

Michele Loi

TAKING SELF-REALIZATION SERIOUSLY

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MICHELE LOI

TAKING SELF-REALIZATION SERIOUSLY
A CRITIQUE OF THE RAWLSIAN ARGUMENT FOR
EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

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Michele Loi completed degrees in Philosophy (MA) and Political Theory (PhD) at State University of Cagliari and Rome-LUISS respectively. He is currently researcher at CEHUM – Minho University with a post-doctoral grant from the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). His recent publications include *Giustizia e genetica* (2011).

e-mail: loimichele@gmail.com

The **Comparative Politics and Public Philosophy Lab (LPF)**, directed by Maurizio Ferrera, is a Programme of the Centro Einaudi supported by Compagnia di San Paolo. It looks at the transformation of the political sphere in contemporary democracies, with a specific focus on the relationships between the policy choices and the value frameworks in which such choices are, or ought to be, carried out. The reference here is to the “reasonable pluralism” singled out by John Rawls as an essential feature of political liberalism.

The underlying idea is that implementing forms of “civilized” politics is desirable as well as feasible. And, as far as the Italian political system is concerned, it is also urgently needed, since the system appears to be poorly prepared to deal with the challenges emerging in many policy areas: from welfare state reform to the governance of immigration, from the selection criteria in education and in public administration to the regulation of ethically sensitive issues.

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LPF • Centro Einaudi
Via Ponza 4 • 10121 Torino, Italy
phone +39 011 5591611 • fax +39 011 5591691
e-mail: segreteria@centroeinaudi.it
<http://www.centroeinaudi.it>

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John Rawls, equality of opportunity, self-realization,
difference principle, social justice

ABSTRACT

TAKING SELF-REALIZATION SERIOUSLY**A CRITIQUE OF THE RAWLSIAN ARGUMENT FOR EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

What (if anything) justifies the place of Fair Equality of Opportunity (FEO) in Rawls's conception of "justice as fairness"? Why, from a Rawlsian perspective, should a government give priority in the allocation of its educational budget to preventing unequal social backgrounds from generating inequalities in access to careers? A possible answer is that the priority ascribed in Rawls's theory to the distribution of opportunity, rather than income, reflects the moral importance of self-realization through work. Against this argument, it is argued that this premise either supports a version of the Difference Principle (DP) without FEO or a form of allocative justice explicitly disavowed by Rawls. Thus, orthodox Rawlsians who endorse FEO and its lexical priority cannot attribute a special importance to self-realization through work. The argument does not offer a conclusive case against FEO's priority but shows that concerns of individual self-realization support the DP more directly than FEO.

TAKING SELF-REALIZATION SERIOUSLY

A CRITIQUE OF THE RAWLSIAN ARGUMENT FOR EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

INTRODUCTION

What (if anything) justifies the place of Fair Equality of Opportunity (FEO) in Rawls's conception of "justice as fairness"? Why, from a Rawlsian perspective, should a government give priority in the allocation of its educational budget to preventing unequal social backgrounds from generating inequalities in access to careers, thus mitigating the effects of social class? Why not, instead, allow inequalities in education generated by unequal social backgrounds, if they make the worst off better off in income terms?

It is not at all clear what Rawls's answer is or the Rawlsian answer *ought* to be. In a footnote to *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Rawls honestly admits that:

Some think that the lexical priority of fair equality of opportunity over the difference principle is too strong, and that either a weaker priority or a weaker form of the opportunity principle would be better, and indeed more in accord with fundamental ideas of justice as fairness itself. At present, I do not know what is best here and simply register my uncertainty. How to specify and weight the opportunity principle is a matter of great difficulty and some such alternative may well be better. (Rawls 2001, 163, n. 42)

Robert Taylor's paper (2004) presents a careful examination of these questions in the context of Rawls's theory of Justice as Fairness, providing a much needed interpretation of the Rawlsian rationale for giving lexical priority to FEO over the Difference Principle (henceforth DP). The main virtue of this interpretation is that it develops Rawls's most explicit, yet still cryptic remark on the subject:

if some places were not open on a basis fair to all, those kept out would be right in feeling unjustly treated even though they benefited from the greater efforts of those who were allowed to hold them. They would be justified in their complaint not only because they were excluded from certain external rewards of office but because they were debarred from experiencing the realization of self which comes from a skillful and devoted exercise of social duties. They would be deprived of one of the main forms of human good. (Rawls 1999, 73)

Taylor's analysis is the most articulate attempt to give shape to the thoughts underlying this passage. It can be summarized as follows: FEO's lexical priority can be explained by pointing out the importance for individual self-realization of the institutions that it governs. Moreover, the good of self-realization through work is infinitely more important¹ than any benefit the worst off could derive from giving DP lexical priority over FEO (after basic needs are met).

Arguably, this interpretation of FEO also leads support to a related justification, namely that equality of opportunity is necessary as a social basis of self-respect. Against this, one could argue that a fair distribution of income and wealth is a ground of self-respect, as pointed out by Nir Eyal:

[...] income and wealth are a social basis for citizens confidence in their determinate plans and capacities. For income and wealth both "affirm" citizens' confidence in their determinate plans and capacities and "guarantee" citizens a real opportunity to build warranties for such confidence. [...] Financial aid is both a natural and a conventional sign of affirmation and trust in the value and in the feasibility of the project which aid promotes [...] [I]income and wealth may 'guarantee' citizens the possibility to develop warranted confidence in their own determinate plans and capacities [...] (Eyal 2005, 207-208).

A reply, suggested by the Rawlsian passage quoted above and Taylor's interpretation of it, would be that career-related opportunities are primarily important for building self-respect, because the self-realization that comes from exercising social duties at higher levels of complexity is so central to self-respect, that income cannot substitute for it.

If successful, Taylor's interpretation of Rawls would deliver the clearest statement of the self-realization argument for FEO. I shall argue that the argument from self-realization is not convincing, because it either supports a *maximin* distribution of the complexity of work-related tasks and responsibilities or a form of allocative justice explicitly disavowed by Rawls. Thus, taking self-realization seriously fails to support the lexical priority of FEO over the DP. It is also argued that concerns of self-realization are best accommodated by denying the special importance of careers compared to other means of self-realization. This paper provides the most thorough analysis of the self-realization argument in the literature and reaches important political conclusions based only on internal objections. These conclusions are relevant to equality in education, the division of labor and social hierarchies, equality of opportunity and the idea of a property owning democracy (Hsieh 2009, O'Neill 2009), as well as the social bases of self-respect. It also provides *pro tanto* (non conclusive) support to the right-wing Rawlsian emphasis on income and

¹ As Taylor points out in "Self-Realization and the Priority of Fair Equality of Opportunity" (Taylor 2004, 339), "unless self-realization is of such a nature that consumption can never substitute for it, we will be unable to defend the priority relation between the respective social primary goods (fair opportunities for office and position versus income and wealth) that support them".

wealth, against the left-wing Rawlsian emphasis on meaningful or fulfilling work and equality in the workplace (Arnold 2012b, 20-23).

Let us lay out its logical structure. In Taylor's interpretation of Rawls's argument (§1), the argument from self-realization is supported by three premises:

- T1. Given two skills A and B, if A is more sophisticated than B, practicing A contributes more than practicing B to self-realization (pro tanto).
- T2. Distributive justice requires a fair distribution of the social bases of self-realization.
- T3. (After a satisfactory threshold) no addition of income can compensate a loss of self-realization through work.

The first stage of the argument (§2) assumes that the complexity of the activities exercised at work directly contributes to the subject's self-realization. Assuming that it is possible to justify an objective hierarchy of job complexity, citizens with jobs involving less complex tasks are objectively worst off in terms of self-realization. It is argued that while this premise justifies the lexical priority of FEO, it is incompatible with the natural/social asymmetry of FEO. FEO is unjust, because it gives the naturally talented more chances of self-realization than the naturally untalented and self-realization inequalities are not compensated by income gains. Taking self-realization seriously, then, leads to rejecting the idea of equality of opportunity expressed by FEO.

In the second stage of the argument (§3) three objections against the above critique are considered: the natural inability objection, the freedom objection, and the leveling down objection. The first is that the inequalities permitted by FEO are unavoidable, because naturally disadvantaged citizens cannot acquire skills at the highest levels of complexity, due to biological limits, irrespective of institutional facts. The second claims that social institutions cannot redress life-chances inequalities due to natural endowments, because even if the least naturally endowed citizens are biologically able to acquire sophisticated abilities, they freely choose not to learn abilities that are too hard for them to learn. The third claims that an institutional system granting talented and untalented like chances of self-realization (e.g. a lottery or turnaround system), even if biologically and politically feasible, makes everyone worse off. According to these objections, Rawlsians who attribute a special value to self-realization through work can coherently endorse FEO, in spite of the natural/social asymmetry. It is argued that each objection is mistaken, so egalitarians attributing to self-realization through work more value than income cannot coherently endorse FEO.

Section §4 denies a direct relationship between self-realization and job complexity, so no objective hierarchy of self-realization corresponds to the hierarchy of job complexity. What contributes to self-realization differs from person to person, being relative to personal ideals of self-realization. It is argued that FEO cannot be rescued by appealing to this interpretation of premise T1. If the other premises of

the argument are maintained (T2 and T3), a just distribution of the social bases of self-realization leads to a form of “allocative justice” that Rawlsians ought to reject.

In conclusion (§5), no version of the self-realization argument justifies FEO and its lexical priority. Moreover, it is also argued that room can be made for considerations of self-realization in the Rawlsian framework by denying that self-realization *from work* has special moral importance while emphasizing the instrumental role of income and wealth.

1. FEO VS. EFFICIENCY

Rawls’s FEO states that:

[...] assuming that there is a distribution of natural assets, those who are at the same level of talent and ability, and have the same willingness to use them, should have the same prospects of success regardless of their initial place in the social system. In all sectors of society there should be roughly equal prospects of culture and achievement for everyone similarly motivated and endowed. The expectations of those with the same abilities and aspirations should not be affected by their social class (Rawls 1999, 63).

As Arneson points out (Arneson 1999, 80), FEO can be seen as including two requirements: the requirement that “all have at least the same legal rights of access to all advantaged social positions” (Rawls 1999, 62) and the principle that there should not be inequalities engendered by initial social circumstances in the access to social positions. The first part of FEO is also known as the principle of “careers open to talents” (COT), that Rawls deems insufficient to ensure fairness in a well-ordered society.² The argument in this essay only concerns the more controversial second part, requiring society to prevent unequal career attainments engendered by unequal initial social backgrounds, for instance by subsidizing education.

Given scarce resources, FEO’s goals of policy may conflict with goals justified by the first part of the Second Principle of Justice: the Difference Principle (DP). The DP permits socio-economic inequalities necessary to improve the expectations of social primary goods of the worst off group. It is not its purpose to mitigate opportunity inequalities between people from different social backgrounds, which it may even justify when they contribute to improving the expectations of income and wealth of the worst off group. As Robert Taylor asks:

² For the sake of argument, I shall assume COT to be morally justified. For the purposes of the present paper, it does not matter whether COT is justified as a social basis of citizens’ self-respect or by any further consideration, for I want simply to focus on the additional, and arguably more demanding constraint that the second aspect of FEO expresses. I shall also ignore potential conflicts between the “two parts” of FEO, described by Arneson (1999, 81) in “Against Rawlsian Equality of Opportunity”.

Might it not be to the “greatest benefit of the least advantaged” to focus educational subsidies [...] on those (often socially advantaged) students for whom such investment would offer the highest rate of return and then tax them for the benefit of the poor? Rather than fighting a costly and possibly futile battle against family and class privilege, one might instead put such privilege to work for the least advantaged among us through redistributive taxation. (Taylor 2004, 335)

In this case, the lexical priority of FEO entails that preventing opportunity inequalities due to unequal social background has priority over improving the expectations of wealth and income of the worst off group. The intuitive justification for the combination of FEO and DP is that it delivers a reasonable balance of the sometimes opposite demands of equality and efficiency. Efficiency justifies directing educational investment where it would maximize the return in terms of productive abilities and produce more redistributable wealth; equality justifies leveling the social playing field. But sometimes efficiency conflicts with equality, for instance it does not support subsidizing the education of people from disadvantaged social backgrounds. In this case, why should equality have priority? Why is FEO+DP in lexical order a better conception of justice than the DP alone?

Rawls’s answer is that wealth is not a perfect substitute for the intrinsic reward of exercising the social duties associated with social positions. The *ex post* redistribution of income through taxation may mitigate the arbitrariness of the income distribution, but clearly it does not mitigate the arbitrariness of the distribution of other “forms of the human good” (Rawls 1999, 73) that are correlated to different careers. By reducing inequalities engendered by class background, FEO reduces the moral arbitrariness of the distribution of social positions and, *a fortiori*, of all “forms of the human good” associated with them.

Is this view justifiable? It can be argued that consumption is incommensurable with self-realization, after a threshold of basic needs is met (Taylor 2004, 341-342):

virtuosity can prevent life from becoming “dull and empty” , whereas increasing consumption—though perhaps initially satisfying, especially where basic needs have yet to be met [...]—has a tendency to become a “tiresome routine” itself, with titillation giving way to boredom and jadedness in an endless series of addictive cycles (*ivi*, 339).

According to this interpretation, Rawls’s view presupposes that different activities, such as “tiresome routine” and “sophisticated work”, have different self-realization values. It has been objected that Rawlsian liberals ought to reject such perfectionist claims (Arneson 1999). As a reply, Taylor observes that “moderate” perfectionism can be justified by appealing to an important psychological generalization concerning the sources of human pleasure: Rawls’s “Aristotelian Principle”. This principle states that:

other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities (their innate or trained abilities), and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater the complexity (Rawls 1999, 374).

2. THE NATURAL/SOCIAL ASYMMETRY

The Second Principle of Justice, including FEO and DP in lexical priority, does not guarantee equal chances for people with unequal natural endowments. *Only among people born with similar initial endowments* FEO requires that unequal social backgrounds do not engender unequal attainments. This is why society is *permitted* to invest more resources in the education of the most naturally talented citizens. Conversely, in a group of equally talented children, richer parents are not permitted to invest more resources in the education of their own children.

Summing up, the Second Principle of Justice (FEO+DP in lexical priority) involves a *natural/social asymmetry*: initial natural advantage is allowed to engender unequal career attainments, while initial social advantage is not. Institutions that fulfill this principle can give naturally disadvantaged citizens comparably restricted opportunities to access careers. In this section, it will be argued the natural/social asymmetry is incompatible with the premises of the self-realization argument.³

With a publicly agreed criterion of complexity, it is possible to classify citizens levels of self-realization based on what each one does for a job. But then FEO tends to exclude the untalented from the enjoyment of the good of self-realization (Arneson 1999, 99). In the Rawlsian framework, inequalities in social primary goods are fair only when they benefit the worst off. Being debarred from the enjoyment of self-realization does not benefit the untalented, even if their expectations of income and wealth are higher, because income and wealth benefits do not compensate self-realization disadvantages, as we have assumed (Taylor 2004, 339). The premises of the self-realization argument for the lexical priority of FEO over the DP ground a powerful argument against the natural/social asymmetry of FEO, which does not guarantee equal chances of self-realization between the differently naturally talented.

3. THREE OBJECTIONS

3.1. *The natural inability objection*

It could be objected that life-chances of self-realization between people with different natural endowments cannot be equal. Naturally disadvantaged citizens cannot acquire skills at higher levels of complexity, due to their natural limitations. It is *biologically impossible* for society to mitigate the influence of unequal natural talents on opportunities. Even if the Second Principle does not guarantee equal chances, justice cannot require what is impossible. Since equal chances are impossible, the Second Principle of Justice realizes the best possible distribution of chances of self-realization that is biologically and institutionally feasible.

³ For versions of this argument in the literature, see Arneson (1999, 99) and Clayton (2001).

In response, the objection presupposes that the effects of unequal natural endowments cannot be mitigated, biologically or institutionally. This is not an assumption Rawls makes. He recognizes that opportunity inequalities between differently talented individuals can be reduced by manipulating social and environmental circumstances. Society could spend more resources for the education of the least talented citizens, to redress their competitive disadvantage, but the Second Principle of Justice does not require it (Rawls 1999, 86). In the example discussed by Rawls, the reason why the Second Principle does not require equalizing life-chances cannot be that it would be impossible. So the self-realization inequality produced by the Second Principle cannot be excused by the practical impossibility of obtaining less inequality.

3.2. *The freedom objection*

A different objection claims that life-chances inequalities between the differently talented are not eliminable when free individual choices are respected. Let us examine the argument in some detail. Rawls's Aristotelian Principle says that there is a *pro tanto* psychological tendency to acquire more and more sophisticated skills. People tend to augment the level of complexity of their abilities up to the point where the prospective burden of study and practice to learn and maintain more sophisticated skills outweighs the expected greater pleasure of exercising them (Rawls 1999, 376). Other things equal, people whose talents are greater need *less* effort and time to acquire or maintain an ability at any given level of excellence, so the optimal point where to stop improving one's skills corresponds to a higher absolute level of realized ability, for people whose talents are greater. Given this cost and reward structure, it is simply rational for less talented individuals to specialize in activities requiring less sophisticated skills, and for more talented individuals to specialize in those requiring more. The resulting inequality cannot be avoided without interfering with the free choices of the subjects involved. Thus the institutional means to obtain equal chances are morally objectionable, even if biologically feasible, because they conflict with individual liberty. This justifies the natural/social asymmetry in FEO.

This objection can be refuted because life-chances can be equalized without direct interference with people's choices. Society could decide to simplify the "dominant framework" of social cooperation, until all social positions require only skills the least naturally talented citizens are able and likely to learn. As some philosophers observe:

The dominant cooperative scheme in the United States and other industrial economies is highly complex. Among its more important elements are these: an institutional structure that includes [...] a complex division of labor [...] and a thoroughgoing reliance on written language and symbols.[...] [H]owever, it may be possible to exercise some degree of control over some important elements of the dominant cooperative scheme [...]. The opportunity [...] arises if three conditions are satisfied. First, it is recognized that new technologies are emerging [...]. Second, there are political institutions that enable some or all citizens to have an effective voice in consciously determining

whether or how the emerging technology will be deployed. And third, a sufficient number [...] are motivated to try to exert some control over the character of the framework. [...] [I]mportant features of the dominant cooperative scheme may become objects of social choice, just as certain features of the physical infrastructure for interaction have already become (Buchanan et al. 2000, 289-291).

The idea of simplifying the dominant framework of cooperation was analysed (but not endorsed) in *From Chance to Choice* (Buchanan et al. 2000, 289) in the context of an argument for including people with disabilities by changing society, without changing their biological characteristics. But the argument can be extended to all “natural” inequalities, including the lower tail of the normal range. Some technologies can be outside the reach of the normal untalented. If a more equal distribution of chances of self-realization is more just, society should not allow the diffusion of technological applications that some people are not sufficiently gifted to learn. Some technological applications, e.g. electronic calculators for the mathematically challenged, should be permitted, but many others would have to be prohibited. Thus, there is no excuse for failing to mitigate unequal chances of self-realization between the differently talented. Supporters of the Second Principle cannot justify this inequality by invoking the conflict between unequal chances and the morally more important principle of respect for individual freedom of choice of occupation.

3.3. *The leveling down objection*

It could be objected that equal self-realization, achieved by simplifying the dominant cooperative framework, and/or a lottery and/or a turnaround system, inevitably makes everyone worse off. Life-chances inequalities can be shown to be the advantage of all.

Since we are assuming that income cannot compensate for the complexity of the tasks exercised at work, this objection is correct only if the inequalities justified by the Second Principle contribute to improving the level of complexity of the tasks associated with the least complex jobs. This seems implausible. After all, a society regulated by the Second Principle may allow the job of burger-flippers, whose job is arguably less complex than the simplest job among primitive subsistence farmers or hunter-gatherers.

But what if the DP, correctly understood, considers the prerogatives of power and responsibility of social positions? In a more extensive interpretation, the DP entails that the division of labor is fair only if it *maximizes* the complexity of the worst jobs. According to Arnold (2012a), we could define “occupational equality” as a state of affairs in which all jobs have the same level of complexity, for instance “though doctors and lawyers do different things, their jobs feature similar levels of complexity and responsibility” (Arnold 2012a, 106).⁴ The *maximin* rule

⁴ In Arnold’s discussion of the extended DP, a job’s complexity is defined as “the level, scope, and integration of mental, interpersonal, and manipulative tasks in a job”; see Hodson, Randy and Teresa

allows “moves away from occupational equality [...], if and only if they are necessary to maximally benefit the worst off” (Arnold 2012a, 107). Thus the DP correctly understood prescribes feasible changes in the division of labor. For example, if one considers the unequal division of task complexity between nurses and nursing assistants, hospitals should be required to redesign these jobs so that one worker performs all of these tasks (Arnold 2012a, 107-108).

Summing up, the premises of the self-realization argument justify a more extensive interpretation of the DP, requiring that citizens in the worst social position should not be expected to execute a less complex task, than under a more equal division of the complexity of the tasks (Arnold 2012a). But this extension of the DP is not identical to FEO and makes FEO redundant. If the extensive interpretation of DP is justified (in terms of self-realization *or otherwise*),⁵ then the self-realization argument cannot be used to support FEO. This is a problem for Rawlsians who support a “DP for work” (Arnold 2012a and 2012b), if they accept the orthodox Rawlsian position concerning the lexical priority of FEO.

4. SELF-REALIZATION AND PERSONAL VALUES

The conclusion of the previous argument follows if one accepts a specific interpretation of T1 (*T1-strong*), according to which self-realization is proportional to the complexity of the task exercised. It may be objected that this is an implausible, and therefore uncharitable, interpretation of the self-realization argument. This section will examine whether FEO is supported by a version of the self-realization argument that assumes a looser and more plausible relation between self-realization and the complexity of human activities.

Why is *T1-strong* implausible? It says that an increase in the complexity of an activity leads to greater self-realization no matter what the activity is *about*, or equivalently, that the more complex one’s job is, the greater its contribution to self-realization. But consider the following example.

At the end of your high school, you are a promising tennis player and philosopher. Now you have to choose the field for your future specialization, knowing you will not have the time and energy to pursue both at the professional level. You do not consider physical activity a form of human flourishing: in your perspective, tennis is not a serious endeavor to dedicate one’s life to. For the sake of mere enjoyment, your tennis skills are good enough. You regard philosophical contemplation, on

Sullivan, *The Social Organization of Work*, Belmon (CA), Wadsworth Publishing, 2002, quoted by Arnold (2012a, 102).

⁵N.B. Arnold’s argument in “The Difference Principle at Work” (Arnold 2012a) does not rely on the above (Taylor/Rawls) self-realization premises.

the other hand, as the quintessential form of human realization, hence you wish to dedicate your professional life to it. So you decide to continue your academic study of philosophy, leading to a job in that field.

On one interpretation, compatible with T1-*strong*, you have two self-realization reasons to pursue either careers, one stronger and one weaker: the prospective *complexity* of professional tennis gives you *a* reason to prefer that position, which is *defeated* by the stronger self-realization reason to choose philosophy.

This is neither the only, nor the most plausible interpretation of the balance of reasons. It could be more plausible to claim that *since* you do not value tennis to begin with (in terms of self-realization), you have no self-realization reason to get involved in a career leading to more sophisticated tennis skills, not even a weaker, defeasible reason. According to this alternative view, having a self-realization reason to pursue a career in tennis is *conditional* on having a self-realization reason to play tennis to begin with, which is conditional on *valuing* tennis as part of a personal self-realization ideal.⁶ Thus a better statement of the relationship between the two qualities is given by T1-*weak*:

given two skills A and B, if P values the kind of activity in which A and B are used in terms of self-realization and A is more sophisticated than B, then practicing A contributes more than practicing B to the self-realization of P.

It also follows that executing a more, rather than a less complex activity in one's job need not produce any self-realization benefit. In the real world, the job providing the livelihood is often no fulfilling activity.

Taking this into account, consider what a distribution of the social bases of self-realization would have to be in order to be just (equal or fair). A fair distribution improves the expectations of the worst off group compared to an unobjectionable baseline of equality. It will now be argued that an unobjectionable baseline of equality is incompatible with a basic tenet of Justice as Fairness, namely its rejection of allocative justice.

Let us consider the circumstances of "occupational equality" defined before (see 3.3, third objection). In occupational equality, there are different social positions such as lawyers and doctors and every social position involves activities at the same level of complexity. Let us ask whether occupational equality equalizes expectations of self-realization. Suppose that certain citizens, called "Docs", value only medical activities, while others called "Lois" value only legal ones. The

⁶ Valuing an activity as a form of self-realization can be said to be an enabling condition of reasons to value its complexity. This notion of an "enabling condition" and its distinction from that of a reason, owes to the work of Jonathan Dancy, in *Ethics Without Principles* (Dancy 2004).

population consists of Docs and Lois in equal proportions, but 60% of the jobs are in the medical sector and 40% in the legal one. A relevant proportion of the population, some Lois valuing legal jobs, will end up with medical jobs that do not contribute to their self-realization. The point of this example is not to claim that it is impossible to plan and realize a society in which everyone has equal expectations of self-realization, but only to invite the reader to reflect on the kind of *criterion* that is used to select this allegedly uncontroversial baseline of equality and fairness. Equal expectations of self-realization require matching the *kind* of jobs available with citizens personal views of self-realization. Since this fit is unlikely to obtain accidentally, social institutions ought to be selected based on their tendency to approximate this ideal pattern. What kind of conception of justice is this? Since jobs are treated as goods to be allocated, it is definitely a view of *allocative* justice:

allocative justice applies when a given collection of goods is to be divided among definite individuals with known desires and needs. [...] [I]t is natural to share them out according to desires and needs, or even to maximize the net balance of satisfaction. Justice becomes a kind of efficiency, unless equality is preferred (Rawls 1999, 77).

Rawls objects that “an economic system is not only an institutional device for satisfying existing wants and needs but a way of creating and fashioning wants in the future” (Rawls 1999, 229). In the view he endorses, what he calls *pure procedural* justice, “distributions of advantages *are not* appraised in the first instance by confronting a stock of benefits available with given desires and needs of known individuals” (Rawls 1999, 76). Rawls maintains that like utilitarianism, all forms of allocative justice are ethically objectionable because they make the justice of social institutions depend on the initial configuration of desires found in a population, that is arbitrary from a moral point of view. In conclusion, even if the self-realization argument were to lead to an attractive view of equality of opportunity, it is not acceptable as an interpretation of the Rawlsian argument for FEO. If an opportunity principle is justified on this basis, it is not justified for reasons Rawlsians can endorse and lacks the additional support that comes from being part of a broader, coherent view of justice and social institutions.

In order to avoid this objection, the self-realization value of different human activities would have to be defined by what Rawls calls a “desire-independent” conception. But a desire-independent theory of self-realization would be a full blown perfectionist theory, which is not available to Rawlsians as the basis of just institutions (Arneson 1999, 98). If one rejects allocative justice, the justice of social institutions is not a function of their ability to match subjective views of self-realization with a suitable allocation of jobs. But if self-realization necessarily comes from obtaining a work of a certain *kind*, that fulfills one’s aspirations, justice in the distribution of the social basis of self-realization has to be a form of allocative justice.

5. CONCLUSION: SELF-REALIZATION THROUGH INCOME

I have argued that the premises of the self-realization argument do not support the Second Principle of Justice, with FEO and DP in lexical order. Two possibilities have been considered:

1) T1-*strong* is correct. Justice requires an equal or fair distribution of the social basis of self-realization, which is the level of complexity of jobs (the higher the complexity, the greater the contribution to self-realization) (section 2 above). Eventually, this requires an extension of the Difference Principle that distributes the complexity of jobs. The extended DP justifies a more detailed division of labor only when it raises the complexity of the least complex activities (section 3 above). But this makes FEO redundant.

2) T1-*weak* is correct (section 4 above). Justice requires an equal or fair distribution of the social basis of self-realization, which is complex work matching the worker's self-realization ideal (a job does not contribute to self-realization, even if complex, unless it involves a *kind* of activity the person values). Social institutions should be judged by their ability to create jobs that match citizens' views of self-realization. This argument supports a form of allocative justice, which is also different from and incompatible with FEO.

Summing up, no coherent justification for FEO is available based on the premises of the self-realization argument.

Apart from FEO, what is the best way to make room for self-realization needs in a Rawlsian framework? In what follows, I shall propose a view coherent with T1-*weak* that does not lead to embracing a form of allocative justice, because it rejects the idea that careers and positions are the social bases of self-realization that ought to be justly distributed.

In my favored interpretation of Justice as Fairness, it is possible for a perfectly just society to be one in which some people end up doing for a living an activity that is not part of their self-realization ideal. One immediate consequence is that increasing the complexity of the tasks associated with these jobs is not necessarily in the interest of the people who have them. What is in their interest is increasing the economic return of work which, as I shall now argue, offers additional support for the DP.

First, consider a talented person undertaking a career involving sophisticated skills that have no self-realization value for her. She chooses what talents to develop, pragmatically, on the basis of demand for such skills in the marketplace and ends up with a high income job, in a society where income inequalities are justified by the DP. But her work does not contribute to her self-realization. Second, consider a talented person who makes a more idealistic choice, leaving marketable talents

undeveloped and cultivating those that contribute to her self-realization. Since these skills are not easily marketable, she can only find an unskilled occupation with the lowest pay. Third and finally, consider a person lacking the talent required to learn either the most marketable skills, or the skills required for a job that would contribute to her self-realization.

A distribution of income regulated by the DP grants decent prospects of self-realization to all of them. The first citizen obtains little or no self-realization from work, but in virtue of a well-paid job, she can buy opportunities for self-realization in her spare time. After all, income is a primary good, something that by definition allows one to buy things one values, including other means for improving one's virtuosity in valued activities: one can buy challenging courses, canvasses to paint on, instruments to play complicated music on, etc.⁷

Over a whole life, the second citizen (naturally talented but unskilled worker) gets less income, but more free time to engage in activities that have direct self-realization value, but not market value. She obtains *less* resources than the first, but over a whole time, she saves *time* (she does not spend any to acquire marketable skills through education for sophisticated jobs). While the income of those who decide not to learn marketable skills will tend to be lower than the income of the worker in our first example, the DP ensures that it is the highest possible income for this category of workers.

The third citizen is also better off in terms of self-realization in a society in which the DP is perfectly implemented, compared to any other feasible arrangement. This citizen, who *cannot* learn marketable skills, has the highest possible income at her disposal to engage with activities that require little talent, which may be pursued through free associations of citizens with similar talents.

In this perspective, the DP can be seen as the best insurance against the risk that one's self-realization ideal do not lead to marketable skills, as it maximizes the amount of resources available to people who cannot or do not want to acquire any. This is especially true if, as in the latest formulations of Justice as Fairness, leisure time is counted as part of the index of primary goods to which the DP applies. A society that distributes more income to the worst off citizens without leaving enough leisure time for self-realization activities may rate worse, from the viewpoint of the DP, than a society that distributes less income but more leisure time.

The reconciliation between the DP and self-realization is plausible, but it requires denying that self-realization *through work* has a special status. Self-realization is not necessarily achieved through work, but through a variety of free citizens associations to which principles of justice do not apply directly (Rawls 1999, 470-471).

⁷ I owe the last point to Nir Eyal.

Arguably this is the most coherent Rawlsian interpretation of the place of self-realization in a well-ordered society: it is promoted by the DP through income and wealth, and through the internal life of citizens' associations. Concerning education, this view does not require equalizing life-chances for people with similar talents, but only targeting sufficient resources to the education of the least (naturally or socially) fortunate citizens, in order that, as Rawls puts it, they be able to "enjoy the culture of [their] society and take part in its affairs" (Rawls 1999, 87).

In conclusion, against the self-realization argument reconstructed by Taylor, self-realization does not support the lexical priority of FEO over the DP. If place for the idea of self-realization is to be found within Justice as Fairness, it is found by rejecting the idea that it comes especially through work. According to this interpretation, even if self-realization is morally important, it cannot justify the importance of access to careers and the priority of FEO. This leaves open the question if a different rationale for FEO and its lexical priority, but that is a question for a different article.

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