



Motivational adequacy and educational faith

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Abstract

Justice is often thought to require that students receive educations that are, in some important sense, equal. I lay out, and raise questions about, an argument that seems to support this conclusion. The questions I raise about the argument suggest that what justice requires is not equality, but adequacy, of education. More specifically, I contend that justice demands that education be motivationally adequate. It must position students to appreciate and be moved by the intrinsic interest of the subjects they are studying and by the extrinsic rewards that come with age-appropriate mastery of them. I then argue that, if an education is to satisfy this condition, students must have reasonable faith that the educational system and society's distributive scheme satisfy robust standards of fairness.

Keywords

adequacy, equality, input, Kant, moral faith

IN THIS ARTICLE, I WANT TO EXPLORE what is meant by the standard of educational adequacy. That standard is of interest in part because, in *San Antonio v. Rodriguez*, the Supreme Court has said that students must be provided with adequate, rather than equal, educations. Adequacy is also of interest because, though educational equality seems like an attractive goal, it is hard to say just what educational equality demands. If its demands cannot be made out or if they cannot be satisfied, and if adequacy is the alternative to equality, then we may have no choice but to take adequacy as our goal and to try to understand what *it* demands.

The Egalitarian Argument

The attractiveness of some kind of educational equality can be seen by considering an argument for it that is presented – in varying forms – by a number of authors. I shall refer to that argument as the *Egalitarian Argument*.

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The Egalitarian Argument begins with the observation that education is a positional good. There seem to be a number of different formulations of this notion in the literature. I shall use one of my own devising, which is in need of qualifications, but which I hope captures in somewhat rigorous form the most important part of what those who offer these various definitions have in mind. Roughly, a positional good is a good such that if it is not equally distributed and the distribution is amenable to an ordering – whether full or partial – then there is a scarce benefit B the possessor can derive from that good, the value of which is influenced by and positively correlated with her position in the order. Call B a *positional benefit*.

It seems clear that:

- (1) One of the positional benefits that can be derived from education is advantage in the labor market.

Indeed, if (1) were untrue, debates about justice in the distribution of educational resources would lose much of their interest. It seems equally clear that:

- (2) The labor market distributes occupations that confer status and financial reward on a competitive basis.

From (1) and (2), it follows that:

- (3) So one of the positional benefits that can be derived from education is advantage in the labor market competition for occupations that confer status and financial rewards.

It is generally assumed that:

- (4) Competition in the labor market should be fair.

It is also generally assumed that:

- (5) Competition in the labor market will be fair only if none of the competitors is advantaged by positional benefits that she has gained on the basis of factors that are arbitrary from a moral point of view, such as race, gender or class of origin.

Steps (4) and (5) imply that:

- (6) None of the competitors in the labor market should be advantaged by positional benefits that she has gained on the basis of factors that are arbitrary from a moral point of view, such as race, gender or class of origin.

And (3) and (6) seem to support:

- (7) None of the competitors in the labor market should be advantaged by positional benefit of education that she has gained on the basis of factors that are arbitrary from a moral point of view.

One way to make sure that no one is advantaged by the positional benefits of education would be to decouple success in the job market from academic success, so that educational success does not confer the positional benefit referred to in (1). We could, for example, assign jobs by lottery. But we want jobs to go to people who have succeeded in school. We just do not want such success to depend upon morally arbitrary factors. So it seems the only desirable way to satisfy (7) is to satisfy:

- (8) None of the competitors in the labor market should gain the positional benefit of education on the basis of factors that are arbitrary from a moral point of view.

It seems clear that:

- (9) No one gains the positional benefit of an education on the basis of factors that are arbitrary from a moral point of view only if the quality of education made available to students is independent of those factors.

And (8) and (9) get us to:

- C: The quality of education made available to students must be independent of arbitrary factors such as their race, class and gender.

As I indicated earlier, I do not mean to be doing anything original in laying out the Egalitarian Argument. The argument is commonly heard in some form and it is laid out by other writers – most systematically by Harry Brighouse but also by Robert Reich and William Koski (2008: 23). In fact, the conclusion C of the Egalitarian Argument is a conclusion explicitly defended by Brighouse (2002: 184; also 2000: 117–18) and the argument I have laid out follows his closely.

There is a good deal that could be said about the Egalitarian Argument. I shall restrict myself to a couple of remarks.

First, as I indicated when I went through the Egalitarian Argument, the move from (7) to (8) presupposes that we want education to confer positional benefits. I believe that this is right, and I shall return to the point below.

Second, the move from (8) and (9) to C presupposes that the positional benefits one gets from education depend upon the quality of education one receives. This may not be exactly right. It would not be entirely true if, for example, all Stanford diplomas had equal value on the job market because they were above a certain threshold, or if prospective employers did not think it worth disaggregating Stanford signals (results) into *summa* (highest distinction) and *magna* (high distinction) signals, or into the different signals sent by success in majors in which the quality of education is different. But even if the presupposition is untrue or in need of qualification, I think this is an acceptable simplifying assumption.

Equality and adequacy

The conclusion of the Egalitarian Argument C is compatible with inequalities of per-pupil expenditure. It is, for example, compatible with inequalities in spending to accommodate

special needs. Even so, the argument is sometimes presented as an argument for equality of education and, in particular, for equality of inputs or of resources spent per capita. Why?

I think the idea is something like this. The conclusion *C*, it is said, expresses or implies a necessary condition on an educational system's satisfying the ideal of equal education. For while *C* is compatible with extra expenditures on disabled students, if the condition expressed by *C* is satisfied, then differences in ability and motivation are *all* that is left for quality of education to vary *with*. In that case, the quality of education made available to students who are equally talented and motivated will be the same. And that, it might be thought, is *clearly* a necessary condition on educational equality. Let us express it as:

Condition 1: Educational equality requires that equally talented and motivated children get equally good educations.

Moreover, if we take quality of education made available to students to correlate with the money spent on the educational packages made available to them, at least in the special case of students who are equally talented and motivated, then we get the condition that money spent on such students will be the same. That, too might seem plausible as a necessary condition on educational equality.¹ Let us express it as:

Condition 2: Educational equality requires that equally talented and motivated children receive equivalent educational resources.

Even those who take the Egalitarian Argument as an argument for educational equality may want to qualify these conditions somewhat. I think it is permissible that there be inequalities in the value of the packages of educational resources available to equally talented and motivated students at time T_2 , provided – say – that those inequalities result from choices made at previous time T_1 , such as the choice to study the piano rather than the blocks or the triangle. So I think Condition 1 and Condition 2 would be more plausible if they referred to equally talented and motivated students who have made the same choices. But I shall ignore this complication for simplicity's sake. What matters for present purposes is that what I have called the Egalitarian Argument is supposed to support *C*. Thinking about *C*, in turn, is supposed to shed some light on what equality of education demands and shows why satisfying the demand is attractive. For example, equality of inputs is an implausible ideal of educational equality if it is understood to require unconditional equality of per-pupil expenditure. But if it is defined as including Conditions 1 and 2, or as meaning the conjunction of those two conditions, then equality of inputs may have some appeal.

The problem with this line of thought – and with equality as an educational goal – lies in Conditions 1 and 2.

To see the difficulties with these conditions, we need to distinguish them carefully from other conditions with which they might be conflated. Conditions 1 and 2 should not be confused with the very different claim that if Fran is as talented as Nan but is less motivated, then the ideal of educational equality is violated if the quality of education provided to Fran, or the amount of money spent on her, is equal to or greater than that provided to or spent on Nan. This condition, though different than Conditions 1 and 2, is

sometimes thought appealing. To see the problem with it, suppose that Nan comes from a family which takes for granted that she will go to college and in which the rewards of higher education are all around her. Fran comes from a very different family, in which book learning is disdained, in which higher education is not highly prized and in which no one has previously pursued higher education with any enthusiasm. In that case, it is understandable, I think, that Fran is less motivated to succeed in school than Nan is. It does not seem to me to violate the demands of justice if Fran is provided with a better and more expensive education than Nan in the form of better guidance counseling, more intensive pedagogical effort, even an effort to place her with the more inspiring teacher if a choice needs to be made.

Differences in motivation are sometimes morally relevant to the resources that should be spent on students' educations. Ideals of educational equality and educational justice have to take that into account. To insist that they are always relevant, and so should always be reflected in differences in educational expenditure and quality, ignores the fact that motivation is itself, in part, a product of education (O'Neill, 1976: 278). But motivation is not just *elicited* by good teaching and good advising. A good education also helps to *sustain* motivation. I believe this fact poses a problem for the conditions on educational equality that I *am* considering, Conditions 1 and 2.

Consider Fran's sister Jan who *is* as talented and motivated as Nan at time T_1 despite coming from circumstances that are – as we have seen – far less favorable. By Conditions 1 and 2, the educations made available to Jan and Nan should be equal in quality, and equal resources should be spent on their educations. But because of Jan's family circumstances, including peer-pressure from her underachieving sister Fran, Jan's motivation is a fragile plant. To keep it from withering by T_2 , I believe it would be consistent with justice to give Jan's motivation extra nurture – to make a better and more expensive education available to Jan than to Nan, again in the form of better guidance counseling, more intensive pedagogical effort, and effort to place her with the more inspiring teacher.

If this conclusion is right, then either justice does not demand equality of education or Conditions 1 and 2 are not conditions of the ideal of equality. We could maintain that justice *does* demand educational equality and take the second option, defining equality without relying on Conditions 1 and 2. Since I do not see how 'equality of input' could be defined in an appealing way without relying on Condition 2, I do not think that the goal of educational equality should be defined as that kind of equality.

It might be thought that the goal should be understood as equality of opportunity, and that this kind of equality *can* be defined without appealing to Conditions 1 and 2.² The champion of equality of opportunity will, of course, have to address the question of what she wants to equalize the opportunity *for*. The Egalitarian Argument derives the desirability of educational equality from the desirability of fair competition for the positional benefits of education. Since the move from step (7) to step (8) of that argument depends on the claim that we want those benefits to go to those who have succeeded in school, a natural answer to the question is that what should be equalized is the opportunity for educational accomplishment. Can this kind of educational equality be defined without appealing to Conditions 1 and 2?

According to some of the most sophisticated characterizations of equality of opportunity for education accomplishment, such equality is to be brought about by educational

spending. The egalitarians I now have in mind recognize that spending may have to be unequal. But they try to distinguish those elements of students' conditions that such differential educational spending should try to even out from those which it need not. The latter elements are said to be those that depend upon students' willing expenditure of effort. The attempt to distinguish the former from the latter seems intended precisely to characterize equal opportunity for educational accomplishment so that the spending that brings it about satisfies Condition 2 (Risse 2002: 725–6).

Recall that the conclusion of the Egalitarian Argument says:

- C: The quality of education made available to students must be independent of arbitrary factors such as their race, class and gender.

When I first looked at the Egalitarian Argument, I said that the condition expressed by C might be considered a necessary condition of educational equality. It might now be said, however, that that condition is both necessary and sufficient for equality of educational opportunity. If it is also said that the right way to understand the goal of educational equality is as equality of educational opportunity, then the condition expressed by C is a sufficient as well as a necessary condition of that goal.

This proposal severs the connection between educational equality and Conditions 1 and 2, and so avoids the problems with those conditions. To fill in the details of the proposal, we would need to be told more about the 'arbitrary factors' to which C refers, since C specifies those factors only by example. In particular, we need to know whether a student's willingness to expend effort is a morally arbitrary factor. If it is, then equality of educational opportunity can be realized only if students have equally good educations made available to them regardless of how hard they are willing to work. In that case, it is hard to see why someone's claim to equal treatment – and to the resources equal treatment requires – is a claim of justice or a claim of desert. While motivation is, as I have stressed, a product of education, there surely are some students who by some stage of their educational careers can be said to have forfeited their claim to equal treatment by their unwillingness to expend effort. Since the point of the Egalitarian Argument was to identify a goal that the educational system is supposed to satisfy as a matter of justice, I assume that proponents of equal educational opportunity will not want to assert the irrelevance of motivation. But if motivation is not a morally arbitrary factor, then we need to be told how the willingness to work helps to identify students who are entitled to equal educational opportunities. It is hard to see how the proponent of equal educational opportunity can do that without appeal to Conditions 1 and 2, or to conditions that are vulnerable to the same difficulties that they are.

These worries make me sympathetic to the conclusion that justice does not demand equality of education. Misgivings about this conclusion are assuaged by what I believe is a Rawlsian insight: the insight that, crudely put, what justice demands of the educational system is not that it equalize *education* but that it equalize *students*.³ Somewhat less crudely, it requires that the educational system help to equalize students and the citizens they will become. And so I think that the question we should be asking is, as Debra Satz has argued, the question of what education is adequate to that task.⁴

In attempting to answer this question, we need to bear in mind that the educational system is not solely responsible for equal citizenship or even for equality of opportunity. Differences in the positional benefits that remain when everyone has an adequate education could, in principle, be addressed by aggressive programs of affirmative action and preferential hiring, at least if we assume that those differences cut along lines of race, class and/or gender. But wouldn't it be better not to rely on these measures? Wouldn't it be better to eliminate the residual differences in positional benefits that they are supposed to remedy?

I think the answer is clearly 'yes'. Note that nothing I have said requires giving up on the Egalitarian Argument, since I have merely questioned what is said to follow from its conclusion. For, as we saw in moving from step (7) to step (8), that argument presupposes that we want job market success to be correlated with academic success. If we also want the market operations that match labor market success with academic success to be fair, then we still have an argument for narrowing or eliminating the sort of differences in positional benefits that affirmative action and preferential hiring are used to address.

Note next that the Egalitarian Argument does not depend upon the assumption that we want jobs to be well performed. It could be satisfied by a society in which the highest level of success that anyone achieves is still low in absolute terms, and the entirety of the labor pool is unskilled. But if we add the assumptions that we want jobs to be well done and job-holders to be highly skilled, then it seems clear that the job market will have to reward high levels of performance or training. That tells against setting the threshold of adequacy at a low level before we narrow or eliminate differences in the positional benefits of education. So, with the additional assumption that we want jobs to be well performed, the Egalitarian Argument can use the desirability of a fair labor market to leverage a high level of educational adequacy with narrow differences in positional benefit.

This is itself an interesting result. I said at the outset that I want to understand adequacy better. That means seeing what it implies. So, in the remainder of this article, I want to proceed in reverse. Having said why I am interested in adequacy rather than equality, I now want to see if we use claims about adequacy to leverage a high standard of fairness in the economy rather than the other way round. I am not sure whether this can be done, but I wish to try out the line of argument.

Motivational adequacy

I have already noted that the motivation to master academic material and succeed in school is elicited and sustained, at least in part, by schooling itself. This means that an education is adequate only if it adequately elicits and sustains student motivation. Meeting this standard does not require that all students must be equally motivated upon graduation or at any other time in their schooling, assuming for the sake of argument that we could even determine that that is so. Indeed, it does not mean that every student must be motivated at all. I want to leave open the possibility that a student can receive an adequate education – or even a great education – but not have the motivation to succeed, for any of a variety of reasons. But I do think that all students should have an education that *positions* them to appreciate and be moved by the intrinsic interest of the subjects they are studying and by the extrinsic rewards that come with age-appropriate mastery of them.

Let's say that an education that meets this standard is *motivationally adequate*. I do not know what conditions are sufficient for a motivationally adequate education. But here are some that strike me as normally necessary: if students are to receive an education that is motivationally adequate, they should all have teachers who communicate their own excitement about academic material, who present that material in a stimulating way, who communicate their expectations and their hope that students will live up to them, who can give students individualized attention and from whom students learn what further rewards academic success might bring. They must also have administrators talented enough to create a school culture that is supportive of achievement. As my discussion of Fran, Jan and Nan suggested, I think motivational adequacy is compatible with, and may well require, inequalities in the quality of education that students receive and inequalities of per-pupil expenditure.

I hope my claim that all students should receive a motivationally adequate education is fairly uncontroversial. Even those of the 'pull oneself up by the bootstraps' school, who think that the creation and distribution of wealth should satisfy only formal standards of fairness, assume that everyone can try. If they recognize the role of schools in eliciting and sustaining motivation, then they too will grant that education should be motivationally adequate.

I am not sure what indicators might be used to determine whether such an education is being provided. A layman's conjecture is that objective indicators include student-teacher ratios, counselor-student ratios, the quality of a school's teachers and guidance counselors, whether those in such positions are trained to motivate students at risk. Among the subjective indicators that students are being provided with a motivationally adequate education might be that they are actually motivated to study, choose more rather than less demanding classes, apply to selective colleges if they are college-bound, make voluntary use of guidance counselors and tutors, and take part in demanding after-school or extra-curricular programming. We have some indication that students in a given school are not getting a motivationally adequate education if significant numbers of them drop out, have limited aspirations or are judged by conscientious teachers to continue their educations with apathy.

We professional educators, committed to our subjects, want students to be motivated by the intrinsic interest of the material. But we also recognize that this is unrealistic. Many students are motivated to some extent by the prospect of extrinsic rewards. If they want educational success, it is – in part, and perhaps in large part – to secure the positional benefits of education. The question I want to pursue is what the background conditions are of an education that adequately positions students to develop this kind of motivation.

Educational faith

It is not easy to say exactly what the motivation for academic success *is*. Academic success is hard-won, requiring perseverance and application. So, whatever else motivation is, it is a trait that endures in the face of temptations and reasons, sometimes very strong ones, to leave off or give up. Among students who are old enough consciously to reflect on the fact that they have reasons to leave off, motivation manifests a commitment. I want to suggest that commitment, and other motivation that endures in the face of strong

temptation, requires faith. If education must be adequate, if an adequate education must be adequately motivational, if an adequately motivational education positions students to commit to their work, and if commitment requires faith, then education must position students to develop a kind of faith. What kind?

Philosophers have talked a good bit about religious faith. They have also talked, though considerably less than they should, about moral faith.⁵ The objects of faith I have in mind now are neither religious nor moral. They are educational and social. I shall therefore refer to the kind of faith I think students need as *educational faith*. Still, educational faith as I conceive it bears a strong resemblance to moral faith. The need for moral faith is most famously defended by Kant. If the details of his defense are not familiar, or even easily worked out, the conclusion of the argument and its upshot are well known. Let me therefore begin the discussion of educational faith by sketching an argument that Kant is thought to have made.

Kant thought that having a good will – that is, a will consistently to act from the moral law – may well not confer happiness. It merely makes its possessor *worthy* of happiness (Kant, 1997 [1785]: 7). Of course, it would be good if those who are worthy of happiness actually are happy, and if those who are fully worthy of happiness are fully happy.⁶ Indeed, Kant thought this state of affairs would be the highest good. As the highest good, he thought, this state of affairs is the natural object of our willing. But since there seems not to be a causal connection between acting from the moral law and the production of what we want – namely, happiness – it will be hard for us to see what the *point* is of living a moral life. If we think there is no point of a commitment, then we are unlikely to make and sustain it. So Kant thinks that we will not be able to sustain our commitment to the moral law unless we believe that moral action will be – or at least can be – productive of the highest good. But how can that connection possibly be established? Kant famously replied that it can be established only by an agent who knows our motives and who is capable of apportioning happiness. The only agent with *that* kind of knowledge and power is God. And so Kant thought that we must believe in God to sustain our moral commitment. That's why God's existence is a practical postulate.

Kant's argument asserts several objects of moral faith. The most obvious, of course, is God. Having faith that God exists, we have faith that the highest good can be realized through moral action, and we have faith that a commitment to the moral law is worth making and sustaining. This last article of faith is the one Kant would seem to be most concerned with vindicating. The question is why Kant thought faith in the *highest good* is needed to vindicate it. We might think that each person can sustain her commitment to the moral law only if she sees reason to think that *her* action will bring it about that *her* happiness will be proportionate to *her* virtue. But that is not what Kant says. Of course he thinks that if the highest good is realized, then each person's happiness *will* be proportionate to her virtue. But that is not what he thinks is needed if agents are to see the point of their commitment. Rather, we see the point of moral commitment when we see that moral action can contribute to bringing about a state of affairs in which *everyone* enjoys happiness proportionate to her virtue. This is a very intriguing claim. So what really interests me about Kant's argument is why he thought faith that a moral life is worth living can be sustained only by faith that moral action will produce an outcome that is *fair*. What is it, about us or about commitment to the moral law, that makes that so?

I am no Kant scholar. My answer is therefore, of necessity, speculative.

First, suppose we *know* that in making and following through on the demanding commitment to the moral law, we make ourselves worthy of happiness, and that this is part of why we choose to do it. I am not sure exactly what ‘worthy of happiness’ means. It could mean something as strong as ‘deserving of happiness, all things considered’. It could mean something weaker, such as ‘prima facie deserving of happiness’. What is essential if Kant’s argument is to work, I suggest, is that to be worthy of happiness is to have a moral claim of some kind on happiness, the denial of which must be justifiable to us, a claim which I shall simply refer to as a ‘worthiness claim’. So, by acting from the moral law, we acquire a worthiness claim to happiness, we know that and that is part of our motivation for making a commitment to act from the law.

Second, if we could not see any regular connection between our own and others’ happiness and our own and others’ worthiness claims to happiness, then we could only conclude that the world is indifferent those claims.

Third, if the world were indifferent to those claims, then we would see no point in our doing what we have to do to acquire them. And if we can see no point in doing that, then – given the demands of conducting ourselves that way – we are unlikely to do it. To see the point of committing to the moral life, and to sustain that commitment, we need to believe that our acquisition of worthiness claims can lead to a state of affairs in which those claims are satisfied, and to believe that others’ failure to act from the law can lead to their unhappiness. We need to believe, that is, that the world can apportion happiness fairly.

Of course, the possibility that the world can apportion happiness fairly depends upon special features of the good to which we acquire worthiness claims – namely, happiness. Happiness is not scarce, for one person’s being happy does not, as it were, leave any less happiness for everyone else. Moreover, virtuous agents do not derive happiness from the unhappiness of other virtuous agents, so satisfying the desires of some does not itself require the unfair treatment of others. Finally, we have to suppose that there is at least one possible state of affairs in which happiness is non-competitive: in which no one’s pursuit of happiness competes with anyone else’s. Then the idea of a state of affairs in which everyone receives the happiness of which she is worthy is not inconsistent, and – given God’s power and God’s knowledge of our wills – it is a state of affairs God could bring about.⁷

I find this line of argument very interesting. I am also interested in the question of whether Kant ever offered any such argument. But I am not going to evaluate the argument, or ask whether it is Kant’s argument, here. Instead, I want to draw attention to the premise about motivation that I have imputed to Kant to try to make the argument work. That is the premise that we can sustain a demanding commitment that we know gives rise to worthiness claims only if we have faith that the world is not indifferent to, or hostile to, those claims, but is instead fairly responsive to them. That is the step of the argument that I believe has interesting implications for education that is motivationally adequate.

I said earlier that for education to be motivationally adequate it must position students to appreciate and be moved by the intrinsic interest of the subjects they are studying and by the extrinsic rewards that come with age-appropriate mastery of them. While the desire for these latter rewards may be an ineliminable part of educational motivation, it is not an incorrigible or an unteachable part. Part of an educator’s job is the education of

desire for these goods. As part of students' education, they have to learn that there are standards of academic performance with respect to which their achievements are judged. They need to see the positional benefits of education – approbation, advancement, admission to desirable schools at the later stages of education, success on the job market – as goods for which one becomes worthy by meeting those standards, or by excelling when judged by them. So, if an education is to be motivationally adequate, it is not enough that it position students to learn what extrinsic rewards can be achieved by through education. It must position students to think of these goods as goods that go to those who have certain qualifications, and it must position them to be moved by a desire to qualify for the extrinsic rewards of education through their own academic achievement.

Let me put this in the terms I used when I discussed Kant: it must position them to want to acquire worthiness claims to the extrinsic rewards of education. Moreover, it should position them to want to stake strong worthiness claims because an education which is motivationally adequate is one which positions all students to want to be as academically successful as they can. If talk of worthiness claims is unfamiliar, I still take these to be fairly uncontroversial claims about what we want education to accomplish, one that would be endorsed across the political spectrum.

A student's commitment to doing well in school is therefore like a moral agent's commitment to acting from the moral law. Both are demanding commitments to patterns of conduct that require discipline and perseverance in the face of temptation. If students' desires are properly shaped, both are commitments to patterns that are believed by those making them to give rise to worthiness claims. These similarities suggest that, if the motivational claim I imputed to Kant is right, students' commitment to academic success will be too difficult to sustain if they cannot see the point of that commitment, and they will be unable to see its point unless they believe that the world is not indifferent to such claims. As moral agents' belief that the world is not indifferent to their worthiness claims depends upon their believing that acting on a commitment to the moral law can be productive of happiness, so, I suggest, students' belief that the world is not indifferent to *their* worthiness claims depends upon their believing that acting on a commitment can bring the extrinsic rewards of education. And if *this* is right, then students will be able to see the point of a commitment to academic success, and to sustain that commitment, only if they think that the processes by which the extrinsic rewards of education are distributed are fair.

There are differences between academic commitment and commitment to the moral law. For example, academic success gives rise to worthiness claims on benefits that are scarce. This difference is significant. Since two people can – at least in principle – be equally worthy of those scarce goods, some people may end up less well rewarded than those with whom they are tied. The same is presumably not true of the allocation of happiness when the highest good is realized. But I do not believe this difference affects the point about motivation that I have drawn from Kant. If an education is to position students to be moved by the extrinsic rewards of education, they must be in a position to have faith that a commitment to academic success is worth making, and that the temptations to leave off or drop out or give up are worth resisting. That faith depends upon their faith that there are fair causal processes connecting academic commitment with the extrinsic rewards of academic success.

I have not said so far what the attitude of faith is. What I have to say about this complicated matter will, I'm sure, be frustratingly vague. The word 'faith' is sometimes treated as synonymous with the phrase 'blind faith'. That phrase, in turn, is taken to refer to the affirmation of propositions for which the believer lacks reasons. When Kant speaks of faith that the highest good can be brought about through the exercise of a good will, and faith that a commitment to the moral life is worth making, that is not the way he is using the term. Rather, Kant thought that we must postulate the existence of God precisely so that we have reason to accept these other articles of faith. When I say that students must have faith in the fairness of the scheme for connecting rewards with academic success, I, too, mean that their faith has to be based on reasons. Those reasons will fall short of demonstrating its fairness, and fall short of guaranteeing that academic commitment will prove worth making. But they must be enough to ground – to borrow a phrase from Kant – students' 'reasonable faith'.

What reasons should they have? I do not, of course, think students should have to postulate a divine coordinator of the labor market who guarantees its fairness. Rather, their faith in the fairness of the scheme should be grounded on publicly known features of the scheme itself.

One distributive scheme that is sometimes thought to be fair is a scheme in which positional benefits are available in proportion to achievement, regardless of how achievement is gained. If some students have a better chance for achievement than others, because they go to better schools, that would be fair. Faith that the distributive scheme rewards success even under these circumstances should be enough to sustain all students' academic commitment, regardless of where they are socially placed.

Whether or not it should be is a normative question, one to which I merely suggest an answer. I do not think it reasonable to expect students in deteriorating and underfunded schools to see the point of academic commitment, or to have faith that that commitment is worth making, if they see that the positional rewards of education are much more likely to go to others because of the advantages they enjoy. This seems to me more likely to breed cynicism about academic commitment. If this suggestion is right, then faith that a commitment to academic success is worth making *should* be grounded on the belief that the educational system and the distributive scheme meet more demanding standards of fairness. Indeed, it seems to me that students can be expected to escape cynicism and commit to academic success only if they can see that the distribution of education's positional benefits does not discriminate on grounds that are morally irrelevant, such as race, gender and class.

If this is so, then we can indeed reverse the Egalitarian Argument. As we saw, that argument takes the imperative of a fair labor market as a premise – the premise expressed in step (4). While some proponents of the argument believe it supports educational equality, I argued that it does not do so. But I also suggested that the argument does support the conclusion that all students must receive an education that is adequate to equal citizenship. I have maintained that an education meets this standard only if it is motivationally adequate.

One of things I hoped to do in this article is show that philosophical reflection on the motivations we want people to have can bring to light the social preconditions of those motivations. I argued that an education is motivationally adequate only if it positions students to develop what I called 'educational faith', one of the elements of which is that

a commitment to academic success is worth making. I then argued that whether students are in a position to develop such faith depends upon whether they are in a position to develop faith in the fairness of the scheme for distributing the positional benefits of education. Being in that position requires that the distributive scheme itself, including the labor market, actually satisfies robust standards of fairness.

Just what those standards are, and how robust they have to be, are questions I must unfortunately leave for another occasion. These questions are, I believe, made particularly pressing by differences in natural ability that no education can level off. Every educational system will include students who know that their abilities pose significant barriers to academic achievement and to the attainment of the positional goods that go with it, but whose perseverance in school is clearly desirable. What must the distributive scheme be like to sustain their educational faith?

It may be that the faith of the least-advantaged will be reasonable, and their perseverance reasonable to expect, only if they have good reason to think that the greater positional goods that will be enjoyed by those more talented than they are will not come at their expense. If that is right, then the perseverance of the least-advantaged in an educational scheme can reasonably be expected only under the conditions that Rawls (1999a [1971]: 88) has argued: the participation of the least-advantaged can reasonably be expected in a cooperative scheme when all inequalities work to the benefit of the least-advantaged. In that case, the conditions of educational faith require that the distributive scheme satisfy conditions that are very demanding indeed.

Notes

1. And so Brighouse (2002: 184) writes: ‘every child should have an equally good education. What this means is obviously contested. When you compare children with similar talents, and similar levels of willingness to exert effort, it is pretty intuitive to say that educational equality is satisfied when they receive a similar level of educational resources.’
2. I am grateful to Rob Reich for raising this point.
3. I call this point ‘Rawlsian’ because Rawls’s defense of democratic equality purports to show that treating people as equal citizens is compatible with unequal distribution of resources. For an especially clear treatment of this idea of democratic equality, see Rawls (1999b [1975]: 262–4) and Anderson (1999).
4. See Satz (2007: 635): ‘if we reflect on the civic purposes that we want a conception of educational adequacy to serve, we will endorse only conceptions that include comparative and relational elements. On my view, the idea of educational adequacy should be understood with reference to the idea of equal citizenship.’
5. My treatment of moral faith is deeply indebted to Adams (1995).
6. In the remainder of this paragraph, I rely on Kant (1956 [1788]: 128–31).
7. To conclude that God *would* bring about the highest good, we need to add some assumptions about God’s motives.

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