# Equality of opportunity and other equity principles in the context of developing countries

*Denis COGNEAU*

# EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY
# AND OTHER EQUITY PRINCIPLES
# IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES[1]

Denis Cogneau
DIAL, IRD, Paris
cogneau@dial.prd.fr

## ABSTRACT

I propose a personal reading of some theories of social justice at a moment when the issue of equality or equity appears to be back on the 'development agenda'. Nowadays the term equity tends to be most often associated with the equality of opportunity principle. After having briefly summarized the equality of opportunity standpoint, I review the two main criticisms that have been addressed to it inside the economic literature: the right-wing meritocratic criticism on the one hand, and the left-wing egalitarian criticism on the other. I supplement these internal criticisms with a sociological or anthropological standpoint that advocates for a more pluralist definition of justice and gives a central role to the competition between elites for legitimacy. I argue that despite its indubitable potency (even for issues like international inequalities between countries), the equality of opportunity principle is incomplete and that some meritocratic principles and some equalization of outcomes should enter into play when thinking about social justice in a given real society. Moreover, a socially relevant conception of justice should take into account cultural variations in the definition of fairness. A universalist definition of justice is better preserved when the issue of tyranny and separation of powers is considered at both the social and political levels.

**Keywords:**  Distributive Justice, Inequality, Equality of Opportunity, Meritocracy, Political Economy, Development, Equity, Separation of Powers


## RÉSUMÉ

Je propose une lecture personnelle de quelques théories de la justice sociale au moment où la question de l'égalité ou de l'équité semble être revenue sur l'agenda du développement. De nos jours le terme équité semble être le plus souvent associé au principe d'égalité des chances.  Après un court résumé du point de vue de l'égalité des chances, je passe en revue les deux critiques principales qui lui ont été adressées au sein de la littérature économique : la critique méritocratique de droite d'un côté, et la critique égalitariste de gauche de l'autre. J'ajoute à ces deux critiques internes un point de vue historique et sociologique qui prone une définition pluraliste de la justice et fait jouer un rôle central à la compétition des élites pour la légitimité. J'argumente que malgré son indubitable puissance (même dans le domaine des inégalités internationales entre pays), le principe d'égalité des chances est incomplet et que des principes méritocratiques et d'égalisation des résultats doivent entrer en jeu lorsqu'on réfléchit à la justice sociale dans une société réellement existante. De plus, une conception de la justice socialement pertinente doit prendre en compte les variations culturelles dans la définition du juste. Une définition universaliste de la justice est mieux préservée lorsque la question de la tyrannie et de la séparation des pouvoirs est considérée, à la fois sur le plan social et sur le plan politique.

**Mots-clefs :**  Justice distributive, Inégalité, Egalité des chances, Méritocratie, Economie politique, Développement, Équité, Séparation des pouvoirs.

**JEL codes:  A13, D63, O15, P50**

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# 1. INEQUALITY PERSISTENCE AND INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY

Available international datasets not only reveal huge average income differences but also large differences in income inequality levels between countries of the world, with Gini indexes from as high as 0.65 to as low as 0.25[2]. The Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa countries appear as the most unequal in the world in that respect. In contrast with Kuznets' wisdom, the poorest countries are not less unequal, at least now (if they have ever been). These datasets also show that within-countries inequality levels are fairly stationary over time, with some exceptions linked to historical changes in economic regimes: in the recent period, the liberalisation of former socialist economies (Eastern Europe, China) and the Reagan's and Thatcher's "shocks" in USA and UK have been extensively documented. Among former colonies, no 'legal system'[3] is more unequal than others, but a higher pre-colonial level of development seems to have an equalizing effect (Cogneau and Guénard, 2003). The antiquity of development brings more equitable institutions and explains a great deal of the intercontinental inequality differentials between Latin America and Africa on one side, and Asia on the other side. For developed countries, stability also prevails for intergenerational occupational mobility (see Erikson and Goldthorpe study, with its evocative title "The Constant Flux", 1991)[4]. Few indications for some developing countries in Latin America (Behrman et al., 2001) and Africa as well do not reject stability over time as a first approximation, except in the case of strong shocks like civil wars and forced population displacements. The literature on poverty traps and micro-economic income convergence between the rich and the poor brings mixed and rather inconclusive evidence (Fields et al., 2002), because of measurement errors and econometric identification problems and because of the shortness of the panel period under review.

Much hope has been placed in the expansion of education as a long run mean of poverty and inequality alleviation. In contrast with income inequality, available evidence shows a large worldwide reduction of within-countries and between countries educational inequalities as measured for instance by the number of years in school or by basic skills like literacy. As years of schooling are bounded, any large expansion of schooling generates an equalisation, as has been observed since the 1950s in almost every country. However, schooling may be more and more qualitatively differentiated whether in terms of transmitted skills or of signalling properties. If there is some evidence that this more equal distribution of schooling contributed to a reduction of inequalities within countries, it is also the case that returns to education have sometimes increased, or that other factors have counteracted, like for example an increased selection on unobserved skills or absolute advantages (see, e.g., Bourguignon, Fournier, Gurgand, 2001, on Taiwan; Lam, 1999, on Brazil and South-Africa). Further, the intergenerational transmission of education has remained high and in most cases has shown a great deal of stability, once structural moves are discounted (the ratio of the probability to reach a given education level between a pupil with uneducated parents and a pupil with educated parents has not changed)[5].

Most theories of the long term persistence of economic inequalities rely on intergenerational transmission of economic and social statuses through the imperfection of human and physical capital markets, social capital or spatial segregation, which either prevent individuals from disadvantaged groups to climb up the social ladder, or else prevent children from advantaged groups to fall down (Piketty, 2000 and other works; Loury, 1981). Poverty reduction itself is more and more often conceived of as a dynamic process centred on the 'acceleration of individual exits from poverty' which involves the separation between transient short term components and permanent intergenerational issues (see e.g. Cogneau, 2003, on this point). As it is acknowledged that only a

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[2] From the well-known World Bank (Deininger and Squire) and UN (WIDER) databases.

[3] As reflected by the national identity of the colonial power, like in the La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes, Shleifer, and Vishny series of papers.

[4] In terms of levels and not of dynamics, lower income inequalities do not seem to come with lower intergenerational mobility (like for the comparison between Sweden and United States, see Bjorklund and Jaanti, 2001).

[5] Health inequalities are even more limited by biological constraints (regarding for instance the duration of life). Catching-up has been even more pronounced between developing countries and developed countries during the past 50 years, so that, in contrast with income and wealth inequalities, within-countries health inequalities represent a larger share of overall worldwide health inequalities (see Pradhan, Sahn and Younger, 2003, for nutrition based children health indicators).

small proportion of intergenerational correlation in income may be explained by the direct transmission of genetic or acquired skill endowments, new theories also stress the transmission of preferences like school and work habits, self-confidence, competitive aggressiveness (Bowles and Gintis, 2002 and other works) and adaptative preferences. Beyond parental preferences and endowments, the reference group average behaviour and characteristics seem to carry a great weight in the explanation, so that policies encouraging social mixing and fighting against spatial or social discrimination/segregation are more and more taken into consideration (see e.g. Durlauf, 1996). Holistic changes in values with no doubt also play a great role when fighting against such phenomenon as self-reinforcing statistical discrimination, or in the case of feminist, anti-racist or anti-caste movements.

Thus, historical evidence shows it is uneasy to improve intergenerational mobility… Is equalisation of opportunities between social origins out of reach because of hard though yet unclear difficulties, deeply rooted in the basement of societies? Or do we lack the measurement tools that are able to identify significant although slow changes, apart from drastic or revolutionary changes? Or else is it simply because not enough political effort has been dedicated to it? Perhaps all three arguments make part of the answer.

## 2.    CONCEPTUALIZING AND MEASURING INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY

Starting from John Rawls' impressive book (1971), the sometimes called 'post-welfarist' theories of distributive justice have criticized both the utilitarist/welfarist theories and the raw egalitarianism from the standpoint of freedom and personal responsibility. In order to assess the fairness of social arrangements, they have proposed to focus on the processes through which free individuals are able to achieve their own conception of good. Individuals were first described as transforming resources or 'primary goods' into utility or welfare, and to be held responsible for their use of resources and their goals (Rawls; Dworkin, 1981). The problem of equity was then described as a problem of equalization of primary resources. It was in a second time acknowledged that individuals might be different in their capacity to transform resources into utility, and that they should only be held responsible for seizing opportunities. The problem of equity then shifted to the equalization of capabilities (Sen, 1992) or opportunities (Roemer, 1998). Whatever the divergences between 'resource egalitarians' and 'opportunity egalitarians', new egalitarians agree on the equalization of a 'midfare' (Cohen, 1993) which lies between *initial* opportunity sets and *final* achievements. They also agree on making a divide between illegitimate inequalities, most often traced back to the social origin of individuals (gender, parental wealth and education, status or ethnic group of origin), and morally irrelevant inequalities which result from the free play of individual responsibility. In the field of responsibility-sensitive justice, equality of capabilities or of opportunity seems to have become more prominent than equality of resources, at least among economists. Outside of the academic world, the word 'equity' also seems to be most often heard in that sense, especially in the language of the western 'Third Way' Social Democrats, whose political programmes have put forward equality of opportunity principles while promoting a transition from status based systems of redistribution to more individualised systems.

John Roemer has constructed a rather simple formal framework for defining equality of opportunity (abbreviated EOp in his works) policies and has proposed a way of measuring the extent of EOp reached in some 'playing field' of a given society. Unlike some welfarist's constructs, Roemer's framework is only partial. It does not deal jointly with multiple dimensions of inequality and leaves aside most efficiency issues. It however puts in light and makes clear the important ethical and political choices which are at stake if one tries to design policies equalizing opportunities. There is first the choice of what he calls the 'advantage variable', which can also be called outcome or achievement, and which may be utility, income, education, risk of death, etc. The problems raised here are not new in that they are fundamentally the same as in the previous utilitarist/welfarist frameworks, mainly reduction of multidimensionality within a utility index and inter-personal comparisons of utilities (see Bourguignon, 2002). In contrast, the second choice is at the heart of the Equality of Opportunity approach. It requires the definition of what Roemer calls 'circumstances', which can also be called handicaps, all the morally irrelevant variables which are admittedly out of the reach of individual responsibility. Individuals are aggregated by 'types of circumstances' between which

opportunities have to be equalized. All other factors of the advantage variable are assumed to pertain to the sphere of responsibility, and hence are not to be compensated. Roemer call these factors 'effort', rather improperly in fact as they are more prosaically all factors uncorrelated with the circumstances that influence the individual's rank or quantile in their type's outcome distribution. He proposes to consider, for each quantile of 'effort', the achievement of the worse-off type (that is the minimum across all types), and to measure Equality of Opportunity by a sum of all quantiles minima. Then, non-circumstantial factors or 'effort' are only implicitly measured as a residual in the association between the outcome variable and the circumstance variable[6]. This makes the choice of the circumstance variables so important. Roemer claims that this choice has to be made by society through some kind of ethical and political process. The right-wing set of morally irrelevant circumstances will be typically narrower than the left-wing set. Social origin variables like sex, race, parental education or wealth, region of birth, ascribed caste or ethnic group often appear as the most consensual choice, even if there is disagreement about the 'true' relative weight of circumstances and 'effort' in the production of achievements[7]. This kind of choice establishes a direct link between intergenerational transmission and equality of opportunity.

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**Box 1 :    Equality of opportunity indexes**

$$ROE = 1/Q. \sum_q \min_t \{ y_{t,q} \} \qquad (1)$$

where $t = 1, \ldots T$ is the type of circumstance variable, and $y_{t,q}$ is the q-th decile level of the 'advantage variable' within type t ($q = 1, \ldots, Q$). Roemer (1998) proposes to give equal weights to each quantile minima in order to maintain the 'effort neutrality' of equality of opportunity principles (see below the two critiques about efficiency and incentives to effort on the one hand, and about non-deserving poor on the other hand).

Following Roemer's seminal work, other contributions have proposed alternative indexes within the same theoretical framework, for instance inequalities between types' expected (average) outcomes (Van de Gaer), instead of the average of inequalities between types' quantile outcomes, which may lead to distinct orderings when the mobility matrixes are not monotone in the Shorrocks sense (Van de Gaer et al., 2000). "Opportunity dominance" criterions have recently been proposed (Hild and Voorhoeve, 2004).

$$VdG = \min_t \{ y_t \} \qquad (2)$$

where $y_t$ is the mean level of the advantage variable for circumstances' type *t*.

Note that these maximin indexes are not normalized by the mean of the advantage variable. Therefore they are more welfare indexes than pure inequality indexes: if the advantage variable grows at the same rate for each individual, the (1) and (2) indexes also grow at this rate (homogeneity of degree one).

The choice of a maximin criterion can be replaced by any inequality index or Lorenz dominance (Moreno-Ternero, 2004):

$$ROE = 1/Q. \sum_q I_t \{ Y_{t,q} \} \qquad (3)$$

Or:

$$VdG = I_t \{ y_t \} \qquad (4)$$

where $I_t$ is any inequality index with good properties like for instance the Gini index. In contrast with the former maximin indexes (1) and (2), these indexes are pure inequality (of opportunity) indexes (homogeneity of degree zero).

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**Box 2 :** **Some examples of inequality of opportunity between social origins in Brazil and in Africa**

Inequalities of labor earnings between 40-49 y.o. Brazilian males have remained remarkably stable at a high level, during the 20 years period 1976-96. They even have increased a little. EOp indexes based on social origins have also remained fairly stable and have followed the same evolution than total inequalities. According to Roemer's maximin index, the earnings of the worse-off types have even decreased. In the five countries of Africa examined in table 2, inequalities of consumption expenditures between households again reach a fairly high level, with Gini indexes between 0.4 and 0.5. Here the measurement of social origin is less precise as only 18 types of social origins of the household head have been distinguished (against 128 in the case of Brazil). In four countries, the EOp indexes lie between 0.1 and 0.15. Madagascar makes the exception, as in its case the EOp index reaches 0.3, for a Gini index of 0.5. Migrations and class mobility are indeed much lower in Madagascar than in the other African countries.

**Table 1 :** **Inequalities of labor earnings attributable to social origin in Brazil**

|  | **1976** | **1988** | **1996** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Roemer's maximin criterion | 1.297 | 1.048 | 1.223 |
| Average of Gini index within deciles* | 0.341 | 0.375 | 0.343 |
| Gini of types' average earnings | 0.362 | 0.392 | 0.352 |
| Overall Gini index of hourly earnings | 0.570 | 0.623 | 0.599 |

Coverage: 40-49 years old males
Method: 128 types of social origin constructed from race (2), region of birth (4), father's education (4) and father's occupation (4); decile regressions estimates; hourly earnings in 2002 reais.
Source: PNAD surveys; Cogneau and Gignoux computations
*: see equation (1) in Box 1
**: see equation (3) in Box 1
***: à la Van de Gaer; see equation (4) in Box 1

**Table 2 :** **Inequalities of household income per capita attributable to social origin in Africa**

|  | **Côte d'Ivoire** | **Ghana** | **Guinea** | **Madagascar** | **Uganda** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gini of types' average earnings | 0.120 | 0.147 | 0.109 | 0.297 | 0.135 |
| Overall Gini index | 0.409 | 0.452 | 0.457 | 0.503 | 0.448 |

Coverage: Households where the household head is 40-49 years old and is born in the country
Method: 18 types of social origin of the household head constructed from region of birth (2), father's education (3) and father's occupation (3); decile regressions estimates; consumption expenditures per capita
Source: LSMS surveys; Cogneau computations
***: à la Van de Gaer; see equation (4) in Box 1

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## 3. THE MERITOCRATIC CRITIQUE OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY: WORRYING ABOUT EFFICIENCY

However, even from an individualistic and meritocratic standpoint, equality of opportunity has been criticized on the basis of the efficiency losses it generates for the whole society. Opportunity equalization indeed addresses the effect of all causal factors of the outcome variable which are correlated, even if not caused, by the circumstance variables. For instance genetically transmitted innate abilities which would partly cause both parents and children achievements are to be compensated when intergenerational equality of opportunity is aimed. Likewise, for instance, the propensity to work hard in school that educated parents would be more able to transmit to their children is considered in this framework, where effort is only measured 'relatively' (within types quantiles) and not absolutely (by grades), as morally irrelevant. When talent and effort are considered in their absolute meaning, less 'talented' and/or less 'deserving' pupils will then be more helped than pupils coming from richer backgrounds who show the same 'relative effort'. With equalization of opportunities, we then may have less 'talented' and/or less 'deserving' (again absolutely speaking) in

the higher grades than before. Moreover, knowing that, advantaged children may be discouraged, or else disadvantaged children may expend less effort (whether help is a positive or negative incentive to effort). Roemer makes a strong point against what he calls 'effort fetishism', reminding that effort itself in not the target and that average effort is not to be maximised. He however proposes to delimit the extent of equalization of opportunity by weighing it against average outcome (not effort) through a social welfare function in line with the welfarist tradition. He moreover argues that his Equality of Opportunity principle is better suited to the initial building of resources like education and health. After an opportunity-equitable distribution of resources is met, then a meritocratic efficiency-maximizing principle may enter into play in the allocation of job positions, and in the determination of earnings schedules. This is meant to avoid the frequently alleged perverse effects of some forms of affirmative actions. (In the example that Roemer takes, the access to grades in surgery should be ruled by equality of opportunity principles based on social origins while the selection of the best surgeons should follow a meritocratic rule based on grades and talent.).

## 4. THE EGALITARIAN CRITIQUE OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY: COMING BACK TO RAWLS?

A purist equality of opportunity approach would allow large inequalities within types of circumstances, as they are not considered as morally irrelevant. Among egalitarians, this property is a matter of worry[8]. Roemer's framework already mixes a pure equality of opportunity approach with a basic need approach through the maximin criterion which denotes a care for the absolute welfare level of the worse-off, even of those who exert the lowest level of effort and who might be seen otherwise as the 'non-deserving' poor. With a very large number of types of circumstances, the Roemer's rule in fact translates into a pure maximin Rawl's rule, as within types inequality reaches zero. With such a rule, Roemer's analysis tends to promote a large amount of transfers in favour of the most disadvantaged types[9]. However it may profit more to the better-off among the most disadvantaged type, because of the sum of minima over 'effort' quantiles[10]. The 'non-deserving poor' may be left on the side of the road. Because of this worry, some equalization of achievements or outcomes can not be definitively excluded from egalitarian thinking. The notion of individual responsibility indeed loses its meaning when poverty is extreme. Taking the famous example of Sen, when the poor has no longer the choice to fast but only to starve, only a tyrannical society can treat them as 'non-deserving'. Intertemporal issues also reintroduce equalization of outcomes. First, the intergenerational transmission process is such that parental achievements determine children initial resources and opportunities. Second, it is defendable that some 'forgiveness' (Fleurbaey, 1998 and other works) should be given to people who have failed to seize opportunities, in the form of a second chance principle and for instance through socialized insurance. Starting from these ethical considerations and other more technical problems of feasibility and consistency raised by the equality of opportunity approach, Fleurbaey (1995) ends up proposing a come back to Rawls. "Society should decide on a bundle of functionings it considers important enough to be taken in charge collectively", like good health, "and try to equalize (maximin) an index of functionings across individuals". Functionings that are not selected are not under society supervision and, even if not under individual control, only under private responsibility ('accountability' in that sense). In contrast with Rawls, he recommends replacing 'primary goods' by Sen's 'functionings', in order to avoid the problem of unjust differential capacities in transforming resources in outcomes[11]. Such an approach of equity puts the stance on the political selection (and aggregation) of socially relevant functionings, in place of the selection (and aggregation) of the morally irrelevant set of circumstances. 'Responsibility over factors' is given up, and replaced by accountability over outcomes that are outside of the list of primary functionings to be equalized. The consideration of social origins (as morally irrelevant factors) is no longer central to

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[8] Fleurbaey names the purist approach "conservative egalitarianism".
[9] There is usually only one: the most disadvantaged social group, like in Rawls' difference principle, when mobility matrixes have Shorrocks' monotonicity property. However, not all matrixes are monotone.
[10] Of course, the more restricted is the set of morally irrelevant circumstances the lowest is also the level of transfers required (right-liberal option, in Cohen's terminology, see above).
[11] In his 1995 paper, Fleurbaey proposes six functionings for western societies: respect for the private sphere, health, education and information, wealth, collective decision-making power, social integration.

normative equity measurement, even if it remains important in the positive analysis of observed inequality in primary functionings[12].

## 5.    CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN FAIRNESS: EQUITY AS PLURALISM

Michael Walzer (1981) puts forward a universalistic theory of justice as pluralism, as an explicit alternative to that of John Rawls on justice as fairness. His argument is based on historical and anthropological examples rather than on a procedural demonstration. While Rawls theory is inspired by Rousseau's social contract, it is inspired by Pascal's definition of tyranny. His criticism of Rawls starts from the observation of the anthropological multiplicity and diversity of Rawls' primary goods, a problem also addressed by Sen in his theory of capabilities. In Walzer's view, these primary goods cannot be properly aggregated for the basic reason that they relate to distinct, socially determined, distribution principles. Distributive criteria for a good follows from its social meaning, the functions it serves in society. Walzer calls the association of a primary good and its specific principle a 'sphere of justice'. Justice as pluralism consists in ensuring that one sphere does not predominate over others, with legitimate possession of one primary good ensuring illegitimate access to the others. American society, for example, could be said to be characterized by the tyranny of money and competition. Indian society, on the other hand, could be said to be characterised by the tyranny of caste, and its principle of distribution, purity. Perhaps one could also say that the French society is characterised by a tyranny of education and merit in school. The latter examples reveal the advantage of a theory which is reflective and which allows for the incorporation of a certain form of cultural relativism, without necessarily forgoing universalism. Walzer's proposals can be expressed as follows:

1.    There exist several spheres of justice; that is, several types of primary goods which have different legitimate principles of distribution[13].

2.    The primary form of injustice consists in one sphere encroaching on all others, which borders on tyranny.

Tyranny does not recognize the plurality of spheres of justice; all primary goods are subsumed under a primary imperative (be it noble birth, wealth, education, party membership, or geographical origin), while, if necessary, tyranny is justified as the defence of a 'common good' (the welfare and security of citizens, the purity of race, the power of the nation, the glory of science or the carrying out of God's work). In a society that functions tyrannically there is a particular possibility that certain categories of people might be denied access to even the lowest levels of welfare and security because they lack a predominant good – the poor, the scheduled castes or the uneducated.

This conception of equity as pluralism still agrees upon the fact that achievement in some sphere should only be minimally influenced by affluence in some others. There should be some equality of opportunity in each sphere, where morally irrelevant circumstances are here the level of achievements in other spheres. In the case of education, ability and desire to learn are considered as relevant grounds for differential achievements, parental income or party membership, caste or status as irrelevant factors. The selection of morally relevant and irrelevant factors must be drawn from a socially and culturally relevant mapping of spheres of justice. Walzer's conception rejoins some approaches of the 'political economy and sociology' of redistribution and of progresses towards equity. For instance, Bourdieu (1989) and Elias (1939) both emphasize the role of conflicts of interests between elites characterized by different structures of resources (the highly educated, the capital owners, the landlords…). According to Bourdieu, when this conflict translates in a fight for political legitimacy, the voice and the claims of dominated classes can be heard, and 'true universalism' can make some progress (see also Dezalay and Garth, 2002, on the Latin American case). As Walzer argues, *social*, not only legal, *separation of powers,* is a prerequisite of equity as pluralism, in order to bar tyranny.

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[12]    Social origins also remain useful variables to purge out the effect of measurement errors or irrelevant aleas in the measurement of inequality.

[13]    Among the primary goods, Walzer singles out security and welfare, money, education, access to public office, which are regulated respectively by distribution principles of equality, productive competition, merit, and devotion to public good.

Apart from this general reflexion, there is unfortunately limited knowledge on the cultural variation in the meanings of justice, apart from some experimental evidence (outcomes of equity-sensitive simple games, cf. Heinrich, Boyd, Bowles et al., 2001), or survey evidence (Schokkaert, Devoogth, 1999; Diehner, Suh, 1999), which indeed show large inter-cultural differences but which are difficult to interpret. Walzer's relativism comes to remind us that the conception of freedom and responsibility which inspire the post-welfarist theory of justice are better suited to philosophies of freedom and to 'societies of individuals' (Elias), where it is considered that all human beings should be able to "choose" as freely as possible their destiny, to build and to follow their own conception of welfare, without being ascribed to a social position or function according to their sex, race or social origin. In that sense, the progress of individualism may be, at least for a while, contradictory to some notion of *social cohesion* in a society where roles and statuses are strictly ascribed. The egalitarian critique (see above) also claims that equalizing opportunities is no panacea. Anomy, suicide, new mental illnesses, stress, crime may result from a more individualistic and 'competitive' society, where persons have more autonomy but are also made more 'accountable' of their 'failures' and errors as much as of their 'successes' (see, e.g., Ehrenberg, 1991). In an individualistic society, equality of opportunity, as an abstract principle enforced by the welfare state, comes to counterbalance the hardness of meritocratic competition. But it does not compensate for the loss of the protection once offered by communities of origin. It does not alleviate the sufferings of the unsuccessful, and may even add to the disadvantage of a subordinate position, the moral torture of guilt.

## 6. FROM OPPORTUNITY-SENSITIVE RESOURCE BUILDING, THROUGH MERITOCRATIC ALLOCATION, TO FUNCTIONINGS EQUALIZATION… BACK TO RESOURCE BUILDING

From what precedes, one may risk arguing that equity in a real society probably requires a complementary mix of equality of opportunity, of meritocratic efficient allocation, and of equalization of primary functionings or basic achievements. It was shown that none of those three dimensions of equity was exempt of critique when taken in isolation, but that each of them may be better suited to some domain of social life (see Figure 1).

Equality of opportunity principles are probably better suited to the domain of resource building, particularly during childhood and adolescence when persons are still dependent and when their identity is largely undetermined. Meritocratric allocation of tastes and skills between jobs, social tasks and power positions may then enter into play, for instance through market-based or other efficient mechanisms, with enough anti-discriminatory and anti-nepotism legal safeguards, in order to achieve a high level of aggregate outputs and a high quality of services (like in Roemer's surgeons' example, see above). And third, some equalization of primary functionings should intervene with respect to achievements as fundamental as health, education, wealth, social inclusion, voice, in order to reach a society that would guarantee to every individual equal respect and equal ability to provide for oneself and one's dependents, and forgiveness about opportunity that were not seized. The three mechanisms should reinforce each other. Equality of opportunity should make more acceptable the meritocratic selection, which in turn should help in providing a high quality of services in resource building (child rearing, education, health, etc.). A high level of aggregate social outcome should make easier the provision of mutual care and the equalization of primary functionings. Redistribution of wealth and status among adults is in turn the unavoidable ingredient of equality of opportunity among the next generation. All in all, the association of those three dimensions of equity, in specific proportions for each 'sphere of justice', is more consistent with a pluralist society where resource specific distributive rules are preserved, and where neither wealth, or education or status would play a tyrannical role, in Walzer's sense. Reciprocally, some social separation of powers between elites is certainly a precondition for equity to progress at the political level. This kind of separation of powers may be the principal limit to the progress of equity in many developing societies whose institutions have been marked by a colonial tyrannical rule.

# 7. POST-SCRIPTUM: EXTENDING EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY TO INTERNATIONAL EQUITY

Development differences between countries may be seen as inequality of prospects between individuals born in different countries, where the country of birth is a morally irrelevant variable determining inequality of outcomes. In the international context, attacking inequality from the standpoint of inequality of opportunities may be suited to the building of a fair community of nations. Persisting development differences between countries are indeed rooted in inequality of opportunities: being born in an under-developed country means on average a large deprivation of opportunities, and this individual deprivation can be traced back to country-level morally irrelevant factors such as geographic handicaps and historical illegitimate interventions like colonialism or neo-colonialism. Even within country inequalities have something to do with natural resources curses or fates and with colonial history, through institutional linkages (Engerman and Sokoloff, 2002). The provision and allocation of international aid should also be inspired not only by efficiency considerations, but also by equity principles (Cogneau and Naudet, 2003). Giving aid to countries where both institutions and growth are good enough indeed maximises aid efficiency in reducing the number of poor in the world (Collier and Dollar, 2001), but it can also prove highly inequitable.

**Figure 1 :** **Three dimensions of equity**
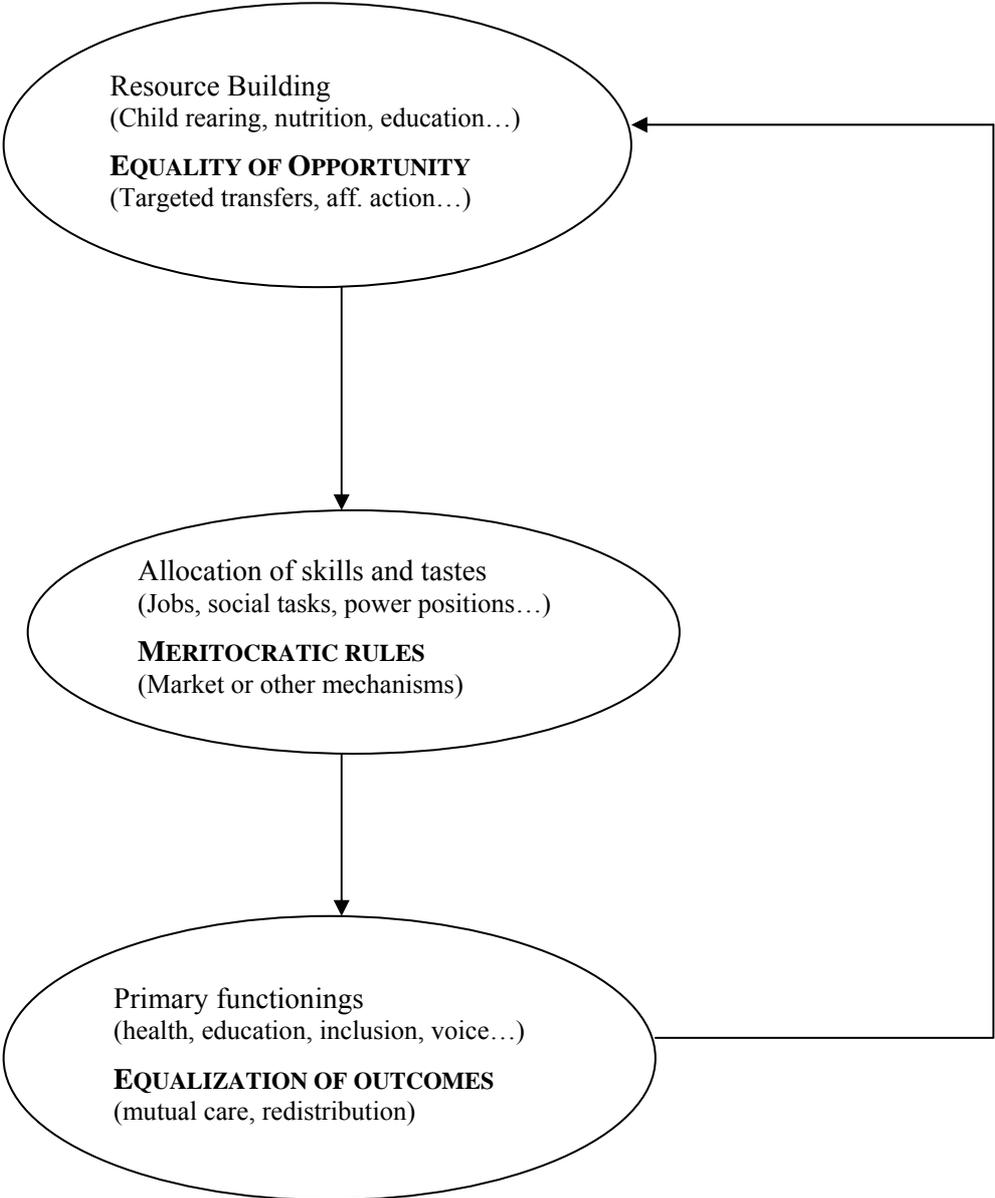
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