

Equality of Opportunity and Other Equity Principles in the Context of Developing Countries

DENIS COGNEAU

A personal reading of some theories of social justice seems appropriate at a time when the issue of equality (or equity) appears to be back on the “development agenda,” so that is a focus of this paper. An overview of empirical and theoretical knowledge about the persistence of within-country inequality over time is presented, which underlines the central role played by the intergenerational transmission of resources and behaviors. The acknowledgment of this role is part of the reason why today, the term equity tends to be most often associated with the normative principle of equality of opportunity. A brief summary of the equality of opportunity standpoint is followed by a review of the two main criticisms of the approach as addressed in the economic literature: the right-wing meritocratic criticism on the one hand, and the left-wing egalitarian criticism on the other. In turn, these internal criticisms are supplemented with a sociological (or anthropological) point of view that advocates for a more pluralist definition of justice and acknowledges the importance of the competition between elites for legitimacy.

This paper argues that despite its indubitable potency (even for issues such as international inequalities between countries), the equality of opportunity principle is incomplete—and that some meritocratic principles and some equalization of outcomes should come into play when addressing social justice in a given 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. In guise of conclusion are comments on the benefits of extending the equality of opportunity principle to the issues of international equity and of foreign aid allocation.

Denis Cogneau is a researcher for the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD) at Développement, Institutions et Analyses de Long terme (DIAL) in Paris.

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Persistence of Inequality and Intergenerational Mobility

Available international datasets reveal not only tremendous average income differences but also large differences in income inequality levels between countries of the world, with Gini indexes ranging from as high as 0.65 to as low as 0.25.¹ The countries of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa appear to be the most unequal in the world in that respect. Contrary to the wisdom of Simon Kuznets, the poorest countries are not less unequal, at least now (if they have ever been). These datasets also show that within-country inequality levels are fairly stationary over time, with some exceptions linked to historical changes in economic regimes: In the recent period, the liberalization of former socialist economies (in Eastern Europe and China) and the Reagan and Thatcher “shocks” in the United States and the U.K. have been extensively documented. Among former colonies, no “legal system” is more unequal than others,² but a higher pre-colonial level of development, as reflected for instance by population density, seems to have an equalizing effect (Cogneau and Guénard 2003). From this fact, one may conjecture that the antiquity of state institutions 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 the 1991 Erikson and Goldthorpe study, with its evocative title “The Constant Flux”).³ Few indicators for some of the developing countries in Latin America (Behrman, Gavaria, and Székely 2001) and Africa (Bossuoy et al., 2005) 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 microeconomic income convergence between the rich and the poor brings mixed and rather inconclusive evidence (Fields and others 2002), due to measurement errors and econometric identification problems, and because of the brief panel periods under review.

Much hope has been placed in the expansion of education as a long-run means of alleviating poverty and inequality. In contrast with income inequality, available evidence shows a large worldwide reduction of within-country and between-country 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 equalization that 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. Even 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 this effect, such as an increased selection on unobserved skills or absolute advantages (see, for example, Bourguignon, Fournier, and Gurgand 2001 on Taiwan; and Lam 1999 on Brazil and South Africa). Furthermore, the intergenerational transmission of education has remained high and, in most cases, 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.⁴

Most theories of the long-term persistence of economic inequalities rely on the intergenerational transmission of economic and social status through the imperfection of human and physical capital markets, social capital, or spatial segregation. These either prevent individuals in disadvantaged groups from climbing the social ladder, or prevent children in advantaged groups from falling down (Piketty 2000 and other works; Loury 1981). Poverty reduction itself is increasingly conceived of as a dynamic process centered on the “acceleration of individual exits from poverty,” which involves the separation of transient short-term components and permanent intergenerational issues (see, for example, Cogneau 2003 on this point). Since it is acknowledged that only a 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 such as school and work habits, self-confidence, competitive aggressiveness (Bowles and Gintis 2002 and other works), and adaptive preferences. Beyond parental preferences and endowments, the reference group average behavior and characteristics seem to carry a great deal of weight in the explanation, so that policies encouraging social mixing and fighting against spatial or social discrimination and/or segregation are increasingly taken into consideration (see, for example, Durlauf 1996). Holistic changes in values, as in the cases of feminist, anti-racist, or anti-caste movements, no doubt also play an important role when confronting such phenomena as self-reinforcing statistical discrimination.

Thus, historical evidence shows that it is not easy to improve intergenerational mobility. Is the equalization of opportunities between groups of different social origin out of reach because of difficult yet unclear difficulties that are deeply rooted in the basement of societies? Or is it because of the lack of measurement tools needed to identify small, significant (although slow) changes as opposed to larger or more revolutionary changes? Or, is it simply that not enough political effort has been dedicated to the task? Perhaps all three arguments are part of the answer.

Conceptualizing and Measuring Intergenerational Equity

Starting from John Rawls’s impressive book (1971), the sometimes called “post-welfarist” theories of distributive justice have criticized both the utilitarian/welfarist theories and the raw egalitarianism from the standpoint of freedom and personal responsibility. In order to assess the fairness of social arrangements, these theories suggest the need to focus on the processes through which free individuals might 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 1971; Dworkin 1981). The problem of equity was described as a problem of equalization of primary resources. It was then acknowledged, in a second step, that individuals might also differ 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). However, despite 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 distinction 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 that 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 used in that sense, especially in the language of the Western “Third Way” Social Democrats, whose political programs have put forward equality of opportunity principles while promoting a transition from status-based systems of redistribution to more individualized systems.

John Roemer has constructed a rather simple formal framework for defining equality of opportunity policies (abbreviated as EOp in his works) and has proposed a way of measuring the extent of EOp achieved in some “playing field” of a given society. Unlike some welfarist constructs, Roemer’s framework is only partial; it does not jointly address multiple dimensions of inequality and leaves aside most efficiency issues. It does, however, highlight and make clear the important ethical and political choices that are at stake if one tries to design policies that equalize opportunities. There is first the choice of what Roemer calls the “advantage variable,” which can also be called outcome or achievement, and which may be utility, income, education, risk of death, and so forth. The problems raised here are not new in that they are fundamentally the same as those in the previous utilitarian/welfarist frameworks—mainly those related to reduction of multidimensionality within a utility index and interpersonal comparisons of utilities (see Bourguignon 2002). In contrast, the second choice lies at the heart of the equality of opportunity approach. It requires the definition of what Roemer calls “circumstances,” which can also be called handicaps. These include all the morally irrelevant variables that are admittedly outside 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 called these factors “effort,” rather improperly, in fact as they stand, more prosaically, for all factors that are uncorrelated with the circumstances that influence an individual’s rank or quantile in the outcome distribution for his/her “type.” Roemer proposes that for each quantile of “effort,” the achievement of the worse-off type (that is, the minimum across all types) be considered, and to then measure equality of opportunity by a sum of all quantiles minima (see box 1). Hence noncircumstantial factors (or “effort”) are only implicitly measured as a residual in the association between the outcome variable and the circumstance variable.⁵ This is what makes the choice of the circumstance variables so important. Roemer claims that this choice must be made by society through some kind of ethical and political process. The right-wing set of morally irrelevant circumstances will typically be narrower than the left-wing set. Social origin variables like

gender, race, parental education or wealth, region of birth, and 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.⁶ This kind of choice establishes a direct link between intergenerational transmission and equality of opportunity.

BOX 1. Equality of Opportunity Indexes

The Roemer index reads as follows:

$$\text{ROE} = 1/Q \cdot \sum_q \min_t \{y_{t,q}\}, \quad \text{Equation (1)}$$

where $t = 1, \dots, T$ is the type of circumstance variable, and $y_{t,q}$ is the q th decile level of the “advantage variable” within type t ($q = 1, \dots, Q$). Roemer (1998) proposes giving equal weights to each quantile minima in order to maintain the “effort neutrality” of equality of opportunity principles (see below for two critiques: about efficiency and incentives to effort on the one hand, and about the undeserving 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 the expected (average) outcomes of various “types” (Van de Gaer, Schokkaert, and Martinez 2001), instead of the average of inequalities between quantile outcomes for “types,” which may lead to distinct orderings when the mobility matrixes are not monotone in the Shorrocks sense.

The Van de Gaer index reads as follows:

$$\text{VdG} = \min_t \{y_t\}, \quad \text{Equation (2)}$$

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 indexes in equations (1) and (2) 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:

$$\text{ROE} = 1/Q \cdot \sum_q I_t \{Y_{t,q}\} \quad \text{Equation (3)}$$

or:

$$\text{VdG} = I_t \{y_t\}, \quad \text{Equation (4)}$$

where I_t is any between-types inequality index with good properties (such as the Gini index, for example). In contrast with the former maximin indexes (1) and (2), these indexes are pure inequality (of opportunity) indexes (homogeneity of degree zero).

Some Examples of Inequality of Opportunity between Social Origins in Brazil and Africa

Inequalities in the labor earnings of Brazilian males from 40 to 49 years of age remained remarkably stable at a high level during the 20-year period 1976–96 (see table 1). The inequalities even increased a little. EOp indexes based on social origins also remained fairly stable and followed the same evolution of total inequalities. According to Roemer's maximin index, the earnings of the worse-off types 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 Gini EOp indexes lie between 0.1 and 0.15. Madagascar is the exception, with the EOp index reaching 0.3. Migrations and class mobility are, indeed, much lower in Madagascar than in the other African countries.

TABLE 1. Inequalities of Labor Earnings Between Social Origins 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

Source: PNAD (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios) surveys; see Cogneau and Gignoux (2005).

Coverage: 40–49 year-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 (Brazilian currency).

Notes: * see equation (1) in box 1; ** see equation (3) in box 1; *** in keeping with Van de Gaer; see equation (4) in box 1.

TABLE 2. Inequalities of Household Income Per Capita Between Social Origins in Africa

	Côte d'Ivoire (1985-8)	Ghana (1987-8)	Guinea (1993-4)	Madagascar (1993-4)	Uganda (1992-3)
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

Source: LSMS (Living Standards Measurement Study) surveys, various years; author's computations.

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

Notes: * in keeping with Van de Gaer; see equation (4) in box 1.

The Meritocratic Critique of Equality of Opportunity: Efficiency Concerns

Even from individualistic and meritocratic standpoints, 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 example, genetically transmitted innate abilities that would partly contribute to the achievements of both parents and their children are to be compensated when intergenerational equality of opportunity is targeted. Likewise, for example, 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” (by quantiles, not by grades), as morally irrelevant. When talent and effort are considered in their absolute meaning, less “talented” and/or less “deserving” pupils will then benefit more than pupils from richer backgrounds who show the same “relative effort.” With equalization of opportunities, there may then be fewer “talented” and/or less “deserving” (again absolutely speaking) in the higher grades than before. Moreover, knowing that, advantaged children may be discouraged, or disadvantaged children may expend less effort (whether help is a positive or negative incentive of effort). Roemer makes a strong point against effort fetishism, as a reminder that effort itself is not the target and that average effort is not to be maximized. However, he 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. And he argues, moreover, 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 presents, 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 both grades and talent.)

The Egalitarian Critique of Equality of Opportunity: A Return 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.⁷ 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 might otherwise be seen as the “non-deserving” poor. With a very large number of types of circumstances, Roemer’s rule in fact translates into a pure maximin Rawls’s rule, as within-type inequality reaches zero. With such a rule, Roemer’s analysis tends to promote a large

amount of transfers in favor of the most disadvantaged types.⁸ However, it may most benefit the better-off among the most disadvantaged type, because of the sum of minima over “effort” quantiles.⁹ The “non-deserving poor” may be left on the side of the road. Because of this worry, some equalization of achievements or outcomes cannot 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 no longer have the choice to fast but only to starve, only a tyrannical society can treat them as “nondeserving.” Intertemporal issues also reintroduce equalization of outcomes. First, the intergenerational transmission process is such that parental achievements determine the initial resources and opportunities available to their children. Second, it is defensible 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 example, 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 and 1998) ends up proposing a return to Rawls. “Society should decide on a bundle of functionings . . . it considers as important enough to be taken in charge collectively,” like good health, “and try to equalize (maximin) an index . . . [of functionings] across individuals” (Fleurbaey 1998, p. 229). Functionings that are not selected are not under societal supervision and, even if not under individual control, fall only under private responsibility (or “accountability” in that sense). In contrast with Rawls, Fleurbaey recommends replacing “primary goods” by Sen’s “functionings” in order to avoid the problem of unjust differential capacities in transforming resources in outcomes.¹⁰ 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 normative equity measurement, even if it remains important in the positive analysis of observed inequality in primary functionings.¹¹

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’s theory is inspired by Rousseau’s social contract, Walzer is instead inspired by Pascal’s definition of tyranny. His criticism of Rawls starts from the observation of the anthropological multiplicity and diversity of Rawls’s 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. Dis-

tributive 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 of 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 its principle of distribution, which is competition, while Indian society could be said to be characterized by the tyranny of caste and its principle of distribution, which is purity. One might also say that French society is characterized by a tyranny of education and merit in school. The latter examples reveal the advantage of a theory that 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.¹²
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 defense 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—the poor, the scheduled castes, or the uneducated—might be denied access to even the lowest levels of welfare and security because they lack a predominant good.

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, with parental income or party membership, caste or status considered 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 that are characterized by different structures of resources (the highly educated, the capital owners, the landlords, and so forth). 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 achieve 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.

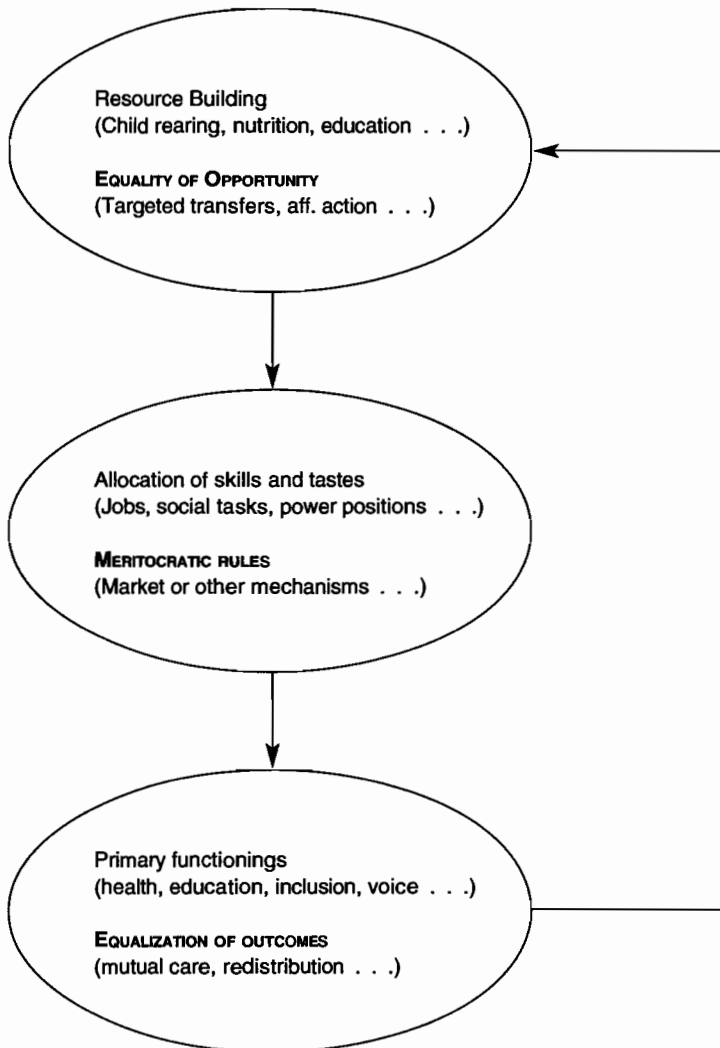
Apart from this general reflection there is, unfortunately, limited knowledge on the cultural variation in the meanings of justice apart from some experimental evidence: On outcomes of equity-sensitive simple games, see Heinrich and others (2001); or for survey evidence, see Schokkaert and Devooght (1999), and Diener and Suh (1999), which indeed show large intercultural differences but are difficult to interpret. Walzer's relativism serves as a reminder 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 1939), where it is considered that all human beings should be allowed to "choose" as freely as possible their destiny, or to build and follow their own conception of welfare, without being ascribed to a social position or function according to their gender, 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 described earlier also claims that equalizing opportunities is no panacea. Anomy, suicide, new mental illnesses, stress, and crime may result from a more individualistic and "competitive" society, where persons have more autonomy but are also made more "accountable" for their "failures" and errors as much as for their "successes." 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.

Three Dimensions of Equity

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 from criticism 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 their individual identities are largely undetermined. Meritocratic allocation of tastes and skills between jobs, social tasks, and power positions may then enter into play; for example, through market-based or other efficient mechanisms, with enough antidiscrimination and antinepotism legal safeguards, in order to achieve a high level of aggregate outputs and a high quality of services (as in Roemer's "surgeons" example mentioned earlier). And third, some equalization of primary functionings should intervene with respect to achievements as fundamental as health, education, wealth, social inclusion, and voice—in order to achieve a society that would guarantee all individuals equal respect and the equal ability to provide for their dependents, and guarantee forgiveness for opportunities not seized. The three mecha-

FIGURE 1. Three Dimensions of Equity



nisms should, therefore, 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, and so forth). A high level of aggregate social outcome should facilitate 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.

Conclusions: 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 that determines 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 underdeveloped 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 resource curses or fates and with colonial history, through institutional linkages (Engerman and Sokoloff 2002). The provision and allocation of international aid should therefore be inspired not only by efficiency considerations, but also by equity principles.¹³ Giving aid to countries where both institutions and growth are good enough indeed maximizes the efficiency of aid in reducing the number of poor people in the world (Collier and Dollar 2001); but it can also prove highly inequitable (Cogneau and Naudet 2004).

Notes

1. These data are drawn from the well-known World Bank (Deininger and Squire) and United Nations (WIDER) databases. See <http://www.worldbank.org/research/growth/ddeisqu.htm> and <http://www.wider.unu.edu/wiid/wiid.htm>.
2. When measured by the national identity of the colonial power, as in the La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes, Shleifer, and Vishny series of papers (see La Porta and others 1999).
3. In terms of levels but not dynamics, lower income inequalities do not seem to come with lower intergenerational mobility. For a comparison between Sweden and the United States, see Björklund and Jantti 2001.
4. Health inequalities are even more limited by biological constraints (regarding, for instance, the duration of life). In that dimension, many developing countries have indeed been "catching up" quickly with the levels reached by developed countries over the past 50 years, so that (in contrast with income and wealth inequalities) within-country health inequalities represent a larger share of overall worldwide health inequalities; see Pradhan, Sahn, and Younger 2003 on nutrition-based health indicators for children.
5. This approach is rather consistent with the fact that individual effort is in real life very often hard to observe without bias.

6. Piketty (2000) has proposed a model where agents draw differential beliefs on these relative weights from their own dynastic experience. Voting patterns would then reflect this distribution of beliefs.
7. Fleurbaey names the purist approach "conservative egalitarianism."
8. There is usually only one of these: the most disadvantaged social group, as in Rawls's difference principle, when mobility matrixes have Shorrocks's monotonicity property. However, not all matrixes are monotone.
9. Of course, the more restricted is the set of morally irrelevant circumstances, the lower the level of transfers required (the "right-liberal option," in Cohen's terminology; see earlier Cohen citation).
10. In his 1995 paper, Fleurbaey proposes six functionings for western societies: respect for the private sphere, health, education and information, wealth, collective decisionmaking power, and social integration (p. 53).
11. Social origins also remain useful variables to purge the effect of measurement errors or of other irrelevant unobservable factors (such as luck or transient components) in the measurement of inequality.
12. Among the primary goods, Walzer singles out security and welfare, money, education, and access to public office, which are regulated respectively by the distribution principles of equality, productive competition, merit, and devotion to public good.
13. International migration could also be seen as a powerful means for equalizing opportunities between people born in different places of the world.

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