td><strong>Lafite 1982</strong></td>
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<td>90</td>
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<td><strong>to the rich people</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Latour 1982</strong></td>
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<td><strong>to the super-rich people</strong></td>
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P1    If either egalitarianism or prioritarianism is true then there is at least a reason to give the Lafite 1982 to the rich people.

P2    There is no reason to give the Lafite 1982 to the rich people.

C     Neither egalitarianism nor prioritarianism is true.
P2 would be plausible if the numbers indicated the *wealth* of the rich and super-rich people...
§2. Offensive and expensive tastes
‘...if men take a certain pleasure in discriminating against one another...

...in subjecting others to a lesser liberty as a means of enhancing their self-respect...

...then the satisfaction of these desires must be weighed in our deliberations according to their intensity, or whatever, along with other desires.’ (John Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, p.27)
Suppose Sarah has a strong desire to discriminate against other people...

Satisfying this desire contributes to her well being...

Is it a bad thing if Sarah and Joe have unequal well being because this desire is not satisfied...?
P1 If *welfare egalitarianism* is true then it is a bad thing if Sarah and Joe have unequal well being...

...even if this is because Sarah’s desire to discriminate against other people is not satisfied.

P2 It is not a bad thing if Sarah and Joe have unequal well being if this is because Sarah’s desire to discriminate against other people is not satisfied.
C Welfare egalitarianism is false.

Neutral welfare egalitarianism...

It is bad in itself if people have unequal well being.

Non-neutral welfare egalitarianism...

It is bad in itself if people have unequal well being if this is not because one of them has offensive tastes.
‘Equality of welfare seems to recommend that those with champagne tastes...

...who need more income simply to achieve the same level of welfare as those with less expensive tastes...

...should have more income on that account...

But this seems counter-intuitive...

(Ronald Dworkin, *What is Equality?*, p.228)
Suppose Sarah has a strong desire for plovers’ eggs and pre-phylloxera claret...

Her well being can be made equal to Joe’s only by giving her far more resources...

Note that expensive tastes does not simply mean tastes for expensive things...
Expensive tastes...

P1 If welfare egalitarianism is true then it is better if Sarah has more resources than Joe.

P2 It is not better if Sarah has more resources than Joe.

C Welfare egalitarianism is false.
Suppose Sarah has a physical impairment...

Her well being can be made equal to Joe’s only by giving her far more resources than Joe...

Surely an egalitarian will want to say that Sarah ought to be given more resources than Joe...

But this conflicts with resource egalitarianism...
P1  If *resource egalitarianism* is true then it is *not* better if Sarah has more resources than Joe.

P2  It is better if Sarah has more resources than Joe.

C    *Resource egalitarianism* is false.
§3. Luck egalitarianism
From the Sutton Trust’s 2016 report *Leading People*...

42% of British Bafta winners and 67% of British Oscar winners went to a private school...

74% of senior judges, and 61% of top doctors went to a private school...

50% of the Cabinet, and 32% of the
From university statistics, available online...

In 2015, 44% of students admitted to Oxford, and 38% of British students admitted to Cambridge, went to a private school...

Less than 7% of the British population went to a private school...
It’s just a bit of good fortune to be born to parents wealthy enough to send you to a private school.

It’s unfair—and so bad in itself—if some people fare better than others just as a result of good fortune.

It’s unfair—and so bad in itself—if some people fare better than others just as a result of being born to parents wealthy enough to send them to a private school.
It is just as much a bit of good fortune to be born clever or beautiful...

So by the same token...

...it’s unfair – and so bad in itself – if some people fare better than others just as a result of being born clever or beautiful...
‘...my own animating conviction in political philosophy with respect to justice is a conviction about distributive justice in particular...

...It is that an unequal distribution, whose inequality cannot be vindicated by some choice or fault or desert on the part of (some of) the relevant affected agents...

...is unfair, and, therefore, pro tanto, unjust, and nothing can remove that particular injustice.’
‘...the intuitive idea that [luck egalitarians] all share...

...is that persons should not be disadvantaged or advantaged simply on account of good or bad luck.’

(Kok-Chor Tan, *Defense of Luck Egalitarianism*, p.665)
Luck egalitarianism

It is unfair – and so bad in itself...

...if one person has a smaller distributive share than another...

...just as a result of bad brute luck...

...as opposed to choices that they made and for which they can held responsible...
Distributive shares should be *ambition-sensitive*...

...but *endowment insensitive*...

Roughly this means that your distributive share shouldn’t be affected by what you started with...

...it should only be affected by what you chose to do with it...!
'Option luck is a matter of how deliberate and calculated gambles turn out...

...whether someone gains or loses through accepting an isolated risk he or she should have anticipated and might have declined...

...Brute luck is a matter of how risks fall out that are not in that sense deliberate gambles.'

If Sarah and Joe both buy stocks, and Joe’s stocks rise while Sarah’s stocks fall...

...then Joe has had better option luck.

If Joe, but not Sarah, is hit by a meteorite...

...then Joe has had worse brute luck.
Is Rawls a proto luck egalitarian...

‘Intuitively, the most obvious injustice of the system of natural liberty is that it permits distributive shares to be improperly influenced by these factors so arbitrary from a moral point of view.’

(John Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, p.72)
Distributive shares must not be influenced by factors that are arbitrary from a moral point of view...

When is such influence not improperly influenced by factors that are arbitrary from a moral point of view...?

When it yields a Pareto improvement...
§4. Equality of opportunity
Formal equality of opportunity...

It is unfair and so bad in itself if one person has a smaller distributive share than another...

...just as a result of their race or gender or sexual orientation, etc.

...but it is not unfair if this is because of their socio-economic background...
Conventional equality of opportunity...

It is unfair and so bad in itself if one person has a smaller distributive share than another...

...just as a result of their race or gender or socio-economic background...

...but it is not unfair if this is because of how naturally clever or beautiful or talented they are...
P1 If it is unfair and so bad in itself that one person has a smaller distributive share than another just as a result of their race or gender, or their socio-economic background...

...then this must be because it is unfair and so bad in itself that one person has a smaller distributive share than another...

...just as a result of bad brute luck, as opposed to choices that they made and for
If it is unfair and so bad in itself that one person has a smaller distributive share than another...

...just as a result of bad brute luck, as opposed to choices that they made and for which they can held responsible...

...then it must also be unfair and so bad in itself that one person has a smaller distributive share than another just as a result of how naturally clever or beautiful or
If it is unfair and so bad in itself that one person has a smaller distributive share than another just as a result of their race or gender, or their socio-economic background...

...then it must also be unfair and so bad in itself that one person has a smaller distributive share than another just as a result of how naturally clever or beautiful or talented they are.
P2 is true... but is P1...?

Couldn’t there be some other justification for preventing gender, race, and socio-economic background...

...but not cleverness or talent...

...from influencing distributive shares...?
The total happiness of society is promoted by preventing gender, race, and socio-economic background, but not cleverness or talent, from influencing distributive shares...

In the Original Position we would choose a principle forbidding gender, race, and socio-economic background, but not cleverness or talent, from influencing distributive shares...
Another possible response...

It is unfair and so bad in itself that one person has a smaller distributive share than another just as a result of their race or gender, or their socio-economic background...

This is because these are *morally arbitrary factors*...

...whereas natural cleverness and talent are *not* morally arbitrary factors...
Next week...

More on luck egalitarianism