§1. What is luck egalitarianism?

T1 ‘…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.’

(Jerry Cohen, Rescuing Justice and Equality, p.7)

It is unjust if one person is disadvantaged relative to another person… i.e. has less of whatever we think is good… because of bad luck, not because of the things that he/she has chosen.


T2 ‘…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)

Option luck and brute luck…

T3 ‘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.’


P1 If justice requires us to equalize welfare, then it requires us to give additional resources to people with expensive tastes.

P2 Justice does not require us to give additional resources to people with expensive tastes.

C Justice does not require us to equalize welfare.
§2. Arguments for luck egalitarianism

Is luck egalitarianism the best explanation of our egalitarian intuitions? Here’s the principle: If P is true, and the best explanation for the truth of P is the truth of Q, then Q is true.

**No Shit**

It is unjust if people are advantaged/disadvantaged because of their race or sex.

One explanation for the truth of *No Shit* is the truth of *Luck Egalitarianism*.

P1 Nobody chose their race or their sex.
P2 It is unjust if people are advantaged/disadvantaged because of things that they did not choose.
C It is unjust if people are advantaged/disadvantaged because of their race or their sex.

Is there any other equally good explanation of the truth of *No Shit*…?

Is the truth of luck egalitarianism the consequence of a more basic principle of justice?

P1 It is unjust if people are rewarded/punished for things for which they are not morally responsible.
P2 People are not morally responsible for things they did not choose.
C It is unjust if people are rewarded/punished for things they did not choose.

P1 is obviously true, but C is not *Luck Egalitarianism*.

P1 It is unjust if people have advantages that they did not earn.
P2 People have not earned advantages if they have them as a result of things they did not choose.
C It is unjust if people have advantages as a result of things they did not choose.

C is *Luck Egalitarianism*, but is P1 obviously true?

§3. The luck/choice distinction

T4 ‘…in any ordinary sense of “voluntary,” people’s voluntary choices are routinely influenced by unchosen features of their personalities, temperaments, and the social contexts in which they find themselves…’

(Samuel Scheffler, *What is Egalitarianism?*, p.18)

T5 ‘…we may indeed be up to our necks in the free will problem, but that is just tough luck. It is not a reason for not following the argument where it goes.’

(Jerry Cohen, *Currency of Egalitarian Justice*, p.934)
‘We are not looking for an absolute distinction between presence and absence of genuine choice. The amount of genuineness is a matter of degree, and egaliitarian redress is indicated to the extent that a disadvantage does not reflect genuine choice. That extent is a function of several things, and there is no aspect of a person’s situation which is wholly due to genuine choice.’

(Jerry Cohen, *Currency of Egalitarian Justice*, p.934)

§4. Victims of bad option luck

‘...the fact that a person’s urgent medical needs can be traced to his own negligence or foolishness or high-risk behavior is not normally seen as making it legitimate to deny him the care he needs. Still less do people automatically forfeit any claim to assistance if it turns out that their urgent needs are the result of prudent or well-considered choices that simply turned out badly.’

(Samuel Scheffler, *What is Egalitarianism?,* p.18-19)

Suppose the victim of bad option luck is an uninsured driver.

‘If the faulty driver survives [the accident] but is disabled as a result, society has no obligation to accommodate his disability... It follows that the post office must let the guide dogs of the congenitally blind guide their owners through the building, but it can with justice turn away the guide dogs of faulty drivers who lost their sight in a car accident.’

(Elizabeth Anderson, *What is the Point of Equality?,* p.296)

Does Luck Egalitarianism really say that it is ‘legitimate to deny [the victim of bad option luck] the care he needs’...?

Luck Egalitarianism doesn’t say that we have no reason to give care and assistance to the victims of bad option luck. It doesn’t even say that we have no reason of justice to give care and assistance to the victims of bad option luck. It only says that we have no reason of distributive justice to give care and assistance to the victims of bad option luck.

But shouldn’t Luck Egalitarianism also say that one of the things that is unjust is if people *avoid* being disadvantaged relative to others, and not because of things they have chosen?

§5. Victims of bad brute luck

‘...equality of fortune [aka luck egalitarianism] fails the most fundamental test any egalitarian theory must meet: that its principles express equal respect and concern for all citizens.’
(Elizabeth Anderson, *What is the Point of Equality?*, p.289)

**FROM THE STATE EQUALITY BOARD**

‘To the stupid and untalented: …Because… you were so poorly endowed with talents, we productive ones will… let you share in the bounty of what we have produced with our vastly superior and highly valued abilities…

To the ugly and socially awkward: How sad that you are so repulsive to people around you that no one wants to be your friend or lifetime companion… you can console yourself in your miserable loneliness by consuming these material goods that we, the beautiful and charming ones, will provide.’

(Elizabeth Anderson, *What is the Point of Equality?*, p.305)

P1 If people are disadvantaged as a result of being stupid or untalented, ugly or socially awkward, then they are disadvantaged but not as a result of things that they have chosen.

P2 It is unjust if people are disadvantaged but not as a result of things that they have chosen.

C1 It is unjust if people are disadvantaged as a result of being stupid or untalented, ugly or socially awkward.

C2 If people are disadvantaged as a result of being stupid or untalented, ugly or socially awkward, then we ought to compensate them with a paycheck.

**Why must a luck egalitarian accept C2?**

**Why can’t the luck egalitarian insist that what we ought to do is to change out institutions so that people are not disadvantaged as a result of being stupid or untalented, ugly or socially awkward?**

**Bibliography**