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EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

A Dissertation Presented

By

STEWART PHILIP SHAPIRO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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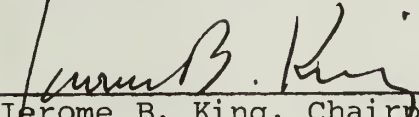
Political Science

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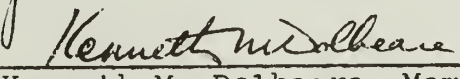
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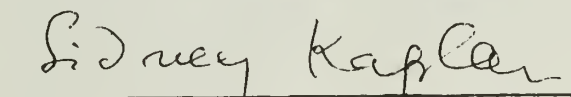
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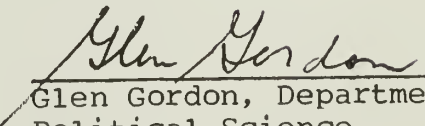
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ABSTRACT

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

February, 1978

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This study seeks to examine the likelihood of full equality of opportunity ever being attained within the United States and the role that the image of equality of opportunity plays in contemporary American society.

Most examinations of equality of opportunity in America begin with two fundamental assumptions. First, it is taken for granted that existing social, political and economic arrangements are as close to an ideal arrangement as one is likely to find in the world today. While some reforms may be desirable for various specific aspects of the system, on the whole the system is regarded as sound. Second, it is assumed that equality of opportunity is, in itself, a highly desirable goal. The purpose of this study is to explore more fully these assumptions with the object of discovering whether such a goal can and/or should be attained within the contemporary American context.

Through an investigation of the concept of equality and the various social barriers to equality of opportunity,

the study finds that full equality of opportunity is impossible in any context. However, it is possible to more closely approximate this goal in a less stratified setting than currently exists in the United States. Factors such as the family, the hierarchical division of labor, and large differentials in wealth are all found to have significant negative effects upon equality of opportunity, while genetic elements are found to be of little importance.

The desirability of pushing for equality of opportunity while accepting existing social, political and economic arrangements is discussed in a case study of American education policy. The study contends that the image of equality of opportunity, particularly in education, best serves the interests of those deriving the most benefits from the status quo by providing a rationale both for their own position and for the positions of those below them in the class hierarchy.

The study concludes that equality of opportunity is impossible even to approximate in a stratified society. The myth that it has or can be realized within that context serves important stabilizing purposes. Therefore, a closer approximation to equality of opportunity requires not different and more "fair" processes, but rather, alternative contexts. In this regard, the notions of moral incentives and limits to growth are discussed--the former as a potential alternative to and the latter as a potential check on the prevailing notions of equality of opportunity.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Equality of opportunity has long been an underlying principle of the American political, social and economic systems. Throughout American history, and, to a large extent, throughout much of modern European history, the concept of equality of opportunity has enjoyed a highly privileged status. We rarely find a Western government that does not make claim to being well on its way to achieving equality of opportunity for its citizens; nor an opposition party that does not promise a more effective means for achieving that goal; nor an individual who will openly disclaim any desire for the achievement of equality of opportunity. Those conflicts that do emerge regarding equality of opportunity generally involve the related issues of whether it does exist in a particular society and, if not, how it may most effectively be attained. Therefore, as we view modern Western history, particularly since the advent of the modern industrialized capitalist state, we repeatedly see, especially in various reformist and revolutionary groups, support for the proposition that equality of opportunity is the sine qua non of the "good society."

The virtually sacrosanct status that equality of opportunity has retained has led to an unquestioning acceptance of both its desirability and its attainability with little, if any, regard for some of its real or potential

negative effects. One of the purposes of this dissertation will be the exploration of such effects which have, particularly in the United States, largely been ignored. An attempt will be made to explore in some depth what is involved in equality of opportunity, what are the implications inherent in the concept as a goal, whether its full development is a conceivable possibility, and how the inevitable societal costs and benefits would likely be distributed if it were fully attained. In addition, the issue of a viable alternative to current notions of equality of opportunity will also be discussed.

The privileged status of equality of opportunity in contemporary democratic political thinking can be traced to two specific factors. On the one hand, there is its literal connection with the concept of equality. For centuries, the term "equality" has had a generally favorable connotation in Western political thought. The notion that all persons possess equal rights and duties, and deserve a relatively equal share in the benefits and burdens of society has, particularly among democratic theorists, long been a cherished belief. Even among those who strongly oppose an emphasis on equality as a major societal goal, or who believe that such a goal is impossible to achieve, there is a felt necessity to give some justification for a negative stance, rather than mere rejection out of hand. Reasons are generally required of, and offered by, those who oppose any degree of egalitarianism in their societal prescriptions. Thus, we

find few modern political philosophers who would position themselves against all notions of equality - be it of rights, opportunity, or results. Given the positive status of the concept of equality, it is not surprising that the concept of equality of opportunity should share some of this positive status, although the connection between equality as it relates to egalitarianism and equality as it relates to the contemporary version of equality of opportunity is antithetical.

The second factor which has had a strong influence in producing the generally positive position of equality of opportunity has been the ease with which the concept has fit the prevailing capitalist economic systems of Western Europe and the United States. If, as Marx maintains, the prevailing ideology of a particular epoch is part of a superstructure erected upon an economic base, then it would be virtually impossible for a political concept like equality of opportunity to gain such acceptance, at least verbally, if it did not fit the prevailing system of production. In fact, equality of opportunity serves as an ideological underpinning for the economic structure, an underpinning which is functional both by enabling those "best equipped" to manage the system in terms of preserving its highly individualistic nature to do so, and by presenting to the society as a whole an image which combines two of its more cherished notions--equality and merit.

Given these bases for the prevailing system's

acceptance of equality of opportunity as a worthwhile goal, it would seem that a detailed exploration of the concept might serve the purpose of redirecting the main thrust of various groups and individuals seeking to alter existing social structures. If, as I will argue, equality of opportunity, as it currently exists, serves to strengthen the existing order, then those groups whose overall goal is a restructuring of society in a more egalitarian direction by gaining "more" of such equality of opportunity, have erred in their strategy. As already suggested, most such programs tend to make more viable and stable the existing structures of society. Such strategies do not serve as effective radical challenges, except in relation to those elements of society which are, in a sense, out of place and time in a modern capitalist state.

The connection between the image of equality of opportunity and social stability is a fundamental theme in this dissertation. The competition, need, and desire for increased material acquisitions, and the strongly individualistic nature which this image produces and reproduces are essential ingredients in systemic stability. The notion of a free market and individual rights which is so much a part of liberal capitalism obviously cannot be accommodated in a formally ascriptive society. A system which prides itself on persons "making it," based upon their own individual merit, must take care to ensure that at least the image, if not the reality, of equality of opportunity exists in the society in

the political, social and economic spheres.

What is generally meant by the concept of equality of opportunity is, in part, the image of life as a race. The idea that each person is allowed to start from the same point and can be assured that the other contestants will be bound by the same rules describes in somewhat simplified terms a basic conception of equality of opportunity. However, to adequately probe the concept it is necessary to view it in more detail. A more adequate approach would be to say that a society has equality of opportunity if

Each individual has equal access to a range of specified resources which will enable him to pursue certain goals.¹

In viewing equality of opportunity in this manner, we must attempt to specify the relevant resources, the relevant goals, and the rewards which are, or should be, attached to the achievement of such goals. To rephrase, if equality of opportunity involves all starting at approximately the same point, with some eventually "winning" and other eventually "losing," it must first be explained just what resources have been, or are to be, equitably distributed so as to allow all to start at the same point. It is obviously an impossibility to expect that all resources will be distributed equitably prior to the commencement of the race. Some resources are impossible to distribute equally, such as various physical characteristics including height, sex, etc.; while others

¹For this definition I am grateful to Professor William E. Connolly of the University of Massachusetts.

might be deemed irrelevant for a particular race and therefore would not need to be distributed on an equal basis.

Having specified what resources are to be distributed, we must next deal with the goals involved in the race. While it is clear that the goal of most contestants in a race is to win, the question of what in particular they are endeavoring to gain from such a victory requires some clarification. Prestige, power, wealth and personal self-esteem are some of the more obvious general goals derived from the winning of various races. In the contemporary American context of equality of opportunity, the case has been made that all of the above are involved in the goal of upward social and occupational mobility. Another view holds that American society, being a system which does not have cumulative inequalities, has varied goals with different races being won by different contestants. As is the case with resources, a number of questions arise regarding goals. For example, how are goals determined, what constitutes a proper reward, and how does one deal with the problem of "right" and "wrong" goals? The point here is that the goals and subsequent rewards involved in the various races must be clearly specified.

Once a society has been established, or appears to have been established, on the principle of equality of opportunity, a pervasive view develops that those who come out on "top" in society have done so by virtue of their own worth and effort. Similarly, those who do not win the races have only themselves to blame. Society, and particularly the societal

class structure, are absolved of any responsibility. Society thus becomes, in a sense, "classless," although such a view involves a fairly narrow definition of what is meant by a class structure.

Essential to a meaningful exploration of the concept of equality of opportunity is a prior analysis of the concept of equality. Such a conceptual analysis is undertaken in Chapter I. The relevance of a discussion of equality in relation to equality of opportunity is that implicit in the American notion of equality of opportunity is the belief that, in one or more highly significant and socially relevant attributes, all men are not equal; and that, in addition, an egalitarian society, in either its purest form or in its modified Marxist form, is neither desirable nor possible. Therefore, it is likely that the adherent to the goal of equality of opportunity within a capitalist context has precluded both the possibility of men already being equal and of their ever becoming equal.

Following this chapter, I discuss the question of the desirability of equality of opportunity, particularly in the context of the American economic and political system. There have been a number of criticisms leveled against setting up equality of opportunity as a goal. Some critics have focused on the inherently inegalitarian results of equality of opportunity, while others have emphasized the need for certain social and economic preconditions being met prior to the achievement of equality of opportunity. Most critics argue

against meritocracy advocates like Daniel Bell by citing the potential costs of equality of opportunity. Such costs include damage to a sense of community, an overly competitive atmosphere, frustration and a lack of self-respect on the part of the "losers," and, in a sense, the eventual and inevitable loss of real equality of opportunity - either by creating a sort of genetic "caste" system, or by the inequality of results which, in turn, inevitably lead to inequality of opportunity.

In Chapter III, I explore the possibility of attaining equality of opportunity. Such a possibility must be regarded as, at best, highly unlikely. The problem of providing equal access to the various resources required to win a particular race runs into a number of seemingly insoluble difficulties. For example, to use the race analogy, we might be able to get a certain degree of equity in terms of some material conditions of the race, such as each lane of the track being equally level and with the same degree of hardness. However, this does not bring about equality of opportunity if some of the contestants have had more experience in the use of such a track. To this problem we might respond by calling for a training program for those who have not had adequate racing experience so that they too can pick up an appreciation of the rules and techniques, and thus help to further equalize their opportunity to win the race. The critic might go a step further and point to the contestants themselves. We might find, indeed we would

inevitably find, that some are more physically fit than others. Even with training in the rules and techniques of racing, an overweight contestant who chain smokes is unlikely to run much of a race against the more fit. Perhaps we could argue that equality of opportunity involves equal access to resources, not necessarily an equality in terms of ownership or distribution of resources. Thus, there is no responsibility by those conducting the race to interfere in the lives of others to see to it that they are physically able to compete properly. Their only responsibility is to ensure that the contestants have equal access to the resources and not to enter into the contestants' private lives outside of the race.

The problem with this latter argument is the highly individualistic assumption implicit within it. The presumption of a sharp dividing line between internal and external spheres of activity is very debatable. If, for example, it is not the responsibility of the conductors of the race to see to it that all contestants are equally prepared for the race, the question remains as to who, if anyone, is responsible. For example, if the unfit contestant was raised by a family lacking either the knowledge or the income to give him a healthy diet, we might blame the parents or perhaps the societal structure, but we can hardly affix responsibility to the child for his environment and resulting lack of access to various crucial resources. Therefore, equality of opportunity does not exist under such circumstances.

This argument can be drawn a step further. Not only might it be impossible for total equality of opportunity to exist with regard to the ability to run the race, but also the question of willingness to run the race must be taken into account. It is illogical to expect that all contestants will have the same desire to win such a race, or even to compete in it. If such is the case, then this inequality of desire would certainly entail a lessened probability of their winning the race. If such a desire is part of the resources involved in a race, then the problem of how to induce a relatively equal desire to achieve various goals is an integral part of creating equality of opportunity. While it may be argued that the willingness or desire to enter the competition is not a part of the resources to be made equally accessible to all, but instead is part of the individual's "will," this still leaves open the question as to how such a will is formed and what responsibility society has in its formation. If this aspect is to be categorized as an element of the resources involved, then to arrive at true equality of opportunity would, of necessity, involve the virtually impossible task of seeing to it that the motivation and determination of all potential contestants was equal.

The problem of genetic factors and their relationship to the possibility of attaining full equality of opportunity will be explored in Chapter IV, with particular reference to the positions of Arthur Jensen and Richard Herrnstein. They

arrive at highly critical conclusions regarding the possibility of setting up full equality of opportunity and further claim that attempts to gain "more" equality of opportunity will be harmful to the status and self-esteem of those with the least genetic potential.

As an illustration of the uses to which the image of equality of opportunity has been put in the United States, I present, in Chapter V, a case study of American educational policy. In this chapter I analyze the "success" of equality of opportunity in American education policy with particular reference to those who have been the strongest proponents of equality of educational opportunity; what benefits, if any, have accrued to the various groups involved; and what problems have emerged from such programs. The basic theme of this dissertation as a whole, that equality of opportunity has primarily been used as an ideological cover for an inegalitarian system, will be analyzed in this specific context of education policy. Furthermore, I will argue that attempts to attain equality of opportunity within such an inegalitarian context are based upon a fraudulent notion of what equality of opportunity requires in the way of social and economic preconditions.

In the final chapter I deal with alternatives to the contemporary notion of equality of opportunity as well as some of the criticisms directed against these alternatives. Problems such as reconciling the goal of a free and efficient

society in which the most qualified persons fill the most crucial positions with the goal of what Bernard Williams refers to as "equality of respect"² will be discussed. By equality of respect I mean the ideal of treating others as ends in themselves rather than as means to an end. It may well be that there is an insuperable contradiction between the goal of equality of opportunity and the goal of equality of respect. Or, it may be that given a different social and economic context, the costs of equality of opportunity could be substantially reduced while equality of opportunity itself could be more closely approximated. Finally I discuss some of the more viable alternatives to the contemporary American notion of equality of opportunity, such as a system of moral incentives and a generally more egalitarian context. The latter is crucial for, as I will show, equality of opportunity without an egalitarian society is impossible.

²Bernard Williams, "The Idea of Equality," in Philosophy, Politics and Society, Second Series (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1969), pp. 118-119.

C H A P T E R I
THE CONCEPT OF EQUALITY

Traditionally, Americans have tended to view equality of opportunity as one of the foundations of a just and democratic society. While a great deal of lip service has been paid to the essential equality of man and the value of equality in various contexts, Americans have tended to place most emphasis upon equality of opportunity. Nor is this tendency prevalent only in the United States. The modern capitalist states of Western Europe have also adopted the ethic of equality of opportunity, though because of a less pervasive and consistent bourgeoisie tradition, the European attachment to equality of opportunity is neither as emotional nor as comprehensive as that of the United States.

Because of the strength of support for the goal of equality of opportunity in the United States, there has been substantially less attention paid to other forms of equality and particularly to egalitarianism. What attention is paid to such concepts is generally of a negative nature. Visions of enforced conformity, drab and gray societies, an end to individual initiative and incentive, the death of the arts, and subsequent stagnation and dictatorship are generally seen as the hallmarks of societies having equality

of treatment and equality of result at their ideological foundation. Equality of opportunity, on the other hand, is viewed as leading to the vibrant, dynamic, and diversified society of the free individual who, thanks to his own ability and ambition, can realistically aspire to almost anything. Given these dichotomous visions it is of little wonder that the latter tends to be chosen over the former. It is assumed that equality of wealth, respect, and/or power is impossible and the attempt to make such goals realizable can bring about only inefficiency, chaos, and eventual collapse of the established political, economic and social order.

Thus, equality of opportunity is seen as not only the ideal form of equality, but also the only possible form of equality consistent with the American liberal - capitalist framework's view of human nature. Prior to examining why this belief is so strongly held, it is necessary to deal with two fundamental questions which logically precede it; that is what is meant by the concept of equality, and what is its relationship to equality of opportunity.

"Equality" and "Sameness"

When we state that two or more individuals or things are "equal," the first and most obvious point to be clarified concerns the context. That is, equal with respect to what? For the present, the following schema will be used to describe a relation of equality:

X is equal to Y with respect to Z.

Note, for the moment, that nothing in this schema specifically deals with the issue of treatment of X and Y. The crucial point of the schema is the "with respect to Z" aspect. To leave this phrase out leads to a highly ambiguous and perhaps even meaningless description. For example, the Declaration of Independence states that "all men are created equal." If we are not aware of the context implicit in that particular phrase, we are left with little in the way of a useful or coherent statement.

Therefore, we must fill in the X, Y and Z. If we are concerned with physical attributes, then this is a relatively minor task. We may simply turn to the various reliable measuring devices which accurately measure such characteristics, and then determine whether X and Y are in fact equal with respect to height, weight or whatever. In such a comparison, "equal to" is used like the concept "same as." Further, such measuring devices are not often subject to attack on the grounds that they are biased in one way or another.

However, discussions of equality generally go beyond such easily measurable attributes as height and weight. Most usage of the concept "equality" centers around issues of a more social nature. Even on questions relating to athletic ability, physical attributes are combined with less measurable factors such as desire, competitiveness and intelligence. Therefore, the need for establishing criteria for

"equal" inevitably arises.

We might claim that the criterion for equal is "sameness" in the absolute sense of X being completely identical to Y. The problem here is that since no two persons are completely identical, this criterion effectively eliminates virtually any accurate usage of the concept of equality with respect to persons.¹ Neither "completely identical" nor "completely opposite" has any practical meaning. Hence, it is very difficult to set up clear-cut reference points for both equality and inequality. One possible way to lessen this dilemma is to make equality a comparative concept. The equality relationship now becomes something like:

X is more similar to Y with respect to
Z than is A, B or C.

Again, however, the criterion problem arises over the issue of those who are also similar to Y, but not as similar as X. Apparently X would then be "more equal" to Y than A is, while perhaps A is more similar than B and so on. Therefore, depending upon context, A is both not equal to Y and equal to Y. This kind of problem attains more importance if a question of treatment or rights is being discussed. In fact, when these types of problems are confronted by persons,

¹See, for example, Hugo Adam Bedau, "Egalitarianism and the Idea of Equality," in Equality, ed. by Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: Atherton Press, Inc., 1967), pp. 7-8. Bedau maintains that equality, particularly in terms of treatment, distribution and rights, does imply the "same" treatment. He does not, however, regard "same" to mean "identical."

it is usually over some underlying question of treatment. Questions relating to equality and who is equal to whom are almost invariably connected to the issue of treatment. This is why the establishment of criteria is such a crucial issue and, as will be demonstrated, why the concept of equality cannot adequately be treated in isolation from the issue of treatment.

Before dealing with the task of establishing a specific criterion, it is helpful to elaborate on the important distinction between "same" and "equal" alluded to earlier. If we take "same" to mean a relationship of identity, then perhaps to differentiate "equal" from "same" we might describe the former as a relationship in which there is sufficient similarity so as to make it unnecessary to distinguish between them in a particular respect. While this is a somewhat awkward sounding definition, it does serve two important purposes. It makes a clear distinction between "equal" and "identical," and perhaps more importantly, it reveals the inseparable connection between "equals" and the treatment accorded them. We can claim that X and Y are similar with respect to Z, but that tells us little about their subsequent treatment. We might also claim that X and Y are the "same," but this runs into the various logical problems described earlier. However, to describe X and Y as "sufficiently" similar with respect to Z avoids both of these problems. If they are sufficiently similar, there is a definite implication that they should be treated similarly.

The word "sufficiently" conveys this point.

The important distinction between "same" and "equal" can perhaps be better understood by dealing with the analogous concepts of "different" and "unequal." There is a substantial difference between, on the one hand, describing apples as being different from oranges, or person X as being different from person Y; and on the other hand, describing apples and person X as respectively unequal to oranges and person Y. The latter carries with it the clear implication that in each of the contrasts, one is "better" than the other in some respect. For example, we could say that apples and oranges are different in sweetness. This, by itself, carries with it neither implications of better or worse, nor any prescriptions as to behavior. However, if we rephrase the statement so that it reads,

The sweetness of the orange is unequal to the sweetness of the apple,

we then have, not merely a different arrangement of words, but also a different meaning. There is the clear connotation that the apple is superior to the orange insofar as sweetness is concerned. Further implicit in the sentence is the idea that if we are searching for sweetness, we "should" select the apple instead of the orange. Thus, unlike sentences utilizing the word "different," the concept of "unequal" carries with it a clear behavioral implication.

Moving from objects to people, we can see a similar

situation. It is clear that all persons are in some ways different from one another, just as they are somewhat similar in other ways. To say that persons X and Y are different from one another does not tell us anything in terms of whether and how their treatment should differ. But, to say that persons X and Y are "unequal" to each other regarding some specific attributes does open up two critical and related questions. First, what does this inequality imply as relates to the relative superiority and inferiority of X and Y? Second, what is the relationship between the inequality of X to Y to the treatment which should be accorded them?

As has been observed, to call X "unequal" to Y carries with it the connotation that X is in some way inferior to Y, a connotation which is not implicit in the notion of being "different from." If this is the case, then it would appear logical to say that if X and Y are unequal in intelligence, then one of the two must be more intelligent; likewise if X and Y are unequal in artistic ability, one of the two must have more artistic ability; and if X and Y are unequal in their ability to participate wisely in the governing of society, then either X or Y must have more such ability. In each of these cases, unequal has carried with it the implication that one of the two subjects has "more" of a given quality and is therefore "superior" as regards that specific quality.

However, this kind of inference is not always correct.

For example, we could be dealing with a person's height. Suppose that X is seven feet tall and Y is five feet tall. Under these circumstances it would appear to make sense to say that X and Y are not equal in height. We could assert that X has more height than Y, and go on to say that X is of a superior height to Y. Yet, when we reflect upon the connotations implied in the concept of "superior," this does not seem as valid a statement as the earlier examples. In areas like intelligence, artistic ability and political acumen, it is obvious that, under most circumstances, it is better to have more of such qualities than less of them. However, this is not so obvious with an attribute like height. While most would probably agree that they would not like to be extremely short, it is also unlikely that very many persons could be found who would like to be extremely tall. Because of various aesthetic and social standards, such preferences would be further influenced by the sex of the respondent. In matters of height, "superior" could refer to two very different standards of measurement. On the one hand, to use an extreme example, if X is six feet tall and Y is eight feet tall, then Y is superior by virtue of having "more" height. On the other hand, if we are measuring superiority in terms of which is more likely to lead to a less difficult life in terms of financial and social pressures, then perhaps X's height should be seen as superior.

The question thus arises as to whether it makes sense

to speak of height comparisons in terms of unequal, since there is this superiority - inferiority connotation implicit in the use of the term. It might make far more sense to use "different from" under such circumstances and avoid the superiority - inferiority relationship altogether. Keeping in mind that the concept of unequal did seem to fit with attributes such as intelligence and artistic ability, we might argue that "equal to" and "unequal to" should be used only in comparing those attributes which are valued by society. However, referring back to the example of height, it is not that height is not valued so much as it is that there is a parameter within which more height is valued and beyond which more height is not valued.

We could also argue that what this discussion has disproven is the assumption that "unequal to" has implicit within it a superiority - inferiority connotation. No such connotation exist and equal and unequal are "neutral" concepts. If this argument is correct, then there is no distinction that can be made between the concepts "unequal to" and "different from." Yet such a distinction surely does exist in our language. For example, to say that

I am unequal to this task,

carries with it a very different meaning than to say that

I am different from this task.

The latter makes little sense, while the former is easily understood to mean that the task is beyond the ability of the subject. In a sense, it is "superior" to him. We

cannot simply eliminate this distinction and deny the various implications which are such an integral part of the concepts of "equal" and "unequal."

It might be that, in attempting to posit a rule governing the use of the concept unequal, we should simply make its use contingent upon dealing with those attributes with which one is attempting to make a superior - inferior comparison. That is, in determining how we use the concept of unequal, we should make reference to the purpose which such a concept serves. The argument then is that the purpose served by the concept "unequal to" is precisely to show that one person, object or attribute is superior or inferior to another. Use of the concept for any other purpose violates the rules governing the use of the concept.

The concept of "equal" bears an analogous usage. Making reference to the purpose which the concept serves in ordinary discourse, to claim that X and Y are "equal with respect to Z" is to say that they are sufficiently similar to each other with respect to Z so that neither can be judged superior or inferior to the other. They are not the "same" but they also are not sufficiently different so as to be judged unequal to one another. Given this usage, it becomes clear that, depending upon the criteria, it is possible for two individuals to be both different and equal with respect to a specific attribute.

Equality of Treatment

If X is unequal (and therefore inferior) to Y with regard to Z, what, if anything, does this imply for the respective treatment of X and Y? Perhaps a better way to examine this issue would be by first dealing with the issue of what is implied regarding treatment if X is equal to Y with regard to Z. A number of theorists have accepted the idea that to claim that X and Y are equal sets up a prima facie case for the equal treatment of X and Y.² Logic would seem to dictate that if two individuals are seen as equal, neither one inferior to the other, then in the absence of countervailing considerations, their treatment should also be equal. This involves not only their being treated equally by third parties, but also that they should treat each other as equals.³

A problem which immediately arises is the question of unequal treatment. In a phrase like "all men are created equal," it is important to clarify what is meant by such a claim. Primarily it would seem to imply that all men, by virtue of their being human beings, are equal to each other.

²See Stanley I. Benn, "Egalitarianism and the Equal Consideration of Interests," in Equality, ed. by Pennock and Chapman; Bernard Williams, "The Idea of Equality," and Charles Frankel, "Equality of Opportunity," Ethics, LXXXI (April, 1971).

³See the distinction made by John Wilson, Equality (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1966), pp. 27-29, between equality of treatment and equality of scope.

Further, that not only are they all human beings, but also that they are all equally human beings. As a result, none are superior or inferior and therefore all are entitled to receive equal treatment. While this presents a concise picture of the situation, it does leave a number of key questions unanswered. For example, what is it that constitutes a human being? This question brings to bear a number of philosophical and biological considerations. Assuming that such a question can be answered to the satisfaction of all, there remains the problem of why, once such a criterion for being a person has been established, this should entail that all who fit into this category are entitled, prima facie, to equality of treatment. Looking back to the criterion established for equality, "sufficiently similar so as to not be judged inferior or superior," it would seem almost illogical to treat any two humans unequally, since such treatment does imply an inferiority - superiority relationship. It is crucial to keep in mind the important distinction between equal - unequal and same - different. Given this distinction, it becomes clear that by definition two persons deemed equal in terms of certain characteristics should also be treated equally in terms of those characteristics. To do otherwise, without "good reasons," forces us into an admission of arbitrary behavior which follows no understandable rule and is therefore irrational. Unless we want to posit irrationality as an acceptable mode of behavior, we are forced into a position of accepting the prima

facie case for equality of treatment of all human beings if we accept the view that all persons are equally human.

Two exceptions might be made regarding such treatment. In the first case, we might maintain that while all are human beings, all are not equally human beings. Some are perhaps "more" human than others, and therefore are worthy of more favorable treatment. This kind of justification for unequal treatment rests upon a substantial loosening of the criterion for humanness. It can be seen, for example, in the categories of human types which classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle envisioned. The "born slave," while still a human, neither is nor can be as much or as developed a human as is the "born ruler." We could also posit the idea that the "born slave" is actually more of a human being while the "born ruler" is so designated because he is less prey to ordinary human weaknesses. In neither case, however, are we maintaining that either category of individual is completely outside of the human realm.

The issue regarding equality of treatment stems from the proposition that all human beings are equal, or at least born equal, in their humanness. This supposition is what has created the prima facie case for equality of treatment. The denial of the original supposition has an effect upon the prima facie case. For example, if there is a large class of beings called humans who share a number of characteristics, though not in the same amount or proportion, and we claim that they are more different than alike, it is not as easy

to make the claim that all humans are equal and therefore deserving of equal treatment. First it is necessary to determine in what specific characteristics they are equal, though perhaps also different, and then to determine if such equalities are sufficient to justify equality of treatment. The burden of proof now appears to be upon those calling for equality of treatment. The prima facie case is against such treatment. Yet, if we examine the argument more closely, it appears that in fact, what is being offered here is a countervailing consideration to offset the initial case for equality of treatment. We are being forced to justify, via reasons, a departure from equality of treatment. By virtue of the fact that all are given the same classification, "human," we have already accepted a substantial degree of equality among all fitting within that category.

In comparing this latter position with the position preceeding it, we can view it as a question of whether it is possible to distinguish between the following two claims:

- a) All humans are not equal.
- b) All humans are not equally human.

The first exception dealt with centers around statement (b). From this we can derive a case denying that all humans should be treated equally. In effect, it sets up the case that in those attributes which distinguish the species "human" from other species, it is possible to observe significant inequalities, not only between humans and other species, but also among humans themselves. Furthermore, because such inequalities are regarded as significant

in terms of superiority and inferiority within the species, it makes sense neither to speak of all human beings as equals nor to assert that they should all be treated equally. What does make sense, given this type of argument, is to maintain that those groups of humans who are equally human, be they at the top, middle or bottom of the scale, should be treated equally as a class.

Statement (a), on the other hand, appears to be a more direct and conclusive assertion. The problem with such an assertion is that it is incomplete in the same way that statements claiming that all human beings are equal is incomplete. To refer back to the schema for equality advanced earlier, statement (a) does not specify in what respect all humans are not equal. Statement (b) does, though somewhat vaguely, by asserting that all humans are not equal with respect to those attributes comprising "humanness." If the assertion that all humans are not equal is to make sense it must be completed. To leave it as it is makes it impossible to argue either for or against it. Given the infinite number of characteristics which different human beings possess, we can always point to an example of equality or inequality among men depending upon our preference.

Suppose that we do complete the statement in such a way that it reads:

All humans are not equal in those characteristics which are important for determining treatment.

Clumsiness of the statement aside, and ignoring, for now, the question of treatment with regard to what, this is, what is implicit in statement (a).

Assuming that this is the case, the distinction between statements (a) and (b) is that the criterion for being considered a human being is more crucial in statement (b). Statement (a) can admit that all humans are equally human. It bases its case for unequal treatment on criteria which rest outside of the standards that constitute humanness. The idea of a prima facie case for equality of treatment may still be present, but now we have attached a counter-vailing reason for overcoming it. If,

- a) All men are human, but
- b) All men are not equally human,

then it is clear that the second statement cuts away at the basis for equality of treatment and in fact more logically leads to a prima facie case against such equality of treatment.

On the other hand, we can claim that:

- c) All men are human.
- d) All men are equally human.
- e) All humans are not equal in those characteristics which are important for determining treatment.

The latter statement has presented a case against equality of treatment. In other words, the prima facie case that is set up by statements (c) and (d) is overridden by statement (e).

The logic of this prima facie case has been criticized by various writers. J. R. Lucas, for example, makes the

point that some egalitarians (though he implies that it's inherent in egalitarianism itself) set up a false schema to justify equality of treatment. According to Lucas, the egalitarian position can be viewed as follows:

- a) All men are men
- b) All men are equally men
- c) Therefore all men are equal.

Against this position Lucas draws the following analogy:

- a') All numbers are numbers
- b') All numbers are equally numbers
- c') Therefore, all numbers are equal.

Because, according to Lucas, (c') is so demonstrably false, Lucas's conclusion is that the fact that men are equal in some respects does not necessarily imply that they are equal in all respects.⁴

However, few egalitarians maintain that people are to be considered equal in all respects. In the first place, the claim that is derived from the schema is that a prima facie case has been made in favor of equality of treatment, not that such treatment is always required. Second, there are some problems with the analogy that Lucas uses to make his point. Since statement (c) is an incomplete version of an egalitarian position insofar as it does not indicate with respect to what all men are equal, Lucas has set up a highly vulnerable straw man to attack. If Lucas had completed statement (c) so that it read, "Therefore a prima facie case exists for treating all men as equals," which is closer

⁴J. R. Lucas, "Against Equality," Philosophy, XL (October, 1965), 297-298.

to an egalitarian position, though still somewhat over-generalized, then the weakness of the analogy becomes apparent. Statement (c'), to remain parallel with (c) would then have to read, "Therefore a prima facie case exists for treating all numbers as equals." This latter statement conceivably could be regarded as correct in the sense that classifying X as a number brings in considerations of treatment relevant to all numbers and therefore a prima facie case for treating all numbers as equals does exist. However, this is not the critical objection to be made to the Lucas analogy.

The crux of the matter is that it is not consistent with the conventions of our language to speak of "treatment" of numbers in the same sense that we speak of treatment of human beings. Numbers are abstractions and their treatment has little in the way of consequences for the number itself. We could never argue that a person treated a number in an "unjust" manner, nor would we ever bother to argue for or against treating all numbers with the same degree of "respect." "Correctly" and "incorrectly" are the sorts of terms ordinarily used to evaluate the use of numbers. Numbers can only represent other things and as such the treatment of the numbers themselves is of little import. Thus, the step from (a') and (b') to (c') is not a legitimate step, but this has more to do with the weakness of the analogy that Lucas draws rather than with any specific logical inconsistency inherent in such a move. Finally, Lucas has also failed to make any

distinction between "equal" and "same." Two persons can be equals without at the same time being the same. For numbers such a distinction does not exist.

Assuming that we do accept the notion of a prima facie case for equality of treatment, this by itself does little to guarantee such treatment. Like any other prima facie case, it can act only as a starting point. We may get around it if we are willing and able to give reasons for doing so. It is over the issue of what constitutes a sufficient reason or reasons for overriding the prima facie case that much of the controversy over equality of treatment arises. We can accept the idea that:

X and Y are human
X and Y are equally human

and still assert that X and Y are not equal with respect to some other attribute and therefore should not be treated as equals. The "humanness" of X and Y is not a quantifiable attribute. They are both human to the same extent, as are, we might argue, all persons. But, treatment for X and Y might be determined according to some other criteria by which X and Y are not equal. The fact that they are both human says nothing about how they should be treated. Or, we could maintain that their common humanity entitles X and Y only to a minimal amount of consideration, but that much of the rest of their treatment involves very different criteria. This appears to constitute the basis for the proponent of meritocracy. The position is:

- a) X and Y are equal with respect to Z (being human).
- b) X and Y are not equal with respect to Z' (eg. physical strength).
- c) Z' is more important in terms of certain kinds of treatment than is Z.
- d) X and Y should not be treated equally in those areas relevant to Z'.

It is important to note that in making such an argument, it is not necessary to maintain that X and Y are not equal in terms of their being human. Such an assertion would undermine the prima facie case argument.⁵ Rather, we can argue that some other attribute or attributes is more relevant in terms of treatment than is their common humanity. In a sense, all people make this distinction when they select their friends. We do not need to deny the humanity of those with whom we are not friendly. Instead, we select some other set of characteristics as being more important in terms of friendship. In this connection, it is more important to determine not only what reasons we are willing to substitute for the prima facie case for equality of treatment, but it is also crucial that we establish just what is meant by "equality of treatment." How far does it go and what does it entail?

Sufficient and Insufficient Reasons

What sort of reasons can be regarded as sufficient to override the prima facie case for equality of treatment? As

⁵A detailed treatment of this distinction between undermining and overriding may be found in Charles Taylor, "Neutrality and Political Science," in Social Structure and Political Theory, ed. by William E. Connolly and Glen Gordon (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1974), pp. 28-29.

Charles Taylor points out in his essay, "Neutrality in Political Science," reasons must fulfill certain requirements for them to count in such matters and not appear to be arbitrary whims.⁶ It is not enough for us to acknowledge on the one hand, that X and Y are equally human, and on the other hand to assert that they should not be treated as equals. John Rees takes this position, claiming that to discriminate against an individual or group requires reasons, the reasons should be given and intellectually defended, they must be justifiable reasons as opposed to just explanatory reasons, and they must be "relevant and sufficient."⁷

However, we might claim that we will not treat X and Y as equals because we like Y better than we like X. If pressed, we could probably give a reason as to why we like Y better and such a reason would necessarily make reference to some characteristic which X and Y do not possess or exhibit in equal amounts. This characteristic, in turn, would then be a primary criterion for our determination of what does or does not constitute a likeable person. The question then arises as to whether some such reasons are more acceptable than are others, and/or if some reasons are simply unacceptable. For example, suppose we state that we like X better because X will physically injure us if we do not.

⁶Ibid. Note particularly the difference between claiming that "X is good," and "I like X."

⁷John Rees, Equality (London: Pall Mall, Inc., 1971), p. 133.

Such a reason would make little sense because the rules for the use of the concept "like" are not consistent with such a usage. We would, in effect, be breaking a "linguistic convention."⁸ It might make sense for us to say that we "treat" X better than Y for this kind of reason, but not "like." Thus, we could be claiming that X is more powerful than Y, therefore they are not equals in this respect; that power is a significant variable in determining how people are treated; and therefore, X should be treated in a more favorable manner than Y. It is a situation in which:

- a) X and Y are unequal with respect to Z.
- b) X and Y are to be treated unequally with respect to Z.

What is justified in the way of treatment depends upon where the argument is focused. If we focus primarily upon the above schema, then (a) appears to have set up the basis for an argument against equal treatment. However, we might instead prefer to keep the focus wholly on the earlier schema:

- a) X and Y are humans.
- b) X and Y are equally human.

We might thereby claim that the inequality of X and Y with regard to various other Z's is not sufficient to overcome their equality as humans, and thus all humans should be treated equally with respect to everything.

It is obvious that neither of the two schemas can exclusively be relied upon. We cannot claim that every

⁸William E. Connolly, The Terms of Political Discourse (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1974), p. 33.

inequality is sufficient to merit unequal treatment without putting ourselves in the position of trying to determine and measure every conceivable inequality, and parcel out treatment accordingly. Given the infinite number of types and gradations of possible inequalities between people, this presents an impossible task. On the other hand, to take the position that because all men are equally human they should be treated equally in all respects also makes little practical sense. Nor does it stand up alongside notions of individual responsibility and morality.

This point does not undermine the basic case for equality of treatment resting upon equality of humanness. Acceptance of this point still appears to posit a prima facie case for equality of treatment to a greater extent than inequality of some other characteristic posits inequality of treatment. To illustrate this point, a somewhat altered version of the earlier schema shall be utilized.

X and Y are equally human; therefore, in the absence of countervailing reasons, the needs (or wants) of X and Y shall be treated equally.

As opposed to, for example,

X and Y are unequal in intelligence; therefore, in the absence of countervailing reasons, the needs (or wants) of X and Y shall not be treated equally.

The reason that the former presents a stronger case is that those conclusions which follow from being human are more open-ended than those which follow from degree of intelligence. The fact that X and Y are unequal in intelligence may

conceivably present a case for their receiving unequal treatment only in those areas deemed relevant to intelligence. However, the argument can be made that the relevance of intelligence to basic human needs is very tenuous. The fact that X and Y are equally human serves as a sort of starting point for any future comparison. The assertion of their common humanity presents the most basic of classifications once we have gone beyond the idea that they are both living creatures. To begin with a comparison like intelligence is to bypass a critical step in distinguishing people from other living things. It may be more reasonable to let criteria like intelligence be added onto the initial case for equality of treatment.

Such an issue can perhaps best be resolved by using the criterion of relevance. To return to the example of inequalities in intelligence,⁹ subsequent inequality in terms of treatment would need to involve matters such as education which are, in theory, closely related to intelligence. Such inequality of treatment would also have to confront the issue of whether the more intelligent should get superior treatment or whether the less intelligent should receive the greater attention so as to compensate for their lower intelligence. A case for some inequality of treatment could be made on this basis.

Against this position we could argue that what is

⁹I shall return to the issue of what is meant by intelligence and how, if at all, it can be measured.

really required is different treatment, rather than unequal treatment. Referring back to the superiority - inferiority connotation of unequal, we might claim that when dealing with inequalities in areas such as intelligence and physical strength, it is unfair for anyone to get superior or inferior treatment. Instead, they should be given "different" treatment relating to their particular wants, needs and capacities.¹⁰ We might pursue this further and assert that the very use of the term "unequal" in describing the attributes themselves, let alone the people's treatment, is itself a faulty use of the concept. People are only different in intelligence, creativity, etc., and any attempt to label them as "unequal" in such attributes is to impose the observer's and/or society's value system upon them. In simplified form, the implication is that:

All men are equally human and beyond that all is differences, rather than inequalities.

The crux of the matter is what is required to offset the prima facie case for equality of treatment in a particular context. What characteristic or attribute in which men are significantly unequal can, in turn, act as a justification for unequal treatment in matters specifically relating to that characteristic or attribute? The context aspect here is crucial for if the prima facie case does nothing else, it at least sets up a situation in which not

¹⁰Of course such a position can run into the "separate but equal" rationale so often used to preserve inequalities.

only must subsequent inequalities of treatment be justified, but also that they can be justified only within a specific context deemed relevant to the particular inequality. This point is emphasized by Charles Frankel, who states that inequalities of treatment are:

justified only when they serve a specific purpose, and they are warranted only when they are restricted to the area in which they serve that purpose.¹¹

Thus, when dealing with inequality of treatment, there are four questions which must be answered.

- 1) In what respects are the subjects unequal?
- 2) Is such an inequality sufficient to justify inequality of treatment?
- 3) What kind of treatment is relevant to the inequality?
- 4) How unequal need such treatment be?

In this connection, the question regarding a definition of equality of treatment must also be posed. Is it enough to say "Treat all humans equally," or "Treat all equals equally?" While such statements are meaningful, they cannot be left as they are. Such rules as these can have various implications. We can say that such prescriptions only imply that, once we have made a particular rule, (for example, of distribution of material goods) that rule must be applied with impartiality, that the rule prevents arbitrary behavior, and that arbitrary treatment is the true opposite of equality of treatment.¹² It is not inequality of treatment per se

¹¹Frankel, "Equality of Opportunity," 201.

¹²W. von Leyden, "On Justifying Inequality," Political Studies, XI (February, 1963), 62.

that is open to criticism, but unjustified inequality of treatment. We can refer to this as a "process-oriented" notion of equality of treatment.

Equality of treatment can also have a more "result-oriented" emphasis. That is, designating equality of treatment to mean a result which occurs when something is distributed equally among a group. Departures from this kind of distribution may at times be justified, but such departures also mean that equality of treatment is not present at such times. In terms of whether equality of treatment exists or not, the reasons offered for exceptions are irrelevant. It is either there or it is not, and the test is to observe whether some have more than others after a given distribution is made. This is the type of equality which defenders of the meritocratic position often equate with the socialist alternative to capitalist - style equality of opportunity. It is, however, only a caricature of the socialist position.

From the above two examples it is obvious why the prima facie case for equality of treatment does not give very much in the way of specific prescriptions for institutional behavior. Not only is clarification necessary to determine what is meant by such treatment in terms of process versus result, but also it is necessary to clarify just what it is that is to be equally distributed. If, for example, we are speaking of income, then the problem is to see to it that all receive the same income. However, problems can emerge over

who comprises the "all." Families, individuals and adults are but a few of the possible alternatives. In each case the actual amount distributed to each individual would vary.

A more important issue arises if we carry equality of treatment beyond anything as readily quantifiable as income. A number of philosophers have argued the case for "equality of respect."¹³ Such respect is not something which can be withdrawn for countervailing reasons. This type of equality of treatment is not necessarily committed to equality of income. Like any other equality of treatment, it is committed to the following of a rule and to the avoidance of arbitrary treatment of others. Nor does equality of respect commit us to equality of praise. This too is a distinction which many contemporary advocates of meritocracy and equality of opportunity have failed to perceive. The rules for the distribution of respect and praise are not the same. Respect is to be offered to all equally on the grounds that they are all human beings, none superior and none inferior in this regard. It does not have to be "earned." Praise, on the other hand, is to be given only to those who have achieved and therefore "earned" it.

Thus equality of treatment must be detailed in such a way so as to specify in what realm people are to be treated as equals. W. von Leyden makes the point that equality of treatment and inequality of treatment are, in practice,

¹³See Williams, "The Idea of Equality," and Steven Lukes, Individualism (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1973).

inextricably bound together. It is impossible to treat people equally in all respects and, in fact, equality of treatment in some respects requires inequality of treatment in other respects.

In some way or other, directly or indirectly, the claim to equal and/or equitable treatment lies at the root of most, if not all our natural justifications of unequal treatment.¹⁴

To use an obvious example, if each individual is given equal treatment in terms of the opportunity to gain wealth, it is highly unlikely that the society can also give each individual equal treatment in terms of how much actual wealth is to be gained. The two would most likely conflict with each other unless we are positing a society in which people are totally equal in capacity and ambition. Another example can be seen if we accept the prima facie case of equality of treatment and try to apply it to the political sphere. It might initially be claimed that a pluralist democracy with a one-man, one-vote arrangement and an emphasis on equality of rights would fulfill the requirements of political equality. On the other hand, it could be asserted that such an arrangement is but an illusion of political equality if it reflects a structure in which some, because of their wealth, have far more political power and influence than do others.¹⁵ If this is so, then more than

¹⁴von Leyden, "On Justifying Inequality," 67.

¹⁵This position has been presented by a number of authors. See, for example, Jean Bethke Elshtain, "The Feminist Movement and the Question of Equality," Polity, VIII (Summer, 1975); R. H. Tawney, Equality (London: George

a formalized procedural set up is required for political equality to exist. There must be at least some degree of equality of result in terms of wealth, not just in the opportunity to gain wealth, as a precondition for real political equality; or it would somehow have to be guaranteed that the influence of private wealth not be felt in the political process. A third possibility is to accept the notion that political equality is, at best, severely and necessarily limited in most modern states generally classified as democratic.

A related point to be considered involves the very rule governing such treatment - "treat equals equally." For example, one of the important aspects regarding the relationship of equality of treatment to equality of results is that if the latter is to exist in even an approximate form, one of two things must occur. Either equality of treatment must be defined in such a way so as to ensure equal results among people of unequal capacities wants, and needs, or an effort first must be made to attain relatively equal results.¹⁶ The latter is one of the major problems involved in equality of opportunity. For equality of

Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1964); and Richard Lichtman, "The Facade of Equality in Liberal Democratic Theory," Inquiry, XII (Summer, 1969).

¹⁶Flathman discusses this issue and claims that we should treat people according to the same rule. The critical question is which rules we choose, for rarely can we treat persons equally in one respect without treating them unequally in other respects. Richard E. Flathman, "Equality and Generalization: A Formal Analysis," in Equality, ed. by Pennock and Chapman, 49-51.

opportunity, with its emphasis on a competitive race environment, accepts equality of treatment only up to the formal beginning and actual running of the race. There does not need to be equality of treatment prior to the formal beginning of the race because it is too great a task to go back that far. Equality of treatment after the race is even less desirable from this perspective because it would undercut the individual's incentive for ever entering the race in the first place. Naturally this implies a very functionalist perspective on human nature in terms of what people's capacities and incentives are and can be. It may also be the only position which an advocate of equality of opportunity in a stratified society can take with any consistency.

Thus the notion of equality of treatment cannot adequately be explored in isolation from such related concepts as equality of condition and equality of results. If we elect to deal only with equality of treatment, that is, treating all via the same rules, and concern ourselves neither with prior conditions nor subsequent results, then we are treating people equally only in one very particular respect at one particular time. For example, if we state that all shall be given the same amount of food, then all are being treated equally in the sense that each is getting the same quantifiable amount. However, if we adopt a rule for treatment which states that all are to be given an adequate diet, then we have introduced a need criterion

which will entail a substantially different distribution than does the former rule of distribution. Likewise, if we were to posit the amount of food that people want or deserve as the distribution criterion. In each of these four cases, an argument can be made that equality of treatment is present, yet each distribution is significantly different from the others. Each criterion will benefit some to the detriment of others. None are neutral.

"Natural" and "Artificial" Equality

The prima facie case for equality of treatment as a general rule in any context cannot be based on any "self-evident" truths regarding the equality of men. There is no way to deny that some men and their actions are not just different from others, but preferable. Some would argue that, if intended as a description of what people actually are, the equality of all persons is a fiction. Unless we are dealing with a Hobbesian state of nature, some persons are going to be regarded as more moral and therefore more "good" in their thoughts and actions than are others. How then can we call for giving the same treatment to the good as to the bad and still be properly using the concepts, particularly the moral concepts, that people utilize in their daily lives. In such a case there is little question but that some are regarded as superior to others - whether innately or by upbringing or whatever. Therefore, to attempt to rest the case for equality of treatment on any behavioral

model places it upon a shaky foundation.

The case has been made that equality of treatment rests upon a specific human treatment which all have regardless of their behavior - a "natural" equality. This brings in two related problems - the relationship between natural and artificial equality, and that between equality as a fact and equality as an ideal. There have been a number of definitions of what constitutes a natural inequality. Height, as was discussed earlier, might be regarded as such an inequality. That is, a difference between men in which some are regarded as superior in that particular aspect (hence unequal) and in which the possessor of the superior attribute has had little, if anything, to do with its development. We do not choose or work to be tall. For the most part it is a result of genetic makeup and thus far removed from a person's individual choices and actions. Hence, those inequalities and equalities are labeled as natural which the individual has not chosen and cannot personally affect. It is not a man-made inequality, but rather, something which is just "there" or just "happens."

In dealing with the notion of an artificial inequality as opposed to a natural inequality, it is important to realize that it is not merely two differences between acquired and innate traits and abilities that are being explored. There is a close relationship between such characteristics that cannot easily be separated. In our language, however, we do, in fact, make such distinctions, as in concepts such

as "merit" and "deserve." Concepts of this sort seem to emphasize that we are dealing with actions in which a person has had some choice and which involve personal responsibility on the part of the actor. They are not viewed as merely the outgrowth of what he "is." To "deserve" something implies that we have made choices and behaved in such a way that we can be praised or blamed, rewarded or punished, for the results of our behavior. The question is whether this kind of distinction is in fact a distinction between natural and artificial inequality. It may be that it is precisely in the potential to make choices that all humans are "naturally" equal. Furthermore, concepts such as merit and deserve often involve a kind of interaction between choices and background (physical, mental and emotional), which helps to shape such choices. It is not that a person does what he does because of either innate or acquired characteristics, but rather because of a particular interaction between them.

To illustrate the manner in which the distinction between natural and artificial inequality has been expressed, it is helpful to discuss how three theorists view the question. Rousseau bases the distinction on those inequalities which are a part of nature, for example, age, sex, and strength, as opposed to those which are rooted in convention and are therefore "artificial." Thus, status, power, wealth and prestige are all artificial in the sense that they are

based on social convention - the consent of men.¹⁷ Such consent is not required, according to Rousseau, to see the obvious and natural inequalities between people in terms of age, sex and strength.

John Rees claims that Rousseau's criterion hints at, but does not sufficiently take into account, the more crucial distinction between natural and artificial equalities and inequalities. To Rees, what is most important is the element of human choice. While Rousseau does make reference to the importance of human consent in determining what kinds of inequalities are artificial, Rees implies that Rousseau does not give this particular point sufficient emphasis. Rees sees the basic distinction to lie in the fact that the natural inequalities do not depend upon human choice while the unnatural inequalities do. He is careful to point out that this does not necessarily imply that natural inequalities are unalterable. Eyeglasses and hearing aids can help people who have natural inequalities become, in a sense, "equal" over time.¹⁸ Developments in science and technology can make people more equal, or less equal at the same time that these developments narrow the natural and expand the artificial spheres. The criterion of choice, therefore, is not a particularly satisfying means of

¹⁷Jean Jacques Rousseau, A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, in The Social Contract and Discourses, translated by G. D. H. Cole (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc.), 196.

¹⁸Rees, Equality, p. 22.

keeping the two types of inequality or equality distinct. Not only does the sphere of characteristics which are unalterable by human intervention continually narrow, and thus blur the distinction, but also the very concept of "choice" is itself subject to dispute. Our choices may be severely limited by the biological and psychological environment within which we have been raised. Thus the criterion of choice requires that a number of related issues be resolved. For example:

- 1) Does "choice" mean within the parameters which we can logically be expected to be able to choose? That is, must we be fully aware of the alternatives prior to being able to have a choice?
- 2) Can we ever be expected to make a choice in the sense of a "freely made" decision, without a great deal of influence from sources over which we have had no control?¹⁹

Perhaps these kinds of issues are resolvable, but they are of a sufficient complexity so as to make the choice criterion a somewhat unsatisfactory method of distinguishing between natural and artificial equalities.

A more satisfactory means of distinguishing between natural and artificial inequalities is discussed by John Wilson. Those inequalities and equalities which are artificial are, according to Wilson, those which require of a person that he learn a set of rules, while those which are natural are those which are found in nature.²⁰ Natural

¹⁹See Herbert Spiegelberg, "Equality in Existentialism," in Equality, ed. by Pennock and Chapman, for a presentation of various existentialist positions on equality.

²⁰Wilson, Equality, p. 41.

inequalities can be detected via sensory equipment. Thus, we can "see" who is more physically attractive and "hear" who has the better voice. However, these two examples introduce another difficulty because we may ask whether attributes such as physical beauty or a pleasant voice can ever be regarded as "natural." A voice or appearance may be a result of nature, but the criterion for labeling someone or something as beautiful or ugly does not lie "out there" in the natural world but instead is a social product whose criterion involves learning a set of man-made rules. It is these rules that determine what is regarded as beautiful or ugly. And, just as Rees's notion of what is alterable by human choice can vary by time and place, so too the sets of rules determining such attributes as beauty and ugliness may also vary. Hence, the latter examples seem to involve what Wilson's distinction would call artificial inequalities. We might argue that a characteristic such as "tallness" fits very well into the "natural" category. We need not adopt a particular social value system to see that one person is taller than another. However, this perception, by itself, leads us to conclude that there are natural "differences" between persons and not that such differences necessarily entail natural inequalities. The latter term, because of its intimation of a superior - inferior relationship, can make sense only in the context of man-made rules. As already mentioned, to state that two persons are of unequal height requires that we learn a set of rules for judging

which heights are "best" and which are the "worst." Wilson appears to be aware of this kind of problem. He points out that the criterion of similarity and difference is itself a man-made product requiring a public language, so as to be able to correct mistakes in usage, and a set of rules.²¹ Therefore, our perception of one man being taller than another requires that we adopt a set of rules to determine what is meant by "taller." Thus, we might conclude that there are no "pure" natural inequalities or equalities, and that Rousseau and others are wrong in labeling differences such as age, sex and strength as natural inequalities.

However, it is difficult to dispense with the notion of natural equalities and inequalities altogether. A case can be made that in some characteristics, such as physical strength, all men are not born the same, and further, that such differences do in fact constitute inequalities. It may be that an attribute such as physical strength is deemed valuable solely by social and not natural standards. Obviously to term anything "valuable" requires learning some set of rules. However, even if such an inequality is in this sense "artificial," it also at least appears natural in the sense that we would be hard-pressed to find any society, past or present, in which physical strength was not valued in some way. Whether this universality is, by itself, sufficient to affix the term "natural" to such inequalities is a difficult question to answer, particularly

²¹Ibid., p. 42.

since the need for physical strength seems to diminish as technology increases. Wilson's own criterion would lead him to deny that physical strength, solely because of its universal status, constitutes a natural inequality. For Rees, the question of physical strength also poses a dilemma since strength is a product of a number of factors, some related to choice (for example, a weight lifting program) and some totally removed from choice (for example, the genes of the parent and the environment in which the child is raised). Likewise for Rousseau, the issue of physical strength cannot consistently be placed in either category.

The point here is that despite the universal respect for physical strength, it does not really "belong" solely to either the natural or artificial spheres. If we look closely at most other attributes we discover that they too do not fit in any consistent manner. Most, if not all, characteristics which are generally labeled as either natural or artificial kinds of inequality can, in truth, rest in either category.

Wilson, however, is not willing to collapse the distinction altogether. He points out that human sensory equipment and human interests "force" certain criteria upon us such that we do say that some similarities and differences are "found" in nature. Wilson uses the example of color categories as a case in which normal human sensory equipment tends to impose a set of distinctions upon us. Likewise Wilson's example of the fact that people distinguish between ant-eaters and lions is a distinction which is very much in

our interest as humans to make, even while it might be possible to construct a language which did not make such a distinction. Thus, certain criteria of similarity and difference are, in this sense, imposed upon us by nature. They are learned, but it is not a matter of choice because no viable alternatives, logically or physically, exist.²² However, Wilson is speaking of natural differences, not inequalities. Distinguishing between colors is some distance removed from claiming that they are unequal to one another.

Wilson expands upon this distinction by reference to how one verifies natural and artificial similarities and differences. (Note again that he is not speaking of equalities and inequalities here). Common language and standards are necessary for making any judgments, but judgments regarding artificial similarities and differences require that one learn the rules of a particular "game." They are not found in nature.²³ This now brings Wilson to artificial and natural equalities. Natural equality may be verified by observation while artificial equality presupposes the learning of a further set of rules. In terms of activity, the capacity or potential to perform artificial activities constitutes an important distinction between man and other creatures. Nevertheless, the difficulty mentioned earlier still remains. Wilson may have produced an adequate criterion for distinguishing between natural and artificial

²²Ibid., p. 44.

²³Ibid., pp. 44-45.

differences, but the question of whether it makes sense to speak of a natural or artificial equality has not been answered.

An analogous problem arises with the related issue of whether people are "naturally equal," particularly as relates to the question of whether all "are equal" or are "born equal" or both. To say that persons are born equal does not necessarily imply that they will remain equal as adults. However, if people are born equal with respect to a certain degree of humanness, then by definition, they are by nature equal. Any subsequent inequalities which may emerge are likely to be man-made and therefore artificial. This can be a difficult distinction to maintain for, in Wilson's words, "it is plain that notions of natural and artificial equality, though logically distinguishable, bear a very close relationship in practice."²⁴ On the other hand, in speaking of a highly artificial inequality like "privilege," Wilson makes the point that

It is appropriate to speak of privilege...
when the artificially granted status or power
is not connected to or justified by any
natural characteristics.²⁵

Hence, some inequalities like privilege, are artificial by definition.

This is further complicated by the issue relating to how the pre-natal environment affects personality and

²⁴Ibid., p. 48.

²⁵Ibid., p. 37.

capacities. Here, the line between artificial and natural becomes even more ambiguous, particularly as human control over previously "natural" factors increases. In confronting this dilemma, Wilson opts for a solution which retains a distinction between the natural and the artificial. He defines natural capacities as being "what a thing can in practice do, be, or become, whilst remaining itself."²⁶ This kind of move requires that we have a conception of what a man is so that we become concerned only with capacities which can be described as "human."

Here, as with so many other related issues, our view of human nature becomes crucial to the way in which we understand not only what man is, but also what he is and is not capable of doing. This applies both to actions and to states of mind. Societies tend to generate an image of human nature which is conducive to existing social and economic arrangements. The accepted view of man's capacities does not come to be acceptable by chance. If man is competitive in order to attain certain kinds of goals, and if within the category of human beings, there are numerous relevant inequalities, then the stratified society which emerges appears to be inherent in the human condition. It is not subject to rational criticism because it is not subject to a more rational form. On the other hand, the egalitarian vision of society is based, in large part, upon a very different view of human nature and capacities.

²⁶Ibid., p. 51.

The problem that emerges is that once we have described a given hierarchical order as "natural," we have implicitly legitimized that order. This vision of each individual, or class, seeking and finding (or being placed in) its predestined position and role is an essential aspect of the functionalist position. By portraying society as comprised of individuals having, not merely different, but unequal capacities and abilities, we have established a case for a stratified society. The case is strengthened if we make the further claim that with all individuals properly "placed" into their roles, both the individual and the society as a whole will benefit.²⁷ Thus the functionalist's explanatory theory, having been premised on the idea of natural inequality, leads in turn to an almost inevitable rejection of egalitarian programs as being a utopian and/or needless and potentially harmful tampering with nature.

If instead, we wish to maintain that all inequalities are man-made and artificial, then a different situation emerges. If all inequalities are artificial, then none are inevitable or intrinsic to the human condition, though this does not imply the same for human differences. Therefore, we are left with the position that all are by nature equal.²⁸

²⁷See Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore, "Some Principles of Stratification," American Sociological Review, X (April, 1945).

²⁸Regarding the issue of "equal with respect to what?", since I am speaking here at a fairly high level of generality, I can say equal with respect to "being human;" or "developing into fully human beings;" or, borrowing from

This inevitably must lead us to an exploration of those inequalities which do exist between persons in society. Just as by calling humans naturally unequal leads to the need to explain those equalities which do exist, so too by viewing all inequalities as artificial, we are presented with the need to justify such inequalities as may be present in society. If all or most inequalities are artificial, then they are all subject to change and all conceivably could be abolished. Society, therefore, no longer reflects nature, but instead has imposed artificial inequalities upon persons naturally equal. Under these circumstances, we would be more likely to view the stratification somewhat critically and to require some justification, if not a restructuring. We might argue that stratification is necessary or functional because, despite the basic equality of people, some degree of hierarchy is required to keep the whole system running and to prevent chaos or, in a more extreme form, a "war of all against all." Furthermore, to provide sufficient incentives for those on top to do their best, it is crucial to provide a system of unequal rewards leading, in turn, to subsequent inequalities in terms of position, material goods and respect. However, by accepting the premise that all are naturally equal, we have already undermined this position. For now we have little to offer as a justification as to why one individual or group is placed in a position higher than

Steven Lukes, persons actual or potential autonomy, need for privacy and capacity for self-development. Lukes, Individualism, p. 133.

another. Neither ability nor ambition is adequate to explain this. If all are naturally equal, then ambition and ability are qualities of which all should have an equal amount, or they are artificial criteria superimposed over the basic equality of persons. If the former, then nothing has been explained regarding why some have better positions than others unless we wish to rely upon "luck" as an explanation, or we take the position that different artificial environments lead to different levels of ambition and ability. If ambition and ability are artificial criteria and this is used as a justification for a society's unequal arrangements, then we can argue that such a society is using an artificial construct to explain artificial inequalities and therefore is not adequately confronting the issue in terms of the "fairness" of such an arrangement. Fairness aside, defenders of this position generally make the claim that it is the most efficient means of running a society. Even accepting the very questionable basis for this claim, such a defense entails viewing persons as means to an end rather than as ends in themselves, and thus conflicts with the idea of equality of respect. Premised on the view that this arrangement involves the construction of artificial inequalities, once we have accepted the view that persons can and should be treated as means to an end, it makes relatively little difference whether the results involve artificial or natural inequalities.

If we assert that all, or almost all, inequalities

between people are artificial, then we have set up a prima facie case for an egalitarian society, but it is not an indestructable case. While the original assertion regarding whether or not men are naturally equal is of some significance, the results which follow from such an assertion may vary. Similarly, we may deny that "natural" has any real meaning with reference to equality or inequality. Everything that people are able to observe about themselves and others is to a large extent, artificial. Owing to the socially imposed criteria for equal and unequal as well as the encompassing factor of upbringing, the word "natural" is not a meaningful concept in this context. For these reasons it may be more fruitful to bypass the issue of natural versus artificial equalities as being irresolvable and perhaps irrelevant.

Equality and Equality of Opportunity

In dealing with the concept of equality we must make continued reference to the function which the concept serves in our language. We have already asserted that the function of the concept is to portray a relationship in which neither party is superior or inferior in a particular respect. We have also brought out that such a relationship logically conveys the idea that equal parties should be treated equally unless overriding reasons for not doing so can be brought to bear, and that such reasons must be judged relevant and sufficient before they can be accepted. Given the fact that

equality of treatment in one respect requires inequality of treatment in another, how then are we to choose among the various kinds of equality of treatment? One of the most popular choices in capitalist society is equality of opportunity. In such a situation, the opportunity for advancement is the treatment which is equalized while the results, in terms of respect, wealth, power and prestige are very unequal.

Hence, equality is still connected with treatment. The advocate of equality of opportunity need not deny this relationship. However, in the United States such treatment includes the opportunity to become unequal, that is, to surpass our fellows. If we are given the opportunity and are unwilling or unable to succeed, the problem is not with the subsequent inequality of results that occur, but with ourselves. Thus, if we do not "push" ourselves sufficiently in school, we have no one to blame but ourselves and society need not feel any responsibility for our plight. The process of natural selection will ensure that artificial and/or natural inequalities will be made manifest and be treated accordingly. Clearly a choice has been made here in favor of a stratified society which allegedly reflects the inequalities among persons in that society. Yet, within the context of such a society, equality of opportunity itself cannot be realized.

The question of why this particular kind of equality has been so popular in the United States involves considera-

tions of the general political and economic system. For it is clear that praise for this ideal is by no means universal, particularly in terms of how equality of opportunity allegedly is manifested in the United States. In Chapter II the question of whether the popularity of equality of opportunity is warranted will be examined.

C H A P T E R I I

THE DESIRABILITY OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

In this chapter the issue being dealt with is not whether a society can attain complete, or near-complete equality of opportunity, but rather with whether it should even try to do so. The advocates and critics of the desirability of this goal can be classified according to three major schools of political philosophy: the liberal perspective, typified by such figures as John Stuart Mill and Daniel Bell; the conservative perspective, reflected in the works of Edmund Burke, Emile Durkheim and Alexis De Tocqueville; and the radical perspective presented in the works of Karl Marx and a number of contemporary thinkers.

The Liberal Perspective

The liberal perspective provides the strongest defense for equality of opportunity. There are several reasons for this, but primary among them is the close connection both liberalism and equality of opportunity have with laissez faire capitalism. Though the significance of laissez faire in modern capitalism has decreased substantially, the identification of equality of opportunity with capitalism and liberalism has remained strong. Therefore, it is to the

classical, as well as contemporary, liberal thinkers that we must look for an advocacy of equality of opportunity. John Stuart Mill's essay, "On the Subjection of Women,"¹ is a good example of the liberal approach to the subject.

In this essay Mill specifically deals with the rights of women, but the principle involved is that all adults have, or should have, an equal right to develop themselves to the best of their abilities. The "legal subordination" of one sex to another renders this impossible.² There are two points we should note here. One is that Mill is implying that all discriminatory laws ought to be abolished so as to render more complete the equality of opportunity between the sexes. The second point is that, in line with free market principles, the only kind of subordination that Mill is speaking of is legal subordination. It is certain laws that are interfering with equality of opportunity and these should therefore be repealed, just as laissez faire capitalism calls for the abolition of laws which attempt to restrict or regulate trade and other commercial activities. Mill does not go beyond calling for an end to such laws to more positive action to bring about equality of opportunity. It is a negative form of freedom and opportunity that Mill is advocating--a position that later liberals would find themselves heatedly debating with regard to issues like

¹John Stuart Mill, The Subjection of Women, ed. by Stanton Coit (London: Longman's, Green and Company, 1924).

²Ibid., p. 29.

affirmative action and quotas. For Mill, removal of such laws would tend to bring about significant "human improvement" due to their being "replaced by a principle of perfect equality admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other."³ In the first paragraph of his essay, Mill presents a general picture of the liberal interpretation of equality of opportunity - no legal obstacles or privileges should be granted to one group which harm another.

This latter point is reemphasized later in the essay when Mill, in language echoed by modern advocates of meritocracy, calls for as much as possible being left to the choices of those directly involved.

It is not that all processes are supposed to be equally good, or all persons to be equally qualified for every thing; but that freedom of individual choice is now known to be the only thing which procures the adoption of the best processes and throws each operation into the hands of those best qualified for it.⁴

The idea here is that equality of opportunity can act as a natural and accurate means of ensuring that the most qualified get into the most important positions while weeding out, in a non-arbitrary manner, the less qualified. Women should not be excluded from entering the competition. If indeed they are "inferior," this will be made apparent by the results of the competition itself. Likewise, it will

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 45.

also become evident just what it is that they are most fitted to do.

What women by nature cannot do, it is quite superfluous to forbid them from doing. What they can do, but not so well as the men who are their competitors, competition suffices to exclude them from ...it is only asked that the present bounties and protective duties in favour of men should be removed...Whatever women's services are most wanted for, the free play of competition will hold out the strongest inducement for them to undertake.⁵

Thus Mill is saying that if the competitive market is opened up to women as well as men via equality of opportunity, both women and society as a whole will be better off.

The key element here, as in equality of opportunity in general, is the idea that any individual ought to have the right to compete if he or she so desires. It is not a matter of having to compete so much as being allowed the option to choose if, where, and when one does compete. The assumption in the liberal framework is that individuals are autonomous beings who, if given the opportunity, either can choose what is in their best interests or should be allowed to make choices in order to discover what their best interests are. This is an argument upon which Mill later elaborates in a different context in On Liberty.⁶ To be able to make choices is consistent with the free market capitalism with which liberalism is so intimately associated. In each case,

⁵Ibid., p. 54.

⁶John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, ed. by Currin V. Shields (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1956).

the emphasis is on the autonomy of individuals coming to be expressed once legal obstacles are removed, without any formal dictation of what they may choose to do. Further, since the chooser is free to make the choices, so too is he or she responsible for these choices. This point is significant, for it implies almost an existential finality regarding the choices that one does make, once formal legal obstacles have been eliminated.

Hence for Mill, and for liberalism in general, there are several advantages to be gained from the principle of equality of opportunity. As already mentioned, the most fundamental factor is that if performance in open competition dictates position, then surely society has little to lose and much to gain by seeing to it that those who perform the best reach the highest positions. The inferior will be unable to compete well with the better qualified, so there is little danger that incompetent individuals or groups will rise to the top. This is an argument that Mill repeatedly uses against those who claim that women are inferior and demand that they be kept out of the competition altogether. If they are inferior, their subservient status will be given an empirical basis; if they are not inferior, then society stands to gain by allowing a whole new group of citizens to contribute their talents to the social system. That this desire for the good of the social system is often contradictory to the self-interest of those who do not want additional competitors is not viewed by Mill as being significant.

Mill adds to this argument the claim that justice can be served only by allowing all into the competition.

...would it be consistent with justice to refuse to them their fair share of honour and distinction, or to deny to them the equal moral right of all human beings to choose their occupations (short of injury to others) according to their own preferences, at their own risk?⁷

On an individual level, Mill cites the happiness that comes with the attainment of freedom which is "the first and strongest want of human nature," after food and shelter.⁸ Whether subsequent liberal philosophers, including contemporary liberals, would place freedom either so high among human desires or even designate it as an inherent part of human nature is not as important as the fact that the philosophy of liberalism, the economic system of capitalism, and the concept and policy of equality of opportunity all place a great deal of emphasis upon the value of freedom. In comparison to other political ideals, and particularly in comparison to the ideal of equality, freedom is given the greatest priority in the liberal framework and its relationship to other cherished liberal ideals such as individualism and tolerance is both clear and close.

A further argument for equality of opportunity which liberals like Mill touch upon is that, once all are allowed into the competition to gain the greatest rewards and/or

⁷Mill, The Subjection of Women, p. 79.

⁸Ibid., p. 123.

make the greatest contribution to the social good, there is less likely to be the kind of frustration and feeling of uselessness which can come to those who "want of a worthy outlet for the active facilities."⁹ In the case of women, this will especially be a problem for those who either have no children or whose children have grown up and left home, leaving their mothers little that they are either allowed to do or are capable of doing with the rest of their lives.¹⁰ Mill condemns the manner in which society has forced women into a "dull and hopeless" existence by not allowing them to fulfill, or even discover, their potential.¹¹

Another advantage of equality of opportunity, implicit in all of the other positive features, is that it clearly affixes personal responsibility. Once equality of opportunity has been established, and all formal barriers to open competition eliminated, each individual within society must bear full responsibility both for the choices made and for the consequences of the choices, particularly in terms of eventual position within the various hierarchies. The former involves the decision as to what one wants to do; the latter involves whether and how well one is able to do what one desires in competition with others. On this latter point, Mill is quite willing to let the chips fall where they may as long as equal opportunity exists. There will always be winners

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 126.

¹¹Ibid., p. 127.

and losers. Equality of opportunity makes the game fair. This gives both winners and losers no one but themselves upon whom they may place responsibility for the outcome. Hence, another positive feature of equality of opportunity is that it absolves other individuals and society itself of responsibility for the results of the various contests going on within its boundaries. This is as it should be in a liberal individualistic, laissez faire capitalist system. Even with the advent of the welfare state in the twentieth century, all that has changed is the amount and scope of activity that the government is allowed to undertake in order to bring about equality of opportunity and a meritocracy.

Much of Mill's position is echoed in the works of modern advocates of equality of opportunity like Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol. The label of "neo-conservatives" which has been attached to them serves to illustrate the fact that today, particularly in the United States, there are few who can accurately be described as conservative unless conservatism is equated only with the desire to conserve that which already exists. The irony is apparent when we consider that what is here being conserved is, in reality, a form of liberalism. The chief focus of debate is over how this "traditional" liberalism is to be conserved. Can liberalism best be preserved by welfare state economic policies along with programs such as affirmative action and quotas; or is it best preserved by a return to its nineteenth

or even eighteenth century principles? In both cases the goal of equality of opportunity retains a high priority. What is at issue are the questions of how best to define it and how best to attain it.

Daniel Bell in particular, gives evidence of the modern American liberal's attachment to equality of opportunity. This is demonstrated by the way he defines the goal:

The principle of equality of opportunity derives from a fundamental tenet of classical liberalism: that the individual - and not the family, the community, or the state - is the basic unit of society, and that the purpose of societal arrangements is to allow the individual the freedom to fulfill his own purposes - by his labor to create property, by exchange to satisfy his wants, by upward mobility to achieve a place commensurate with his talents.¹²

As with Mill, what Bell is portraying here is a situation where the individual, unencumbered by any but the most necessary of checks, is given free rein to develop, to create, to profit, and especially to choose. Freedom is still the key element and the role of society, particularly government, is to be minimized.

In his discussion, Bell specifically praises the coming "meritocracy" more than equality of opportunity. However, it is clear that the meritocracy cannot exist without equality of opportunity. What Bell does is to separate such opportunity from the idea of equality of results, which he regards

¹²Daniel Bell, "On Meritocracy and Equality," The Public Interest, XXIX (Fall, 1972), 40.

as a "socialist ideal." The assumption is that some are more talented, ambitious, intelligent and therefore more deserving than are others. We discover who they are via equality of opportunity, not by "populist" programs such as open admissions, quotas, and other "ascriptive" criteria which Bell sees as endangering the process of discovering the talented as well as lowering standards.¹³ Once the process of discovering the most competent has been completed, such persons are then placed in the most important positions in society and a just meritocracy is created. While Bell also advocates "the priority of the disadvantaged...as an axiom of social policy,"¹⁴ how this is to be accomplished in a manner consistent with his perspective on equality of opportunity is not explained. The obvious priority here, as with Mill, is with those who can rise to the top within the equality of opportunity framework.

The Conservative Critique

Because the philosophy of classical conservatism is not, and perhaps never really was, a major perspective in American political thought, to analyze the conservative critique of equality of opportunity it is necessary to examine various European theorists. As has already been alluded to, what passes for conservatism in the United

¹³Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 67.

States is little more than a style of laissez faire liberal capitalism, which not only does not present any of the basic conservative critiques of equality of opportunity, but also is one of the strongest defenders of this very unconservative principle. Therefore, it is European conservatives like Edmund Burke, Alexis De Tocqueville and Emile Durkheim who will be dealt with in this section.

One of the major criticisms conservatives make is that as the passion for liberty and equality increases among men, and as equality of opportunity becomes more and more a guiding principle in politics, economics and the area of social status, there will be a steadily declining concern for the public good. Liberal advocates of equality of opportunity freely admit that one of its essential ingredients is its individualistic nature. Their assumption is that this individualism will work to the benefit of society as a whole. With equality of opportunity, each person is competing against others to gain certain goods or to "win the race." The result, according to liberals, is greater efficiency which works to the benefit of the individual and the society.

Conservatives are highly critical of this view. Their stress is upon the dissolution of social ties that equality of opportunity engenders, and the societal and personal costs of such a dissolution. From this perspective, liberalism and its attendant equality of opportunity are contrasted with an idealized version of an earlier time. Conservatism holds that in feudal times, there were strongly felt mutual

obligations, rights and duties which all classes in society possessed. Obviously some were far better off than others, but such a situation was rendered less objectionable by these strong ties and the mutual respect that conservatives claim to have existed. Under such circumstances, equality of opportunity was out of the question since people born into a particular class stayed within that class as did their descendents. Hierarchies existed, but they were seen as both natural and legitimate by all concerned. Thus, the ties between persons were strong, and when such ties exist, there also is a strong concern for the public good, since people are concerned with more than just themselves and their immediate families. A sense of community is thereby encouraged.¹⁵

De Tocqueville is greatly disturbed by what he regards as the tendency for concern about the community to decrease as the dissolution of ties between persons increases. At one point he describes man in modern society as being too concerned with his self interest, narrowly individualistic, lacking in care about the public good and exhibiting a general lack of feeling for his fellow man.¹⁶ Tocqueville does not share the liberal's praise of equality of opportunity, particularly as the doctrine relates to each being on his own. Referring to the French peasantry, he claims

¹⁵It should be re-emphasized that we are speaking of an "ideal type" kind of a feudal situation.

¹⁶Alexis De Tocqueville, The Old Regime and the French Revolution, translated by Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1955), p. xiii.

that,

The fourteenth century peasants had been at once more oppressed and better cared for, the great seigneurs may have sometimes treated them harshly, but they never abandoned them to their own resources.¹⁷

Tocqueville perceives serious problems arising from the erosion of the hereditary ties of status between persons that existed in the feudal era. With equality of opportunity and the rise of capitalism, wealth, instead of birth becomes the criterion for status and power. To the liberal, this permits a livelier, freer, and more efficient mode of social existence. To a conservative, however, while some of these features may be beneficial, they have to be weighed against the costs in terms of a society where people no longer care about one another. The major result that Tocqueville sees as deriving from such principles is a return to a Hobbesian state of nature with "unspoken warfare between all citizens."¹⁸ Since all are starting off from the same point, not only do individuals no longer "owe" anything in the way of rights and obligations to their fellow citizens, but also each of these fellow citizens is, in fact, a competitor and a real or potential "enemy." Under such circumstances, it clearly is not going to be easy to instill any feeling for the common good. Modern liberals

¹⁷Ibid., p. 557.

¹⁸Alexis De Tocqueville, Democracy in America, translated and edited by J. P. Mayer (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969), p. 566.

tend to denigrate any such concern with common good on the grounds that it is too vague and ambiguous a concept unless measured strictly in terms of material productivity. This is an easily measurable quantity which bears little resemblance to the classical conservative view that contains a strong moral element and is far more concerned with ties between people than with commodities produced.

Looking at modern society, Tocqueville sees the advent of a growing industrial aristocracy. Further, it is an aristocracy which, unlike its counterpart in feudal times, bears no permanent or supportive relationship to those below it.

The industrialist only asks the workman for his work, and the latter only asks him for his pay. The one contracts no obligation to protect, nor the other to defend, and they are not linked in any permanent fashion either by custom or duty.¹⁹

Contrasting the industrialist with the feudal landed aristocracy, he states:

The territorial aristocracy of past ages was obliged by law, or thought itself obligated by custom, to come to the help of its servants and relieve their distress. But the industrial aristocracy of our day, when it has impoverished and brutalized the men it uses, abandons them in times of crisis to public charity to feed them... Between workman and master there are frequent relations but no true associations.²⁰

While this kind of criticism may relate more specifically to capitalism and/or individualism, its interrelatedness

¹⁹Ibid., p. 557.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 557-558.

with equality of opportunity is clear. If all have been granted an equal chance to get into the aristocracy of wealth, and if there is an ongoing and constant struggle to get into, and stay within, the aristocracy, then few close ties or feelings of mutual obligation can be maintained over time.

Among democratic peoples new families continually rise from nothing while others fall and nobody's position is quite stable...All of a man's interests are limited to those near himself...Aristocracy links everybody, from peasant to king in one long chain. Democracy breaks the chain and frees each link.²¹

Thus the conditions of life in a society with equality of opportunity encourage self reliance. But such self reliance tends to isolate persons from each other as they constantly compete, and provides a kind of moral justification for not being concerned about the problems of others.

The conservative critique of equality of opportunity also makes reference to the effect that such a doctrine has upon established standards, taste and the ideal of the contemplative life. To understand this position it is necessary to understand the conservative perspective on hierarchies. Hierarchies are both natural and inevitable. However, this idea is unlike the capitalist notion in which hierarchies and values are determined by the market place, preferably in a setting of equality of opportunity, and our value is determined by how much we can sell ourselves for on

²¹Ibid., pp. 507-508.

the open market. To the conservative there are numerous natural hierarchies involving various spheres of life, and the "market value" of what we contribute is irrelevant. Even Mill comes close to this position in his denigration of popular taste and opinion in On Liberty. For the conservative, areas such as the arts and sciences should not be subject to market forces, but instead should be the result of men living quiet contemplative lives, guided by the wisdom of tradition and free from the hustling so typical of equality of opportunity. In a society where prosperity, if not survival, is dependent upon responding to the market and where equality of opportunity ensures a competitive framework in which much of our time and energy must be devoted to fighting off fellow citizens in the race for scarce rewards, it is not surprising that conservatives look with some trepidation upon the consequences of all this for contemplation, intellectual advancement, taste and tradition.

Tocqueville gives some attention to the downplaying of contemplation in modern society. A society based on equality of opportunity is unlikely to have a leisure class. Such a society may have wealthy citizens, but their wealth is not as it was in feudal times. With equality of opportunity, wealth is less hereditary and therefore requires constant effort to attain and retain it. This opens up the possibility that we could lose wealth in a perfectly legal manner. In feudal times, the members of the nobility were more secure

in their positions and therefore, if they so desired, could devote their time to art, science, or philosophical speculation without worry that someone was going to overtake them or that their work would not "sell" on the market. Tocqueville describes the distinction between the feudal contemplative life and the modern active life:

Men living in times of equality have much curiosity and little leisure. Life is so practical, complicated, agitated and active that they have little time for thinking.²²

The result of this lifestyle is that, as life moves so quickly, the "quick, superficial mind"²³ becomes a valuable commodity. The traditional ideal of the contemplative thinker, carefully and slowly working out problems, becomes less desirable. Further, the kinds of problems and thoughts with which men become concerned also undergo a shift. The emphasis is no longer on the so-called "higher" principles and pleasures. Instead, great attention is paid to those practical applications of thinking which will either save or make money via saving time, increasing production and accumulating more material goods.

Conservatives are also disturbed with regard to how the elimination of a permanent leisure class and the increase in the role of the market influences standards of taste. Edmund Burke warns that the democratizing aspects of the French Revolution in particular, and the kind of free

²²Ibid., p. 540.

²³Ibid., p. 461.

market, egalitarian (meaning equality of opportunity) doctrines which were then spreading would serve to destroy or seriously impair the two principles upon which civilization, taste, and manners had been built: the spirit of religion and the spirit of the gentleman.²⁴ What Burke means by the "spirit of the gentleman" is the values and lifestyle of the landed nobility. They, and not the market or the masses, should be the source for standards of taste and for the maintenance of what is regarded as civilization. Equality of opportunity presents a danger here just as it presents a danger to the very existence of a leisure class. It leads to mass taste replacing the taste of the nobility. From the conservative viewpoint, with its vision of natural hierarchies, nothing could be more damaging to the maintenance of high standards in manners, art and civilization. Burke thus describes revolutionary France's future:

Along with its natural protectors and guardians, learning will be cast into mire and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude.²⁵

Perhaps the most fundamental of conservative criticisms of equality of opportunity has to do with the "excess" of freedom which it is said to engender. Allegedly, it encourages a lack of proper restraints and limitations on the actions and aspirations of persons, thereby leaving them unprepared for the disappointments that inevitably follow.

²⁴Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961), p. 92.

²⁵Ibid.

Burke attacks the liberal idea that an individual should be free to do as he pleases provided that he harms no one else. Burke, coming from a perspective more conducive to a sense of community and shared obligations, questions the results of such freedom:

The effect of liberty to individuals is that they may do what they please: we ought to see what it will please them to do before we risque congratulations.²⁶

Later, he questions the individualistic premise behind such freedom and rights.

Men have no right to what is not reasonable, and to what is not for their benefit.²⁷

The feeling behind these anti-liberal sentiments is that people should be concerned about their fellow men and their society. More importantly, all are not equally aware of, or the best judge of, their own best interests. Consequently, we must "interfere" with the liberty of those who are unable to handle liberty properly. In terms of equality of opportunity, such interference poses serious problems for it involves restrictions placed upon what races are run and who competes in each contest.

However, it is with regard to the question of setting limits to expectations and aspirations that the conservative critique is most telling. Burke refers to equality of opportunity (though he does not use the term) as,

²⁶Ibid., p. 20.

²⁷Ibid., p. 75.

Instead, there is a constant striving for more and more, which is encouraged by the notion that all have a chance to gain great wealth and that horizons should be unlimited. The result of this is what Durkheim refers to as a state of "rulelessness," in which the interrelated processes of having infinite wants and being unable to satisfy such wants because of their infinite nature result in feelings of despair and disappointment. The hopes that one has can only last so long and the inevitable result is a sense of disillusionment.²⁹

This problem of rulelessness specifically relates to the liberal ideal of laissez faire and unrestrained competition. The liberal ideal of an absolute minimum of checks upon an individual's activities is, for Durkheim, undesirable. Instead, it is crucial that society set up moral limitations to mobility and therefore to people's aspirations for upward mobility. Without this restraint, individuals lose their stability, become less content, and often turn to suicide. Durkheim cites as evidence of this the fact that much suicide, particularly what Durkheim refers to as "anomic suicide," occurs among wealthy individuals in the areas of commerce and industry. It is among these groups that external limits are most weak, as are the individual's own internal restraints. The attainment of wealth, particularly in the highly mobile world of commerce and industry,

²⁹Emile Durkheim, "On Anomie," in Images of Man, ed. by C. Wright Mills (San Diego, NY: George Braziller, Inc., 1960), p. 450.

often leads to the idea that, by individual efforts, we can continue to move up indefinitely.³⁰ However, when infinite aspirations are eventually confronted by the finite capacities of self and market, and either setbacks or a lack of further upward mobility occurs, then the individual is ill-prepared to handle the frustration. Modern society induces a very strong future orientation. Activity is geared primarily to gaining more wealth as opposed to enjoying what we have. When the future suddenly appears less bright because our progress has either ceased or slowed, disillusionment and a potentially suicidal reaction are quite possible.³¹ This is a danger with which the poor are less likely to be faced. The poor are unlikely to have infinite desires and expectations since the reality of their lives illustrates to them the limited nature of their future. Checks on their aspirations are presented to them in the form of numerous other persons standing between them and the top.³² Consequently, they are likely to avoid the sort of "passion for the infinite" that Durkheim sees as so typical of the modern industrial classes.

Thus equality of opportunity, as Durkheim sees it, particularly in the economic sphere, can be viewed as a source of some of the socially and psychologically destabilizing tendencies in modern society. To counter such

³⁰Ibid., p. 456.

³¹Ibid., p. 459.

³²Ibid., p. 460.

tendencies, Durkheim does not advocate a return to an ascriptive society in which hereditary rank is passed along intergenerationally. Instead, he calls for retaining equality of opportunity, but within specific limits. His solution involves a division of labor which, when combined with a restrained degree of social mobility, almost serves as a parallel to an idealized feudal system of mutual obligations and rights. It is an attempt to reconcile the modern industrial age with some of the virtues that existed in the pre-industrial age but which have since been downplayed or subverted.

Durkheim refers to a division of labor in which the individual is alienated neither from the work process nor from his fellow workers. In such a setting, each knows his place and role in the overall productive process, and he knows that some degree of advancement is open to him. The individualistic view that he is isolated from his fellows, owes them nothing, and is a self-sufficient entity is replaced by a more feudal type vision where he views himself as a part of an integrated process whose end "he conceives more or less distinctly."³³ Thus a source of social solidarity and a kind of limitation upon the unbridled egoism and rulelessness which equality of opportunity in the liberal sense so often encourages is provided.

Equality of opportunity fits into this setting by virtue of its being the major means by which positions in

³³Ibid., p. 475.

the division of labor are to be apportioned. However, against the traditional liberal view of equality of opportunity, Durkheim's conception has two distinct advantages for the conservative. First, it is not a wholly unrestrained opportunity. Durkheim seems to be speaking of an opportunity to go higher or lower within a specific functional level. This avoids the sudden surges in mobility, upward or downward, which are so damaging to the stability of both society and the individual. There is room for mobility, but it is a restrained form of mobility. The second advantage of this kind of equality of opportunity is that the stakes are not so high as they are in the liberal version. If each individual has a function, and each function serves a useful societal purpose, and functions are drawn together in a web of mutual rights and obligations, then there is far less damage to a person's self-esteem if he is at one of the lower levels in the division of labor. It may be that under such circumstances, classifying positions as "higher" or "lower," at least in terms of their usefulness to society, is itself a faulty means of distinguishing between functions. Thus, not as much is riding upon the equality of opportunity race. Even the "losers" do not feel useless, since their function, though not as highly rewarded as that of the "winners," is nevertheless a function which must be fulfilled.

Within this solution lies the conservative critique of equality of opportunity. It is impossible to return the

consciousness of men to a point when they were not concerned with equality of opportunity, just as it is impossible to go back to the feudal era. However, it is possible to confront equality of opportunity in such a way as to make it a positive force both for the community and the individual. The way to accomplish this is to place limits upon it within the framework of a society with a functional division of labor. By so doing, many of the conservative objections and criticisms can be dealt with, without risking the kinds of problems that would emerge from more reactionary solutions.

The Radical Critique

The radical critique of the desirability of equality of opportunity bears many similarities to that of the conservatives. The primary difference between the two is in the question of solutions and alternatives to equality of opportunity. Otherwise the critical themes--particularly with regard to areas such as community, competition, and the contemplative life, and the deficiencies of explaining all human relationships and values on a market basis--are given great attention in both perspectives.

In discussing the radical perspective examples will be drawn primarily from contemporary thinkers. While philosophers like Marx and Rousseau were both aware and critical of the implications of equality of opportunity, their criticisms were directed more generally against the individualistic capitalist system as a whole, rather than

at equality of opportunity per se. The latter is basically a twentieth century issue, requiring a more developed capitalist context than existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Thus, while Marx's views on equality of opportunity can be surmised from many of his writings, specific reference to the concept is rarely made by him. Instead, he criticizes the kind of liberal capitalism, which would have probably included equality of opportunity in On the Jewish Question and The Critique of the Gotha Programme.³⁴ In these works criticism is made of the sorts of issues with which liberal reformers, both then and now, were striving to deal, particularly with regard to people's "rights." For example, speaking of the desire for such rights under capitalism, Marx claims that they are rights fit only for egoistic man living under a competitive, individualistic system.

None of the supposed rights of man, therefore, go beyond egoistic man...an individual separated from his community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interests in accordance with his private caprice.³⁵

Marx is criticizing a vision of man which ignores all aspects of his being other than the capitalist conception of

³⁴Karl Marx, On the Jewish Question, in The Marx - Engels Reader, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1972); and Karl Marx, The Critique of the Gotha Programme (New York: International Publishers, 1973).

³⁵Marx, On the Jewish Question, p. 41.

man as competitive, profit-motivated, egoistic individual. However, with a conception of man which sees him as potentially less materialistic and more cooperative, the kinds of rights which Marx labels as bourgeois can be transcended.

Another radical perspective is presented in an essay by John Schaar, "Equality of Opportunity and Beyond," and in Richard Sennett's and Jonathon Cobb's The Hidden Injuries of Class.³⁶ Schaar speaks of the inherently conservative nature of the idea of equality of opportunity. It primarily involves each person being given the chance to develop his abilities along those lines which society is most likely to reward.³⁷ Since societies reward best those abilities which are of greatest benefit to the preservation of the existing order, it follows that equality of opportunity will tend to induce "support for the established pattern of values."³⁸ For one desiring substantial change in a more egalitarian direction, equality of opportunity intensifies problems, since in a liberal capitalist system, such a pattern of values is highly inegalitarian in its consequences.

The conservative and inegalitarian implications of such an allegedly "progressive" doctrine can be seen in a

³⁶John H. Schaar, "Equality of Opportunity and Beyond," in Contemporary Political Theory, ed. by Anthony De Crespigny and Alan Wertheimer (New York: Atherton Press, Inc., 1970); and Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, The Hidden Injuries of Class (New York: Vintage Books, Inc., 1972).

³⁷Schaar, "Equality of Opportunity," p. 137.

³⁸Ibid.

number of other aspects of equality of opportunity, both in terms of the process involved and the results which follow. Schaar, in seeming to accept the conservative and liberal assumption that "natural" hierarchies do exist, maintains that equality of opportunity, by its ability to discover and place in positions of authority such natural elites, will in fact increase and stabilize the inequalities in society. Now the "truly" superior will be placed in positions matching their ability, while the less talented will be placed accordingly.³⁹ Essentially what Schaar has done is to accept the meritocratic arguments about human abilities, and then claim that their conclusions, while logical, are not desirable. While this position is not especially strong regarding the ability to discover the talented and the notion of "talent" itself, nevertheless it does illustrate a potential problem for the advocate of a more egalitarian society.

An area in which radicals find themselves strongly in agreement with conservatives is over the issue of the excessive competition engendered by equality of opportunity. Such a competitiveness cannot help but destroy most chances for fraternal ties among persons. For example, Sennett and Cobb discuss how difficult it is for persons to relate well to one another because so many aspects of their lives are tied up in an attempt to assert their own personal worth and dignity. The asserting of worth and dignity is accomplished

³⁹Ibid., pp. 138-139.

primarily at the expense of others, even while, as an individual, a person is also desirous of having fraternal ties with others. Sennett and Cobb quote a shop foreman who wants to be liked and have close friends at work, but who is also caught up in the competitive race to outdo his fellow workers.

It would be messy to get to be friends with guys you're supposed to be...you're supposed to perform against.⁴⁰

This is similar to Schaar's portrayal of equality of opportunity as a doctrine whose vision of success involves doing better than others, and not merely as well as one can.⁴¹ The point is that equality of opportunity, at least in the American context, sets up an arrangement which, because of its highly competitive nature, greatly limits, if not eliminates, the chances and indeed the rationality of maintaining close personal contacts with other persons, particularly at the workplace. Furthermore, because the desire for these ties still is strong, it lends itself to contradictions within the individual. The conflict between humane values and the desire to achieve, causes what Sennett and Cobb refer to as "divides in self."⁴² Such divides are generally ignored or downplayed by contemporary advocates of a liberal meritocracy, who prefer to see individuals as

⁴⁰Sennett and Cobb, Hidden Injuries, p. 104.

⁴¹Schaar, "Equality of Opportunity," p. 141.

⁴²Sennett and Cobb, Hidden Injuries, p. 210.

being motivated primarily, if not exclusively, by the desire for rewards of wealth, power and prestige.

Closely related to the overly competitive atmosphere which is so much a part of equality of opportunity is the very individualistic perspective which it encourages. It is not exactly that equality of opportunity causes a highly individualistic outlook, as it is that the two feed into each other in the context of liberal capitalism and the class structure that it engenders. What this individualism involves is a feeling, both by self and by others, that each person is responsible for his ultimate position. The less dependent on others that we become, the more admired and respected we are. Those who are not independent are guilty of "perhaps the ultimate weakness in American terms."⁴³ The American hero as often portrayed in American literature, film and television is the wholly self reliant individual with few, if any, ties which could render him less independent. This hero is embodied in such forms as the solitary Clint Eastwood or John Wayne-type cowboy or detective, the Ayn Rand "superman," the James Bond and other such independent types whose ties are few precisely because they stand out from and above the masses.

Such an ideal image, particularly when connected to an image of equality of opportunity, creates or intensifies a number of problems for those adhering to these images. As conservatives point out, it makes the creation and retention

⁴³Ibid., p. 109.

of close relationships very difficult. In fact, it acts strongly to make any concern with either public life or public interests wholly irrational. Spending any time on such matters diminishes one's self interests due to the constant competition from other individuals aspiring to "hero" type status. In addition, it leaves open the question of what to do about the numerous non-heroes in society. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that today, in modern technological society, it has become extremely difficult to be an "independent" individual. For many Americans, the reality of their day to day lives in which, particularly on the job, they are confronted with a relatively faceless and powerless existence, in contrast to the American ideal of self-reliance and independence, creates a series of problems and defenses which Sennett and Cobb explore. For example, the willingness and desire to "sacrifice" for one's children as a means of affirming one's dignity and freedom is closely examined in terms of why such sacrifices are made and why they so often fail to provide much satisfaction for any of those involved.

A major problem is that those who are viewed by others or, more importantly, who view themselves as having "failed" in the race are in a very precarious position both materially and psychologically. Because each individual is regarded as being responsible for his position, and because failure is measured in terms of a lack of self-reliance and freedom, and since such a lack is the common predicament for most

Americans, the problem is substantial both in intensity and in scope. Success or failure is seen as purely a personal problem. Because it is so personal, in terms of responsibility, failure also leads to a lack of self-respect. The "loser" merely becomes a part of the masses, with greater self doubt and lower self-respect.⁴⁴ A worker surveyed by Sennett and Cobb places responsibility for his lack of success on himself by saying:

Life, people can order you around, and you got to take it 'cause you need the job.
But, it's more too, like they got a certain right to tell you what to do.⁴⁵

There is resentment here, but a good deal of such resentment is channelled back at ourselves for not having "made it" when the opportunity was there; even if we are also aware that the opportunity was not equal to that of others in the first place. The lower in terms of independence we define ourselves, a definition which is primarily based upon how much we must follow orders, the greater the tendency to blame ourselves for our position in society.⁴⁶ This is a situation of which the egalitarian must be critical, whether equality does or does not exist in society, so as to avoid the dilemma of people feeling that they lack dignity or are "superfluous" to their society.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 182-183.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 97.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 266.

The political consequences of equality of opportunity are also undesirable. Essentially these consequences are seen as both conservative and undemocratic. In The Hidden Injuries of Class, for example, the authors speak of how the image of equality of opportunity serves to "legitimize" the authority of those on top. The very fact that they have achieved higher positions indicates that they probably "deserve" to be there, and therefore that they also have the right to give orders to those lower on the scale. It is not that those on top are always right so much as it is that those below are not sure that "they have the right to fight back."⁴⁸ The political implications of this are clear. If those in power can be sure of the acquiescence or apathy of persons who are so filled with self-doubts and so wrapped up in their own personal struggles and contests for dignity that they rarely have any inclination to participate actively in the political process, then such a power structure need concern itself only with responding to the needs and desires of the upper levels of society. The latter group will include those relatively few individuals who are not filled with doubts about their ability or right to become angry and/or activated on political issues.

Schaar touches upon a related issue when he says that the inevitable result of equality of opportunity is the creation of an oligarchy. The meritocracy that supposedly

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 159.

will derive from such equality of opportunity is inherently undemocratic. Schaar is a strong advocate of political participation as an essential part of human development. Equality of opportunity, with its emphasis on finding the "best" individuals, encourages participation only by this superior group. The rest of society come to be viewed, and to view themselves, as less qualified to participate and thereby absolve themselves of their political responsibilities.⁴⁹ Thus, equality of opportunity, which is often viewed as perhaps "the" democratic principle turns out on examination to possess the potential of becoming an extremely anti-democratic principle. Perhaps more dangerously, it is an anti-democratic principle requiring no physical coercion. Instead, all that is required is that persons believe it does exist in their society; that it applies to the political sphere in that the best should rule; and that their own political participation is not all that valuable to society or to themselves.

A further radical critique of equality of opportunity, which clearly relates to its competitive aspect, concerns its tendency to discourage emotional involvement both with other persons and in our own activities. Sennett and Cobb cite a number of situations in which persons come to see such involvement as either a sign of weakness or a dangerous risk.

⁴⁹Schaar, "Equality of Opportunity," p. 151.

See like if you care about something, you
gonna get hurt like as not...I get scared
if I care too much.⁵⁰

Sennett and Cobb see the class system as responsible for this sort of situation, but it is interrelated with the notions of equality of opportunity and personal responsibility as well. If a person becomes strongly committed to another person or activity, and then fails in that involvement, he is left in a very painful situation. Many students, at all levels of education, from elementary school through high school, college and graduate school, probably adopt a similar strategy to that used by worker cited above. That is, a student either does not study or, if he does, tries to give the impression to his fellow students that he has not studied. In each case the goal is to create an impression, either to himself or to others, that he has not made the complete commitment to the activity - the activity in this case involving the passing of an exam or course. If the student does not pass the exam or course, he has not "lost" very much. A ready made excuse, "I didn't study," is available to the student. This allows the student to preserve a great deal more self-esteem and/or esteem from others than if he did study, try his best, but still either failed or passed at a mediocre level. Even failing an exam can sometimes be seen as preferable to taking the risk of looking inadequate to self and/or to others. With a failure

⁵⁰Sennett and Cobb, Hidden Injuries, p. 217.

due to a lack of studying, the student can claim that, in a sense, he has "freely chosen" to fail the exam by virtue of his decision not to study. Under these circumstances, while others may question his judgment, they cannot question his ability. Since so much of a persons self-esteem and esteem from others is tied in with his abilities, he has not lost as much in the failure.

Further, there is always the possibility that the student may do quite well despite not studying. If this occurs, then the student is in the enviable position of being viewed as "naturally" bright and able. Self-esteem may also be increased as he looks at fellow students who had to study to pass or who perhaps studied and still failed. He has, as it were, "beat the system" by doing well without the commitment and subsequent effort and risk involved in such a commitment. Equality of opportunity encourages this kind of behavior by affixing responsibility for a person's behavior and position solely upon himself. If such a person is the only one responsible for how well he does in the various contests that he enters, and if the individual is relatively unsure of himself in the first place, it is much safer either to avoid entering such contests or, to give less than a total effort when he does enter. If he gives a total commitment and fails, he has nothing left.

In such a way does equality of opportunity serve to militate against strong commitments. Hence, it adversely

affects not only personal relationships, but also the development of human potential in purely productive terms. Therefore, it is not even a particularly efficient or meritocratic tool. It is possible that in a less class-divided society, where the contests are more diverse, the stakes not quite so high and the importance of surpassing one's fellows not so crucial, equality of opportunity could be a very good policy. What does seem clear, however, is that the liberal version of equality of opportunity cannot adequately deal with most of the critiques which radicals and classical conservatives alike have made.

The liberal conception of equality of opportunity then, is fraught with problems in terms of its desirability. However, judging equality of opportunity solely in terms of its desirability is an inadequate approach, because the main models for equality of opportunity are those which exist in capitalist inegalitarian societies. If it can be shown that even a close approximation to equality of opportunity is impossible in such a context, and that many of the problems discussed are not endemic to equality of opportunity per se, then the question of its desirability may be posed more favorably. For this reason, an exploration of whether equality of opportunity is attainable at all or, if not, whether it can be more closely approximated in a non-capitalist environment, will be undertaken in Chapters III and IV.

CHAPTER III

THE SOCIAL LIMITATIONS OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

If we accept the idea that equality of opportunity is a highly desirable goal, then we have gone some distance in establishing certain parameters regarding how far and in what general direction we wish society to go in its relationship with the individual citizen. In this and the next chapter the question of whether equality of opportunity is possible will be examined. If it does not make logical sense to speak of such a concept in general or, if it does not within the context of a stratified society in particular, then other issues must be confronted.

Discussions relating to the conceivability and feasibility of equality of opportunity in the United States can be divided into two types. One type stresses the social factors which seem to militate against equality of opportunity, such as family structure, necessity and degree of governmental intervention, economic costs, and the overall class structure existing today in America. These factors may, in a sense, be "curable," though whether such a cure is likely, or even feasible, is a question which is very much at issue.

The second type of criticism which has been leveled against the conceivability of equality of opportunity rests upon biological factors, namely the alleged heritability of

certain key traits, particularly intelligence. It is clear that a belief in the heritability thesis contradicts any possibility of equality of opportunity ever being realized. Unlike the social factors weighing against equality of opportunity, the biological factors, according to those who give them most credence, know of no "cure." They are immutable. This separation between social and biological factors is largely artificial. However, for the purpose of distinguishing between the different kinds of arguments raised against the conceivability and feasibility of equality of opportunity, the separation will temporarily be retained.

At the root of many of the arguments regarding the feasibility of equality of opportunity is the question of just what factor or factors may be most responsible for some winning and others losing the various struggles and races that they enter. To clarify this somewhat, it is useful to repeat the criterion for the concept of equality of opportunity which was established in the Introduction:

Each individual has equal access to a range of specified resources which will enable that person to pursue certain goals.

Given this criterion, how then can we both explain and justify the fact that some do win while others do lose? If all persons have "equal access," does it not seem likely that they will all finish in approximately the same position? At this point a counter-argument is often made to the effect that equal access only applies at the beginning of the race

and thereafter all contestants are essentially on their own. The contestants are, in effect, given an equal opportunity to make good in the race. We can see here an ideological connection between this kind of doctrine and traditional laissez faire capitalism, with the race itself acting as a sort of "hidden hand" mechanism to sort out the wheat from the chaff. Theoretically, this operates for the betterment of society and the particular individuals involved.

However, suppose that we wish to carry the phrase "equal access" to its logical conclusion? Assume that equal access involves all those factors which tend to make a difference in the results of a given race. It is no longer sufficient to limit such access to the various training and educational programs, and "fair tests open to all." Now we must also deal with the problems of equal access to an environment which will instill an equivalent amount of ability and motivation and to which all other competitors had equal access. Further, it may also become necessary to make certain that all such contestants have equal access to the proper pre- and post-natal environments. But now the environment would be such that there really could be no substantial differences in aptitudes or motivations. It may be that this position assumes that all persons are inherently equal, particularly in the various cognitive abilities, and that such an assumption is groundless. However, this, in effect, is to opt for one of two possibilities. Either differences in inherent (innate) traits are immutable and

therefore there cannot ever be equality of opportunity, except within certain specific and somewhat narrow parameters; or equality of opportunity can fully be attained only if such inherent traits can somehow be equalized. For what are these traits if not a resource to which all must have equal access if equality of opportunity is to be realized? Thus, if winners are determined by their physical environment, there is not equality of opportunity; if they are determined by parental class and status, there is not equality of opportunity; and if they are determined by hereditary parental intelligence, there is not equality of opportunity.

Hence, we might argue that the presence of winners and losers is itself an indicator that equality of opportunity has not been attained. This is the basic problem regarding the feasibility of equality of opportunity. An analysis of what the obstacles are and why it would be so difficult to overcome them will constitute the remainder of this chapter.

Autonomy

The essence of the case for equality of opportunity is that it can be utilized to find the best individuals via the mechanism of fair competition for specific and scarce rewards. The emphasis is upon the responsibility of the individual to find and establish his or her own place in society. Failure or success in such an endeavor, as well as in achieving a person's overall goals in a society which has equality of opportunity, is the responsibility of the

individual. We owe neither gratitude nor blame to anyone else for our position, except perhaps insofar as we are grateful or ungrateful for having been given the responsibility in the first place. Within this framework is the implicit premise that individuals are autonomous beings who, regardless of the world which they know and have come into contact with, can and do make their own choices. It would not be wholly consistent to speak of complete individual responsibility if we are coerced, manipulated or socialized into making or not making certain decisions. Nor can autonomy easily be reconciled with the idea that people's wants, to a significant degree, are themselves a result of external forces acting upon the individual. Hence, the first question to be raised regarding the possibility of equality of opportunity centers on this issue of individual autonomy and what is involved in the making of a choice.

Suppose, for example, that we accept the existentialist theory regarding the pervasiveness and necessity of human choice. If each of us is, in fact, fully responsible for our choices and actions, then equality of opportunity would seem to be a viable goal. A case could be made that little, if anything, need be done in the way of external measures to help facilitate equality of opportunity. Perhaps, if society erects specific legal barriers to our aspirations, then that would be an infringement upon freedom. But, if such barriers were removed, then the responsibility would fall upon the individual. However, the assumption that once specific legal

barriers are removed we are left to choose freely among alternative means and ends is a highly questionable supposition.

It is true that prominent existentialist theorists, particularly Jean Paul Sartre, rarely deal with issues like equality of opportunity in any specific way. Sartre's concern is more with the human condition itself. Hence his notion of existence preceding essence is basically an attempt to expound upon a certain kind of freedom inherent in each individual's existence. That is, people exist first; what they do and become within that existence is a matter of their own actions based upon their own choices. They are not "born" to do any one specific thing or to fill any particular role, rather, they can and do make of themselves what they choose. Persons who deny responsibility for their choices are accused by Sartre of acts of "bad faith." They are attempting to evade the necessity for choices and hence to evade their freedom and responsibility.

Bad faith is an attempt to lie to oneself. For example, the Freudian analysis, to which Sartre makes numerous allusions, is, in existentialist terms, premised on such an attempt at bad faith. Placing responsibility upon unconscious and repressed drives, which the individual cannot grasp and/or deal with is, to Sartre, merely a means of evading one's freedom. Sartre denies that one might be unconscious of certain drives and therefore be unable both to control them and to be held responsible for them. "Drives"

are themselves the product of the individual's choices and as such, are conscious acts. For example, the individual who might be classified as "suffering from an inferiority complex" is, in Sartre's estimation, acting (which itself implies a conscious decision) upon his own choice to present such an image, both to himself and to the world. In so doing, he hopes to evade some of the responsibility for his actions. In Sartre's terminology, his "essence" is to see himself as inferior. Such an individual is, from his own perspective therefore, neither free nor responsible to the extent that his various activities performed are done because he has an inferiority complex. He no longer acts as a free individual - he acts in a certain manner because he is an individual afflicted with an inferiority complex and therefore not an autonomous being. Sartre regards such an individual as afflicted only with bad faith. He is still a free and responsible person who has chosen inferiority as the way that he wants to be for others.¹ It is an attempt at escape, but an attempt which not only exhibits bad faith, but which also is destined to fail. The act of bad faith is itself an act of freedom; that is, a choosing not to be free. For Sartre, one is free in all respects except to not be free.

This position is weak if Sartre is maintaining that all persons are equally free to choose from the same number and

¹Jean Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), pp. 591-592.

kinds of alternatives. Sartre, however, does distinguish between the different "situations" with which people are faced. For example, home and educational environment is a situation which obviously differs among various individuals and classes. Nevertheless, Sartre asserts that each individual, regardless of situation, is equally free to decide upon the meaning of his situation and hence, the particular action or inaction which is appropriate for him to undertake in response to his situation.

Thus, we are not responsible for our situation in terms of its objective existence, but we are very much responsible for how we define the situation.

For to be free is not to choose the historic world in which one arises...but to choose oneself in the world whatever this may be.²

We are never locked into a particular situation because, since we are in a constant process of "becoming," we are never identical with what we have already made of ourselves.³ To use one of Sartre's examples, if a worker accepts a subsistence wage because it is the only way in which he can survive, he is still free in that he has chosen a specific response to his situation. He has made a choice regarding the value of his life by choosing barely surviving over not surviving at all.

This attempt by Sartre to deal with the issue of the

²Ibid., p. 668.

³Richard Bernstein, Praxis and Action (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 137.

individual situation does little to alter or rectify a fundamental problem in his theory. If Sartre's situations are different for each individual, then it is only through an underestimation of their significance that Sartre can claim that each individual remains equally free insofar as his choice of how he will define such situations are concerned. Sartre maintains that it is bad faith on the part of the individual which prevents him from fully exercising this freedom. It is, however, only through an overly individualistic and vague conception of freedom that he can hold this position. It may well be that all individuals have a capacity to say "yes" or "no" even if it is a purely physical capacity. But this says little regarding the wider differences in the quantity and quality of the choices which are made materially available to different individuals, as well as the great inequalities with regard to the risks and rewards for the different individuals who make such choices.⁴ Further, this position of Sartre's pays insufficient attention to the fact that it is quite possible to manipulate people in such a way that they are not motivated to act in the manner which Sartre describes. To put it more directly, it may be possible to render persons incapable not only of making rational choices, but of making any choices at all.

⁴Sartre does make note of the fact that to have the freedom to choose one's projects (which he affirms as being equal for all), is not the same as to have an equal chance of succeeding in such projects (which he admits are not equal for all).

For example, suppose person X is living within situation B. Situation B is doing significant harm both to X and to his community. Further, suppose that X can, if he so desires and chooses, change his situation to A, which would be a vast improvement for all concerned. For Sartre, regardless of which situation X does choose, he is responsible for that choice. However, suppose that X has been, in a sense, programmed in such a way that he either prefers B to A, does not see A as a viable alternative, or has been rendered incapable of executing any such choice. Sartre, to be consistent, must deny the very possibility of such intensive programming. Therefore, he would regard any of the above possibilities as being mere rationalizations and hence, acts of bad faith. As Sartre points out, it is still the responsibility of the individual, regardless of how he has been socialized or manipulated, to discover and create himself.⁵ He can make "errors" as regards how he goes about attaining his ends, but this does not alter the fact that the choice of the end itself is an act of freedom on the part of the individual.

In terms of the possibility of equality of opportunity, Sartre is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, it may be that equality of opportunity is implicit in the existentialist notion that existence precedes essence. All are equally capable of, and responsible for, making the choices which

⁵Jean Paul Sartre, Situations (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1965), pp. 364-368.

determine what they are. On the other hand, as soon as we introduce the notion of different "situations," the possibility of attaining equality of opportunity is sharply diminished. For even if we continue to maintain, as Sartre apparently does, that all do have the opportunity, as well as the responsibility and necessity, to make their own lives in an autonomous manner, and that such programming as was alluded to in the previous paragraph can be overcome by the individual; nevertheless the fact that the situations of people do differ, implicitly indicates that the ability to consciously make decisions is not going to be equally distributed. We can maintain that all are capable of doing X, and that all should do X, without implying that all are equally capable of doing X. Some may have greater barriers to overcome than do others, though in terms of moral autonomy, Sartre would deny this assertion.

For example, Sartre states that the slave and the master are equally free to choose their projects, though they each see and experience different worlds. In explaining this, Sartre appears to imply, though he does not use this terminology, that slave and master are within different paradigms and each makes choices, forms projects, and defines himself within his respective paradigms. For a particular slave and master this may be the case. However, a possibility which Sartre does not acknowledge is that a particular paradigm (or situation) may render those within it incapable of making choices, forming projects, and defining

themselves at all. If such is the case, then it is senseless to speak of the slave being as free as the master, or for that matter, to speak of the slave as being "free" in any capacity. This will especially be the case if the slave's paradigm negates even the possibility of suicide. As alluded to earlier, Sartre prefers to see such possibilities as a mere evasion on the part of the slave - an act of bad faith.

This illustrates one of the fundamental difficulties with Sartre's exposition of freedom and responsibility. In a number of the cases which Sartre presents, including the example of the individual who accepts the subsistence wage cited earlier, the "free choice" ultimately comes down to either an acceptance of a particular situation or order, or suicide. Hence, Sartre makes reference to one "choosing" to do something, despite the fact that the only alternative is death, because of the value which one chooses to place upon his life. In Sartre's presentation, the alternatives of life and death are analogous to any other sets of alternatives in the sense that one is condemned to make choices autonomously, and that any rational adult knows that the possibility of suicide always exists. Such a consciousness of suicide renders it a perennial choice for persons. Yet it does seem that an explanatory theory which does not appear to see even a prima facie case in favor of the alternative of living over dying has some fundamental limitations. If a prima facie case does exist in the minds of most persons

in favor of survival, can a person be said to be making a completely free choice when he prefers life at a subsistence wage to suicide? Are not the scales weighed sufficiently in one direction so as to render suicide a more difficult and less likely alternative to be chosen?

Sartre's repeated reliance upon suicide as an alternative to any particular life situation is, therefore, an evasion of the issue of free choice and individual responsibility. This evasion is heightened by the fact that suicide is not as viable an alternative for a person brought up with the belief that suicide is a mortal sin which condemns its perpetrator to eternal damnation. To this last example, Sartre again would claim that this is merely an example of bad faith and that the individual, by defining himself in such terms, has simply attempted to escape from his freedom and responsibility, an attempt destined to fail because the act of defining is itself an act of freedom. However, the question again arises, even granting that the choice of suicide does exist continuously for all persons, as to whether this implies that all are equally free to make such a choice.

The existentialist position, with its heavy emphasis upon the autonomy of the individual, his freedom and his responsibility to make the choices that define him as an individual, still has a great deal of difficulty accepting the possibility of equality of opportunity. Sartre is not speaking of an equal opportunity to attend college or obtain

desirable jobs. He is, instead, speaking to the question of human nature itself; to the question, that is, of whether all do possess the freedom and capacity to transcend their environment, their past, and other such "situations." Sartre's answer is in the affirmative, but for the purposes of this essay what is more significant is that regardless of whether or not we accept this questionable assertion, this in no way points towards an assertion of the existence of equality of opportunity to make such choices. All may be free and responsible, but Sartre has not shown that all are equally free and responsible.

Stuart Hampshire, in Thought and Action, addresses a number of these same issues in a manner somewhat different from that of Sartre. For Hampshire, the key element with regard to freedom and responsibility appears to be the individual's self-conscious awareness of his particular situation. Thus, for example, in the critical area of unconscious motivation, Sartre maintains that it does not exist and that to justify actions on such grounds is bad faith. It is also contradictory since we can hardly attempt to justify an action unless we are conscious of it. Further, to Sartre, there are no limits to our ability to be self-conscious. We act only in ways that we choose to act. Hampshire, while approaching this perspective, does not make the same assertion. He does accept the idea that person can act in ways that they do not "choose" to act to the extent that they are not aware of, and therefore not

responsible for, such activities. We are not really free and responsible individuals engaging in deliberate actions, until we become self-consciously aware of ourselves.⁶ Further, unconscious drives can exist and the individual is not fully responsible for them, or for actions resulting from these drives. However, as soon as we do become more aware of the relationship of such drives to our thoughts and actions, then we also become more responsible. A person can then identify his own limitations. Once this has been accomplished, the freedom to act or not to act, or at least to form intentions to overcome our drives, becomes operative.

When Hampshire discusses the idea of the individual's freedom with regard to forming intentions, though not necessarily with regard to specific actions, he approaches Sartre's view that a person's freedom to choose his projects bears no necessary connection to "success" in such projects. There does seem to be more emphasis by Sartre upon the individual's responsibility to be self-conscious, yet both authors regard the possibility of transcending one's own sphere to be ever present. Like Sartre, Hampshire draws a line regarding how far we can remove the individual from responsibility. His contention that all individuals have the responsibility to try to improve, rather than acquiesce in, their particular

⁶Stuart Hampshire, Thought and Action (New York: Viking Press, Inc., 1959), p. 175.

situation is of a highly existentialist nature.⁷ What is most crucial for Hampshire is that the individual be aware of himself. A person can excuse himself for actions committed in the past, prior to the development of self-consciousness, but with self-consciousness comes freedom and responsibility, both for present and future actions. What divides Sartre from Hampshire is that the latter implies that total self-consciousness may be impossible given the influence of social context. Thus, we can move from less self-consciousness to more self-consciousness, and therefore from being less free and responsible to being more free and responsible, but we cannot become fully free and responsible in the existentialist sense that Sartre appears to believe possible. Differing environments, and particularly differing economic conditions, can render the likelihood of self-consciousness as more or less likely. Lucien Goldmann, for example, claims, like Marx, that one's level of consciousness is, in large part, a product of one's social environment.⁸ Likewise, as shall be shown, a stratified society renders equality of opportunity impossible.

One possible way out of this problem might be to maintain that if an individual were so programmed or conditioned as to render him incapable of attaining self-consciousness, or even attempting to attain it, then that individual would

⁷Ibid., p. 186.

⁸Lucien Goldmann, The Human Sciences and Philosophy (London: Cape Publishers, Inc., 1969), pp. 87-89.

no longer constitute a human being. However, the question remains as to whether this implies that all are equally capable of self-consciousness. If such awareness is more difficult for some to attain than for others, or if forming the intention to become aware is more difficult for some than for others, than even at this basic level, equality of opportunity cannot be said to exist. It may be conceivable that complete equality of opportunity, in the sense of self-consciousness and autonomy, could be brought about, but only under a very different set of circumstances than currently exist in the United States.

It is clear that if the existentialist position, or at least Sartre's representation of that position, is difficult to reconcile with complete equality of opportunity, then surely visions of the human condition which place less emphasis on human freedom, choice, autonomy and responsibility are also inconsistent with the kind of equality of opportunity which we have been discussing. If Sartre is unable to present a solid case that equality of opportunity either can or does exist, it is unreasonable to expect a B. F. Skinner or a Karl Marx, with their respective images of human action and potential, to be more able to overcome the problems inherent in the full realization of equality of opportunity.

B. F. Skinner, while perhaps willing to admit of the possibility of attaining equality of opportunity, implies that such an endeavor would require a massive amount of

social intervention and engineering.⁹ Given the weight which he attaches to the external environment in terms of forming a person's personality, desires and capacities, Skinner must call for a basically equal environment for all if equality of opportunity is to be a viable goal. In Sartre's terminology, the "situations" of all must be made equal if all are to have an equal opportunity. As has been shown, Sartre denies that such a process must take place since the meaning and significance of the individual's situation rests upon the individual himself and the choices that he makes. For Skinner, the process that takes place is almost the exact opposite of what Sartre describes. To Skinner, the individual at birth is lacking free will, intentions or expectations, except for those basic drives related to self-preservation. The environment with which the individual comes into contact makes or conditions the individual as he grows. Thus, if all individuals come into contact with the same environment, they all will be "made" in the same way and hence all will have equal opportunity.

How far back into the individual's life such engineering must be utilized, and how far back Skinner is willing to go, is not of particular importance here.¹⁰ Suffice it to

⁹See B. F. Skinner, Beyond Freedom and Dignity (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1972).

¹⁰See authors such as Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958); and George Kateb, Utopia and Its Enemies (New York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1963), for critiques of Skinner's position.

say that while both Sartre and Skinner apparently see equality of opportunity as a possibility, only Sartre connects it with a notion of human freedom and choice. For Skinner, such a vision is nonsensical, given his view of how and why persons make choices at all, as well as his description of what, in fact, such choices constitute. In Skinner's world, the idea of an individual being responsible for his choices is itself contradictory. Since autonomy is eliminated and we are virtually powerless to affect the so-called "choices" that we make, we can hardly be held responsible for them. The point, for Skinner, is that given a particular stimulus, we are conditioned to respond in a particular manner. Therefore, Skinner is not speaking of choice at all, but instead is discussing conditioning and responses. Under these conditions, there is no real freedom or responsibility on the part of the subject.¹¹

A third method of dealing with the notion of human choice, freedom, and equality of opportunity is that of which Karl Marx and Jean Piaget make use. In this third approach there is a kind of synthesis of both Sartre and Skinner. According to this approach, an interaction process takes place between the individual and his environment in which the individual simultaneously shapes and is shaped by the external world. In Marxian terminology, peoples' consciousness are a reflection of the material conditions

¹¹Noam Chomsky, "The Case Against B. F. Skinner," The New York Review of Books, December 30, 1971, p. 19.

around them. It is not, however, only a reflection since persons use their consciousness to try to alter these material conditions. In so doing, the newly created material conditions which they have helped to create, affect them in different ways leading to a different consciousness and to the likelihood that both material conditions and consciousness will again be altered in the future. Hence the individual and the environment are products of each other in an ongoing interaction, and cannot be spoken of in isolation from one another.

According to this paradigm, therefore, both Sartre and Skinner are incorrect in that each of them sees the process as fundamentally a one-way street. Skinner views environment as determining the total make up of the individual insofar as his wants, capacities and choices are concerned. Sartre, while admitting that the external world does have an effect upon the individual by defining, in some vague manner, the parameters of his choices, nevertheless is unwilling to see the significance of this factor and hence regards the isolated individual as totally autonomous and therefore totally responsible for all of his choices. The Marxist position does not absolve the individual from responsibility for his choices and actions, but it is far more willing than Sartre to accept and deal with the importance of the parameters of consciousness which the environment creates, and with the related problem of how such parameters can be transcended. The fact that the parameters can be transcended at all in

no way eliminates their significance in this interactionist perspective. The dialectic process is still at the root of an individual's actions and consequently, the freedom and responsibility of the individual is neither as total as Sartre claims nor as illusory as Skinner asserts. In this process, the individual does not merely react to his environment but, by his actions, helps to create his environment. Man is active, but not in the same sense that Sartre describes. His choices do make a difference, and not just for the individual actor.

Jean Piaget adopts a position similar to Marx regarding human action and responsibility, though his terminology is less political and his emphasis primarily upon the development of the child. He too sees behavior as developing through the interaction of the individual with the environment, as opposed for example, to the stimulus - response mechanism that Skinner regards as fundamental to human behavior. Nor does Piaget regard man as a passive receptacle of experience. Instead, the individual is active and does form intentions and purposes.¹² In addition, the individual is active in the sense that he can and does make adjustments as he comes into contact with the outside world. The interaction process which takes place simultaneously involves

¹²J. Mcv. Hunt, "The Impact and Limitations of the Giant of Developmental Psychology," in Studies in Cognitive Development: Essays in Honor of Jean Piaget, ed. by David Elkind and John H. Flavell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 8.

both "assimilation" (an adjusting of the environment to fit oneself), and "accommodation" (an adjusting of oneself to fit the environment).¹³ The individual organizes the experience, experience does not just directly affix itself to him. Thus, as he views the world, there is both an assimilation by the subject and an accommodation of the subject. How he organizes the experience determines the manner in which the experience determines, or influences, his future. To an extent, the individual, through his activity, does help to construct his own world.

It is important to re-emphasize that the large role that both Marx and Piaget ascribe to human activity is quite dissimilar to that of Sartre. Piaget is careful never to exclude equal roles for experience and choice in shaping human action. This is the basis for the interactionist approach. For example, Piaget does not regard it as possible that there can be a sudden and radical jump in the cognitive development of the individual. The reason for this is that:

...the organism can assimilate only those things which past assimilations have prepared it to assimilate.¹⁴

Change via assimilation must be slow and gradual, leading to continuity in development. This being the case,

¹³John H. Flavell, The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1963), p. 19.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 50.

it is clear that Sartre's autonomous individual, able to do, or at least to choose to do, whatever he pleases regardless of his past, is an impossibility in Piaget's paradigm. Instead, Piaget criticizes the existentialist image of the "free" man by asserting that the individual who believes himself to be totally free only succeeds in becoming unconsciously affected by others.¹⁵

This discussion indicates the immense difficulty in attaining full equality of opportunity. The "equal access to a range of specified resources" aspect of the definition of equality of opportunity obviously can be extended to mean that all individuals must either already be equal, or be made equal, prior to the attainment of equality of opportunity. In fact, we might be able to make the case that all persons must not only be equal, but also the "same." Thus an idea which seems to be premised on the notion of diversity, competition, freedom, and winners and losers, may instead imply a rigidly conformist, tightly engineered and stagnant society. The conclusion to be drawn here is that total equality of opportunity may be impossible due to certain aspects of the human condition. However, to reiterate a central theme of this essay, different contexts may be more or less conducive to a closer approximation of equality of opportunity than currently exists.

¹⁵Jean Piaget, Insights and Illusions of Philosophy (New York: World Publishing Company, 1971), p. 16.

The Question of Talent

In dealing with the possibility of equality of opportunity, a number of the more substantial issues and related problems may be discussed through confronting a specific issue - that of an individual's talent. The concept of talent is generally defined as something which a particular individual "has," much like a part of his body, usually gained either through an hereditary genetic endowment, or simply via chance. For a talent of any sort to be utilized, there must be some combination of natural endowment, environment and individual motivation. If this is what constitutes talent, and if, as is generally believed, talent does have an important connection to our chances for success in the world, then the implications of talent for equality of opportunity are substantial. On the other hand, if we argue that there is no such quality as talent, or that the "natural endowment" aspect of talent has been highly exaggerated, then there are different but equally significant implications for equality of opportunity.

Let us first assume that talent is a sort of "gift" which is an essential part of a particular individual. In terms of the notion of equality of opportunity, one of the first and most obvious points to be made about such talent is that the possession of it is not "earned." The exercise of talent may involve something which the individual does, but the mere possession of it is a result of either heredity

or chance, and therefore is something over which the individual has neither control nor responsibility. The relationship of this issue to equality of opportunity can be seen in the following example. Suppose that an art contest is to be held with the winner being the individual who paints the finest painting. In their attempt to be totally objective, the judges are not told the names of the contestants until after they have selected the winning work. Hence, the judges can only use their aesthetic judgment in determining the best painting. Therefore a claim can be made that there is an equal opportunity for each of the contestants to win the contest. Further, to ensure that it's not just a matter of some having more expensive equipment than others, all are supplied with the same quality and quantity of supplies.

Before going on, two assumptions must be made. First, it must be reiterated that we are assuming that such an entity as innate artistic talent does exist in unequal quantities among different individuals. Second, we are assuming that the judges' standards do conform, at least minimally, to some objective standards of what constitutes "good art."

Given the above conditions and assumptions, it follows that, all other things being equal, the most talented is most likely to win such a contest. Now the question arises: Is such a contest truly run on the principle of equality of opportunity? Certainly the "race" is not unfair to the extent that personal biases in terms of a contestant's wealth or fame are not relevant to the outcome. On the other hand,

is it fair, and is it equality of opportunity, if the outcome of the race is foreordained by the chance distribution of talent? It may be argued that the possession of the talent constitutes only a part of the requirements for winning the contest. Contestants must be willing and able to make the fullest use of such talent. In fact, it is quite possible that a less talented individual, who is willing to put in a greater effort, may succeed in having his painting judged superior and thereby win the contest. This argument might conclude that equality of opportunity does exist in that it is possible for anyone, regardless of innate talent, to win.

The above argument suffers from the defect of not coming to grips with the fundamental issue. It is not that the possession of some innate talent necessarily allows us to win those contests which involve the use of that talent; rather it is that when we possess a talent, we are at a decided advantage over those without, or with less of, that particular talent. Effort does not become the chief criterion for determining who wins because if a talented contestant and an untalented contestant exert the same amount of effort, the talented individual will win every time. Where does this leave equality of opportunity?

Perhaps we should eliminate the question of talent altogether and deal exclusively with effort. Rewards and victors could be determined by the amount of effort that is put into a particular enterprise. Certain obvious problems arise

with regard to the ability and possibility of accurately determining and measuring an individual's effort. This would be particularly difficult in dealing with the measuring of artistic effort since the very notion of somehow determining how strongly an individual is taxing his creative potential seems almost beyond the realm of the possible. Nevertheless, this sort of approach does have its adherents. John Gardner, in his book, Excellence, attempts to make the case that since all are not born equal insofar as talent is concerned, the optimum solution is to have equality of opportunity to attain some kind of "excellence."¹⁶ In other words, equality of opportunity to do excellently that which one is most able and suited to do. An equality of opportunity for excellence, but without all striving to attain the same kind of excellence. This may better fit the traditional American vision of equality of opportunity insofar as it appears to place almost complete responsibility upon the individual and not on genes, luck, or some other attribute beyond personal control. However, even if it were possible to determine accurately for each individual the general direction in which he or she should strive to achieve excellence, Gardner's position, nevertheless, exhibits a weakness which collapses the foundation of his ideal of equality of opportunity.

Gardner's problem lies with two interrelated issues:

¹⁶John W. Gardner, Excellence (New York: Perennial Library, Inc., 1961).

Is man fully autonomous? Is "effort" a part of the individual himself, or is it, at least in part, environmentally determined? Both questions may, in this context, be subsumed under the issue of talent. If, for example, one can be "born ambitious," a position to which few adhere, then individuals do not have the same opportunity to engage in a sustained effort to attain excellence. However, if upbringing helps determine the degree of effort in which one is willing to engage, then equality of opportunity is again an impossibility as long as different individuals have different upbringing. The third possibility is the acceptance of a view of man as fully autonomous, but here too some response has to be made to the question of "why" some individuals are willing and able to put in a stronger effort than are others. It will not suffice to respond to such a question by stating that "that's the way people are," or some similar rejoinder, particularly if the way people are has been isolated from both hereditary and environmental factors.

In essence, Gardner's position is but a restatement of the functionalist position in which each individual finds his or her proper niche. The only important distinction is that Gardner's view is somewhat more pluralistic. He places relatively few guidelines as to which areas of achieving excellence are superior and which should be discouraged:

provided that I am engaged in a socially acceptable activity, some kind of excellence is within my reach.¹⁷

¹⁷Ibid., p. 157.

This, however, does little to resolve the essential issues relating to the attainment of equality of opportunity. Nor do Gardner's guidelines for how and where to achieve excellence eliminate the possibility of striving for excellence in activities which could, with some objectivity, be deemed trivial or useless. In a society which wishes to encourage activity beneficial to the community as a whole, such vague guidelines are counter-productive.¹⁸ They do, however, serve the function of socializing children, particularly in the educational process, into the belief that all do have a chance via equality of opportunity. Generally, despite what Gardner may imply, the goal desired is money.

Let us assume that all, or at least most, individuals are born with some talent or talents. This assumption does not imply that all are born with the same kind of talent, nor that all are born with the same amount of talent. We can also assume that each individual is sufficiently autonomous and responsible so as to be capable of the same degree of effort. Given such assumptions, is it not possible to accept equality of opportunity as a viable possibility in the sense that we could create an environment more conducive to allowing or encouraging all persons to develop their respective talents to the fullest? Even aside from serious difficulties inherent in the above assumptions, the answer

¹⁸For a criticism of Gardner which, though elitist in tone, does make some telling points, see David Lyons, "Equality and Excellence," Ethics, LXXVI (July, 1966), 302-304.

must still be in the negative.

In the first place, there are two forms of equality of opportunity which must be distinguished. There is the equality of opportunity to develop our talents, whatever they may be; and there is the equality of opportunity to be a "success" in society, a notion which, in American society, generally implies some combination of wealth, status, and happiness. For the former, the chief obstacle has to do with equalizing motivation; for the purposes of this argument we are assuming that such an equalization is possible. However, to allow for each individual to have an equal opportunity to develop his or her talent requires a number of pre-conditions which are unlikely to be attained. Regardless of what our inherent talent may be - and it must be kept in mind that we are now speaking in terms of inherent possession rather than environmentally produced talent - it nevertheless follows that if we are in an environment which severely restricts or perhaps negates the development of that talent, then we do not have the same opportunity to develop that talent as those born into more advantageous environments. For example, if one has a talent for painting, but is born into a poor rural family in which it is necessary to labor almost continuously to survive, the chances for developing such a talent are considerably diminished. It may be possible for a truly motivated and talented individual to overcome such obstacles and thereby to develop this particular talent, but this hardly can lead to the conclusion

that such an individual has had an opportunity equal to that of the child of more wealthy parents. Similarly, to borrow from an example discussed by Charles Frankel, if an individual is born in the heart of New York City, he is not going to have the same opportunity to develop any innate talents that he might have to play baseball as he would have were he born and raised in the more wide open spaces of Oklahoma.¹⁹

In both of the above cases it is still possible for the talented but environmentally disadvantaged individual to give his best effort at developing his particular talent. Yet he is less likely to try if the environment acts to discourage such an attempt, and is more likely to fail should he make the attempt. It is not at all an easy matter to ensure that all have an equal opportunity to develop their talents. Even if we assume that all are equal with respect to putting forth the same amount of effort, it is also unlikely that people born into different environments which directly affect their chances of developing their specific talents will be assured of the means to put forth the extra effort which would be required.

The fact that talent, regardless of its source, requires at least minimally favorable environmental conditions in order for it to develop, indicates that talent cannot be examined or judged in isolation from the environment in which it has or has not been nurtured and developed. Nor

¹⁹Frankel, "Equality of Opportunity," 202-203.

is this particular type of problem limited to the necessity requiring two individuals having the same talent to be raised in the same environment in order for them to have equality of opportunity to develop such talent. There is also the problem of two individuals having different kinds of talents being raised in the same environment. In this case, we must deal with the likely possibility that the same environment may be far more conducive to the development of one form of talent over another. Thus, what appears to be implicit in the attainment of equality of opportunity to develop a talent is not merely the same "neutral" environment for all - a requirement impossible to meet even under the best of circumstances - but rather, the creation of that variety of environments suitable for the development of various talents. Even Skinner would probably regard this goal as being unattainable.

To conceive of meeting such a goal, the attainment of equality of opportunity would require that we somehow discover at a very early age just what each child's talent was, and then direct that child into an environment conducive to the development of that talent, and to which all other children, possessing the same talent in the same quantity, would also be sent. Hence society would become subdivided, at least at the level of child rearing and education, into numerous areas by talent. The problems of such an undertaking are legion, and they are intensified by the necessity of dealing with, for example, the child who appears to have

an abundance of different talents as well as the child who, though talented, may require more time to develop. As regards the former, society would either have to establish its priorities as to which of the child's talents were most important, though the question of whether this priority is with regard to society or to the individual would also have to be examined; or it might simply try to establish a separate environment for the multi-talented child, a sort of "renaissance man" environment. As for the talented but slow developing child, here too the difficulty in establishing equality of opportunity would be compounded by the negative psychological effects which might well be the result for such a child as he perceives others with similar talent progressing at a more rapid rate of development. Thus, with respect to the environment, to standardize it for all or to leave it as it is would be insufficient for equality of opportunity. Instead, society would have to draw together the right environments for the right individuals, and this would have to be done for all individuals. Hence, to call for presenting to all individuals an equal opportunity to develop their talents to the fullest is to open a Pandora's box of related difficulties and obstacles which are surely beyond solution.

There are also a great number of difficulties with the related notion of calling for each individual to have an equal opportunity to be "successful" within a particular society. The problem that inevitably emerges is that each society has

its own particular hierarchy of values.²⁰ Every society establishes its own view as to the kind of talent and behavior which is most useful and admirable, and rewards that talent or behavior accordingly. Therefore, to be born with a talent which society deems very useful - particularly if such a talent is in short supply - is to be given a far better opportunity for societal rewards than that given the individual who has the misfortune to be born with talent not greatly in demand. This indicates that if talent is even partially connected with heredity or some other uncontrollable force, the equality of opportunity to become a success is that much less likely. For if the so-called "born poet," seeing the unlikelihood of a prestigious and lucrative career as a poet due to the existing hierarchy of values, decides upon a different career, he will still be at a disadvantage with relation to those who have innate talent in such an alternative career. If we wish to make the argument that being an excellent poet is itself a form of success, then we must also confront the fact that in our society being a success generally involves some combination of wealth, status and power, and that most poets rarely achieve all three. It is also difficult to conceive of a pauper, regardless of what he happens to be doing, viewing himself or being viewed by others, as a "success" in the American context. Thus, as long as society rewards some talents more than others, there

²⁰Schaar, "Equality of Opportunity," p. 136.

can hardly be equality of opportunity.

For example, suppose we make the following argument: since success in society is dependent upon the possession and exercise of particular types of talent, and since all citizens do not possess such talents to the same degree, that therefore, becoming a success is mainly a matter of chance. Should we not then change the rules of the game? If the rules determining who shall be the winners inevitably favor one group at the expense of another, and the best that persons can hope for is an impartial application of such rules, then to alter the rules would be to change which groups or individuals come out on top. Thus the advocate of complete equality of opportunity may find himself calling for a method of choosing by lot those who shall occupy the positions regarded as most desirable in the political, as well as economic and social sphere. This would immediately and significantly alter the society's notion of success. Surely, for example, the status, prestige and perhaps material benefits attached to the top positions would diminish considerably once it was determined that anyone, irrespective of talent and effort, could attain these positions. What is more significant is the effect that such a means of determining top positions might have upon those with the most talent and ambition. Particularly if we accept the "homo economicus" theory of human nature, we can see that such a method of determining winners might well have a negative effect upon many individuals as

well as upon the society as a whole. The case hypothesized here is not merely selection by lot for temporary political office, as was occasionally done in some of the ancient Greek city states. Instead, equality of opportunity on all levels would be required so that virtually all positions would be selected in this manner. This change in rules would be to the benefit mainly of the less talented and at the expense of the more talented. Again, we are assuming that talent is both innate and distributed in unequal amounts among persons. The question here is: if a particular game requires a certain skill, and some do not have that skill, does equality of opportunity require that the rules of the game be altered so that such a skill is no longer required for success? In a sense, this is precisely what full equality of opportunity would logically require. For if equality of opportunity is to entail that each have an equal opportunity to be successful, and being successful requires the possession of certain specific talents which are not equally distributed to all in equal measure, then full equality of opportunity can exist only if we break the chain at the point of responsible choice.

Given the assumption of a genetic component of talent, it is obvious that we cannot attack the chain at the level of each individual possessing qualitatively and quantitatively unequal degrees of talent. Therefore, the rules of the game must be altered so as to make talent virtually irrelevant as to success in society in terms of wealth and prestige.

For reasons already discussed, we cannot make effort the chief criterion for attaining positions in society. Thus, chance in selection of what we do and what the rewards shall be becomes the criterion to parallel the chance aspect of being born talented in the first place. In this way we would approach the attainment of equality of opportunity, but we would also be dealing with a form of society so abstracted from political and economic life as we know it that it is almost impossible to conceive of it ever coming to pass or working for long if it were eventually established. What conceivably could be brought about is a society which awards positions according to some combination of talent and effort while awarding wealth in particular, by some other criterion - perhaps need. However, when equality of opportunity is not the goal so much as the stability inducing image of equality of opportunity, then the latter society is impossible.

Let us now suppose that talent is not an innate and/or genetic product, but instead is, in large part, a result of the external environment. What are some of the specific measures which would be required to make equality of opportunity a reality, given the assumption of a significant environmental component of talent? It shall be shown that the more stratified a society is, the more nearly impossible the attainment of equality of opportunity becomes, regardless of whether such stratification is *de jure* or *de facto*.

The Class Structure

If talent is environmentally shaped, either wholly or in part, and if talent is required for success, then it is clear that equalization of environment becomes a necessity. It is crucial to see that this entails a great deal more than, for example, the abolition of inherited wealth. Though the latter is significant, it is but one, and by no means the most important, of a number of factors and characteristics passed from parent to child which interfere with the attainment of equality of opportunity. The relationship between the class position of the parents and the values, behavior, and eventual class position of the child has been discussed by Melvin Kohn in Class and Conformity.²¹

Kohn discovered that the values of the parents are intimately connected with their particular class, that such values are transmitted from parent to child, and hence, that the values adopted by the child are highly conducive to his or her remaining in the same class as the parents. In examining three different studies, Kohn shows that different classes lead very different lives and dwell in different worlds. This being the case, their hopes, fears and the behavioral demands which they place upon their children will be notably different from class to class. Thus, for the child of middle class parents, the parents are likely to

²¹Melvin Kohn, Class and Conformity: A Study in Values (Homewoods, IL: Dorsey Press, Inc., 1969).

place more stress upon values such as curiosity, happiness and consideration for others; while for the child of working class parents, the values more likely to be stressed involve obedience, conformity and neatness. Such value differences may more adequately be described in terms of upper and middle class children learning to place more emphasis upon their own internal standards of conduct and a greater confidence that their actions are more than just their arbitrary and untrustworthy whims. The child of working class parents, according to Kohn, is less likely to rely upon such internal standards and instead is more comfortable with adherence to society's external rules. Hence, the latter child, having inculcated these values, is more likely to conform to the specific rules of society and be more rigid in the way that he applies them both to himself and to others.²² This is also illustrated in terms of what each group of parents surveyed regarded as "punishable behavior" on the part of their children. Without getting into specifics, the working class parents surveyed were far more concerned with the external consequences than with the intentions of the child's behavior. For the middle class parents, the stress was the opposite. Punishment was deemed more appropriate when aimed at the intentions of the child.²³

²²Ibid., p. 80.

²³Ibid., pp. 97-100.

While these findings have important ramifications in terms of equality of opportunity, what is of greater significance is Kohn's analysis as to why the particular values transmitted from parents to their offspring are so different between classes. Kohn regards as most crucial the effect of the parent's worklife upon his or her values. A parent who is part of the upper or middle class in terms of income and prestige is likely to have a more satisfactory job than a parent from the working class. By "more satisfactory" is meant that such a position has far more intrinsic, as well as extrinsic, satisfactions. There is a substantial opportunity to engage in a variety of different tasks, and to exercise initiative and self-direction. Thus, there is more interest in the work, greater freedom and, if desired, a greater opportunity for community service.²⁴

The parent who is a part of the working class, especially the factory worker, is far less likely either to have, or give greatest stress to, intrinsic job satisfactions. Instead, he will emphasize extrinsic rewards such as higher pay, longer vacations, and shorter hours. On the other hand, the middle class worker will be less likely to stress pay in his hierarchy of values, not so much because he does not desire high pay as because high pay is not as problematical for the upper classes as it is for the working class. The less difficult a goal is of attainment, the lower

²⁴Ibid., pp. 139-142.

it will tend to be ranked in one's value hierarchy. Good pay is rarely an easily attainable goal for the working class parent and hence, his greater concern with it. Further, the job requirements and opportunities of this latter individual tend to have little, if any, relationship to initiative, self direction or creativity on the part of the worker. Instead - and an assembly line operation is the clearest example - what is usually required is obedience to the man in charge, conformity in behavior, and the ability to do the same work continuously throughout the working day. Thus, the job itself precludes both the need and the opportunity to engage in creativity and self-direction. In addition, because the worker in such a job will tend to have little control in the workplace, it is more likely that he will tend to see his actions in general as having little consequence.

This is very significant in terms of child-raising. Because the working class parent sees in his daily life that his survival and security depend upon obedience to authority and conformity to the socially accepted, this is the sort of behavior that he will encourage, either consciously or subconsciously, in his children. Therefore, the child of working class parents will be brought up in a "stricter" environment, while the child of middle or upper class parents will tend to experience a more tolerant and egalitarian family life.²⁵ It follows that as the child grows to adulthood,

²⁵Ibid., p. 109.

he or she will be more likely to retain such values and eventually to pass them on to his or her own children.

This relationship has important ramifications for equality of opportunity. What Kohn has illustrated is that as long as the class system which currently exists in most developed capitalist societies continues and, in particular, as long as the hierarchical division of labor persists, the attainment of equality of opportunity is highly unlikely. Given Kohn's evidence of a reciprocal relationship between job and values, each helping to shape the other, it becomes that much more likely that both values and job, or at least job capacity, will be passed along intergenerationally. The parent's values, which are primarily suited for, and partially a result of, his particular place in the hierarchical division of labor, will tend to be passed along to the child, thereby rendering that child capable of serving at that same level, but less capable of working at other levels. The working class father whose job demands of him conformity and obedience, rightly perceives such values to be a necessity for whatever success, or at least security, he may attain at his position. Often he will pass such values on to his offspring, regardless of whether the parent wants his child to do the same work as he does, or whether he desires and pushes his child to attain a far higher status. Assuming that the child has adopted such values, he is, even before he ever enters the job market, rendered virtually incapable of adequately

filling the higher status positions which may require persons willing and able to think creatively, take the initiative and direct themselves.²⁶ What has been created here is a sort of self-perpetuating mechanism by which first values and then class are passed along from parent to child.

Kohn does not ignore other factors which help to shape the child's values and thus determine his eventual level in the division of labor. For example, education level is also significant in this regard. The higher the level of education, the more curiosity comes to be valued, the greater experience gained in independent thought and the greater capacity achieved for self-direction.²⁷ However, since education level, both qualitatively and quantitatively, is largely a function of social class, it does not appear to be as crucial a factor as social class itself in determining eventual status. This again illustrates that equality of opportunity in a stratified society with a hierarchical division of labor is an unrealizable goal.

Such a lack of intergenerational mobility is not inevitable. Certainly it is not an unheard of occurrence for a child of working class parents to achieve higher status, nor for the child of upper class parents to descend in the class ladder. However, it is sufficiently unusual to be regarded as the exception rather than the rule. To cite just

²⁶Ibid., pp. 198-200.

²⁷Ibid., p. 31.

one example, only 7.8 percent of American children of working class parents ever make it to the upper level positions of American society.²⁸ In terms of overall trends, it is most typical for the child to remain in the same class as the parents, or to move up or down only a short distance in the class ladder. What the exceptions do accomplish is to preserve the myth of equality of opportunity and thereby render more stable the existing class system.

If Kohn is correct in his analysis of why mobility is minimal, then attaining equality of opportunity cannot occur so long as the hierarchical division of labor remains as it is. The passage of legislation outlawing discrimination in employment or raising the minimum wage, or increasing educational benefits for the poor, or establishing a pure merit system in employment would still leave society a long ways from equality of opportunity. The parents can only prepare the child for the world as they know it, and that world is greatly influenced by their worklife and social class. As Kohn states:

Social class is significant for human behavior because it embodies systematically differentiated conditions of life that profoundly affect men's views of social reality.²⁹

The attainment of full equality of opportunity would also require a number of specific measures which are very

²⁸For a more complete picture of mobility statistics, see U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Toward a Social Report (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 24.

²⁹Kohn, Class and Conformity, p. 189.

unlikely to be attempted and probably impossible to achieve even were the attempt to be made. Specifically, equality of opportunity would require that the environment be engineered so as to provide an equal chance for all. It is manifest that a number of obvious factors which are a part of the environment would have to be eliminated. For example, a society desirous of attaining full equality of opportunity, or at least of approaching it, would certainly have to eliminate racism and sexism, de facto as well as de jure. This is not a particularly controversial idea, though how to put it into effect is no small matter. Nevertheless, few consistent advocates of equality of opportunity would argue against this requirement.

Somewhat more controversial than the elimination of such obstacles as racism and sexism, but nevertheless a clear precondition for equality of opportunity, would be the elimination of inherited wealth. On the one hand, it is obvious that if the opportunities for developing talents are to be equalized, and if all are to have "equal access to a range of specified resources," then inherited wealth is inconsistent with equality of opportunity. For inherited wealth is not "earned" by the recipient in the same sense that he "earns" money at a job, and it almost inevitably presents the recipient with "unfair" advantages over those who might be equally talented but who have not any inherited resources. Referring back to the race analogy, this means that, in a particular race, all are not starting from the

same point. This disparity is heightened by the fact that in many modern societies, money is both a means to the winning of the race as well as a reward for winning the race.

On the other hand, arguments also have been made in opposition to eliminating or heavily taxing inherited wealth. Robert Nozick makes the point that merely because a person has done nothing to "merit" an inheritance, this does not, in itself, render it an "unfair" exchange. Rather, he places the emphasis on the freedom of the giver to present his wealth or whatever to whomever he pleases.³⁰ However, this argument while having a place in dealing with the relationship between equality of opportunity and individual freedom, does not, in itself, contradict the notion that full equality of opportunity would require the elimination of inherited wealth. Basically, this argument of Nozick's forces us to make a choice between equality of opportunity and a particular notion of individual freedom. It does not present a case for saying that the free and unimpeded right to inheritance is consistent with the attainment of equality of opportunity.

It is clear that wealth is not the only inheritable good which can prevent the realization of equality of opportunity. We could also present a fairly strong argument claiming that the family as it exists today must itself be eliminated. Different families, with their diverse and

³⁰Robert Nozick, Anarchy, the State and Utopia (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974), pp. 215-236.

perhaps unequal methods of child raising have created, not merely different, but also unequal environments for their offspring. This leads to some individuals having decided advantages over others, and thereby ensures inequality of opportunity in any society which retains a family structure.

This problem can be illustrated, and hopefully clarified, by examining the possibility of equality of opportunity in a chronological regression beginning with the child's school. It is generally acknowledged that equality of opportunity requires that schools, primarily elementary and secondary, be as equal as possible in terms of teacher quantity and quality, class size, extracurricular activity opportunities and facilities, and similar attributes. While some have made the point that an attribute like the opportunity and facilities for extracurricular activities have an effect, not so much on learning per se as on the creation of a more enjoyable environment in school,³¹ it is also true that a more enjoyable scholastic environment is itself conducive to a more positive attitude toward schooling, and thus is more conducive to learning. At a minimum, therefore, expenditures on schools, both within and between school districts, would have to be standardized. Whether this would be done on a per school or a per pupil basis is one of the issues that would have to be resolved.

Expenditures in themselves, however, deal with but a

³¹Christopher Jencks, et al., Inequality (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972), p. 29.

part of the problem. To provide for equality of opportunity—there would have to be, in addition, as complete an integration of all pupils as could be accomplished. This goes far beyond the already demonstrated difficulties in attaining racial integration. Economic and social class integration would also be required as long as the society itself was stratified along class lines. This would be a far greater task than racial integration, for it would require either that all school districts themselves be integrated by class, which probably would involve a lowering of the costs of buying and owning a home in a wealthy neighborhood; or a busing program which would dwarf the contemporary busing to achieve racial integration; or the elimination of social classes themselves. We might try to counter the need for such class integration with the argument that, having already equalized expenditures and thereby the quality of all schools, regardless of the socioeconomic status of their respective districts, there would be no further need to integrate across school districts to achieve so-called "class integration." But schools and school environment do not differ just in the quality and quantity of faculty and facilities. They also differ sharply with respect to the quality of the students within the schools, at least insofar as "quality" of students is measured in terms of attitudes and abilities required for academic success. Fellow students are, in fact, a very significant part of the educational environment, particularly in terms of helping to shape students' attitudes toward

schooling. Because, for reasons already hinted at in the Kohn discussion, environments become decreasingly conducive to educational attainment as class level decreases, it would appear that full educational equality of opportunity must entail a class, as well as racial, integration in the school. Again, this assumes that the elimination of a class structure is not a viable alternative within the parameters of liberal capitalist reform.

Even assuming that the class integration could be attained, this would be insufficient. In the first place, there would remain the problem of differential treatment on the part of teachers according to the cultural background of their students. What this often involves is a sometimes subconscious distinction that a teacher sets up between, for example, those who have been encouraged, particularly in their homes, to present opinions or raise questions in a more coherent and intelligible manner, and those who have not. It does not necessarily follow that the teacher will "like" such students more, nor that such students necessarily will get better grades. What generally does result is that the teacher, with some accuracy, will perceive which students are the most likely to wind up in college and, because of the teacher's own educational background, he or she is likely to regard such an attainment favorably. Having come to the conclusion as to which pupils are "college material," the teacher will often treat them accordingly in terms of greater encouragement, higher expectations, and

the type of extra attention that the teacher may deem appropriate. By doing so, the teacher helps to fulfill his or her own prophecy as to which students have college potential. Further, by focusing upon what appears to be the student's academic potential, the teacher is not overtly violating the ethic of equality of opportunity.

The relationship of the above to equality of opportunity is heightened by the fact that it is generally in the homes of the upper class that, for example, the children will be most encouraged to read, the parents will be most able to help the child, the environment of the home, in terms of noise and number of other children, will be most conducive to learning, and the physical health of the child will be best. Given such a situation, it is not at all surprising that the children of wealthy parents will often seem the most willing and able to learn and therefore, the most likely candidates for higher education. Thus, as was seen in the Kohn study with regard to future employment, so too with regard to future educational attainment - the children of the wealthy are at a decided advantage regardless of the amount of integration which may be present.

This illustrates the problem in expecting equality of opportunity to be attained solely via the manipulation and engineering of the school environment. A more significant root of inequality of opportunity lies outside of the school and within the home and social relations of the family. To begin with, if equality of opportunity is to have any

relationship to "equal access" and to the idea of "earning" a place in society, then the very nature of the family runs counter to such equality of opportunity. For all families are not equal with respect to the kinds of environment, training, values and contacts that they provide to their children; therefore they do not all provide equal access to the resources of society and subsequent rewards, and no child can ever be said to have "earned" his position to the extent that he "deserved" to be born to a particular family.

It is clear that the family as we know it cannot co-exist with full equality of opportunity. It follows that if we accept the inevitability and/or desirability of a class stratified society, only two alternatives remain. Either complete equality of opportunity must be regarded as an impossibility, or at best, far too costly in terms of societal cohesion; or the raising of children must be removed from the hands of the parents and placed instead in the hands of the state. John Charvet suggests that state run nurseries would be the precondition for total equality of opportunity.³² In such a manner, the environment for each child could be equalized, and the role of the parents in shaping the child's values, intelligence and opportunities for success could be minimized, if not terminated. However, the removal of just the family would not suffice to ensure

³²John Charvet, "The Idea of Equality as a Substantive Principle of Society," in Contemporary Political Theory, ed. by Crespiigny and Wertheimer, p. 157.

complete equality of opportunity. Again, to quote Charvet:

The principle of equality of opportunity requires that everyone be in an equal position in regard to those who help and encourage development, i.e., parents, teachers, friends, etc.³³

Since "friends, etc." help in the shaping of values and outlooks, it is clear that those individuals who have access to persons whose values and outlooks are more conducive to success in a particular society will have a better than equal opportunity to be successful. Hence, it now becomes necessary to regulate with whom individuals become friendly in such a way so that each individual can somehow have the same opportunity to become friendly with an equal number of good and bad influences. The choice that the individual would then make would derive from some aspect of his upbringing, though since upbringing would be fairly standardized, it is likely that most would make the same choices. While this might seem to involve a logistic problem regarding whether there are a sufficient number of "good influences" to go around, this could be offset by the likelihood that, in theory, as more and more good influences are selected, the "selectors" themselves become "good influences." Thus, the pool of this latter group steadily increases while the "bad influences" slowly wither away.

This is an obviously farfetched scenario, and its applicability to the United States, where even day care centers are viewed by many with suspicion and hostility, is parti-

³³Ibid.

cularly limited. However, the alternative, according to Charvet, is to eliminate all associations such that no individuals are at all dependent upon any others for their development. As Charvet correctly points out, this would involve the abolition of society itself, and this too is unlikely.³⁴

Charvet's position is based upon the assumption of a liberal capitalist society. While no society has ever equalized all families in terms of size, values, etc., it is true that in a society without a class structure and based upon some rough equivalent of the socialist dictum, "To each according to his needs," the role of the family as a mechanism to channel offspring into the parent's class could be eliminated. The role and/or need for state run nurseries need not be as comprehensive as Charvet describes unless we are unwilling to go outside the parameters of stratified society.³⁵ Here, as with most other criticisms of equality of opportunity as an attainable and/or desirable goal, the problem is less with equality of opportunity per se than with the context in which it is so often framed.

Even with the ability and willingness to regress to the extent of the elimination of the parent's role in child

³⁴Ibid., p. 158.

³⁵Ibid. For an interesting examination of child raising in the Soviet Union, see Urie Bronfenbrenner, Two Worlds of Childhood (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970).

raising and the requisite standardization of opportunities for friendship with socially and intellectually advantageous individuals, we still have not gone back far enough. The point at which to draw the line between the individual and the environment can be stretched back to the pre-natal environment. A case can be made that unless we standardize pre-natal environments, equality of opportunity does not exist. Improper nutrition in the pregnant woman can have a detrimental effect, both physical and intellectual, upon the infant. Thus, we cannot guarantee equality of opportunity by dealing only with the child, even if the state takes full charge moments after birth. Instead, state intervention must commence in the pre-natal stage. As to what such intervention would entail, at a minimum it would have to ensure that all pregnant women be given an equal degree of rest, proper diet and adequate medical care. The alternative, assuming that we are still desirous of equality of opportunity, would be to eliminate the role of the mother altogether and perfect the so-called "test tube baby." Of these alternatives, the former would involve a degree of state intervention and egalitarian treatment sharply at odds with the prevailing liberal capitalist ethic. The latter alternative would require even more state intervention than the first and is unlikely ever to be realized in this or most other conceivable societies.

Equality of Opportunity Elsewhere

It is evident that equality of opportunity, in the sense of equal access, is a very dim possibility in any society. The regression from who gets hired and who makes the most money, back through the schools, the neighborhood, friends, family and even pre-natal environment demonstrates the overwhelming preconditions which would be required before full equality of opportunity could be said to exist. As the difficulty involved in accomplishing each successive prerequisite increases, the likelihood of their being accomplished decreases. However, we can also make the point that the likelihood of equality of opportunity is decreased to the extent that a society has class stratification. For this reason, equality of opportunity is less likely to be realized in the United States than it is in a number of other, somewhat more egalitarian societies.

In this regard, it is instructive to look briefly at the United States in comparison to various other societies with regard to equality of opportunity. For example, given what is already known about the difficulty of attaining equality of opportunity in a stratified society, we would expect that there would be more equality of opportunity in the socialist countries. For if such societies are less stratified, then it would seem to follow that equality of opportunity would be more likely to be approximated. Statistics seem to bear this hypothesis out. They reveal

that, at least in the "state socialist" countries where statistics are readily available, thus excluding a number of states such as Cuba and China in which equality of opportunity may be more fully realized, there does appear to be more equality of opportunity than in the more stratified capitalist nations. It is not necessary to show that such state socialist societies are entirely "classless" to make this point, only that whatever class stratification that they do have is significantly less pervasive than that existing in the United States. There is evidence that such is the case, despite periodic fluctuations in such states with regard to how strongly the goals of classlessness and economic equality are stressed. Recent work by Milton Mankoff, Frank Parkin and David Lane all describe how the socialist societies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, despite not being communist in the Marxist sense of the term, nevertheless exhibit far less inequality, particularly in terms of income, and far more mobility and equality of opportunity than do most Western societies.³⁶

Such mobility is shown in the higher likelihood for the children of manual workers in such state socialist countries to make it into the higher status and prestige non-manual occupations. For example, a 1960 survey cited by David Lane reveals that the children of working class

³⁶Milton Mankoff, "Toward Socialism: Reassessing Inequality," Social Policy, III (March/April, 1974); Frank Parkin, Class Inequality and Political Order (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1971); and David Lane, The End of Inequality? (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, Inc., 1971).

parents in the Soviet Union have a higher rate of upward social mobility than do such children in Denmark, France, Great Britain, Sweden and the United States. That is, 14.5 percent of such Soviet children make it into the more elite positions compared to only 7.8 percent in the United States.³⁷ It can be argued that this merely illustrates a greater favoritism toward the working class in the Soviet Union, as opposed to equality of opportunity. Such a hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that the same 1960 survey shows that upward mobility rates from the middle class to the elite is relatively similar in all the countries surveyed, including the Soviet Union.³⁸ However, the point would still remain that, at a minimum, we would have to conclude that there is more upward mobility in the Soviet Union than in the other countries surveyed.

In exploring why there is more mobility and equality of opportunity in the state socialist countries than in the Western capitalist countries, certainly a good part of the answer must lie with the greater degree of equality, particularly economic equality, that exists in the state socialist countries. Questions of individual freedom and political rights aside, the fact remains that there is less stratification in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union than there is in the United States. For example, in terms

³⁷Lane, The End of Inequality?, p. 29.

³⁸Ibid., p. 30.

of income differentials in the Soviet Union, the differentials, after an increase during the Stalinist period, are relatively narrow. In fact, the highest estimate of such differentials portray the ratio between the highest and lowest incomes in the Soviet Union as 300:1, and between the highest and average incomes as 100:1. In the United States, during the same time period, the ratios were 11,000:1 (highest to lowest), and 7,000:1 (highest to average).³⁹

Likewise, sexual equality in the Soviet Union is also far more pronounced, at least on the occupational level, than it is in the United States. For example, in 1967 women accounted for 52 percent of all professionals and 72 percent of all doctors in the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ In the United States during the same year, women accounted for approximately 38 percent of the classification, "professional and technical workers," of which elementary and secondary school teachers were the most prevalent, (42 percent of all professional women). The trend here was for more and more women to be placed in elementary school education.⁴¹ In terms of the medical profession, women's percentage of the total American physician force was approximately 7 percent. Sexual

³⁹Ibid., p. 74.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 88.

⁴¹U. S. Women's Bureau, U. S. Department of Labor, 1969 Handbook of Women Workers Bulletin 294 (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 98.

discrimination does exist in the Soviet Union, but as shown by the above figures, it is manifested occupationally to a lesser degree than in the United States.

Lane also shows that in terms of the social relations within the home, women in the Soviet Union are still generally allocated the tasks of cooking and cleaning. Occupationally it is also relatively rare for a woman to be in a position in which she gives direct orders to men.⁴² Nevertheless, in view of most societies hierarchies of status and income, and given that the professions are generally at or near the top of the scale, a greater percentage of women classified as professionals would seem to indicate a lesser degree of occupational sexual discrimination.

There are many reasons why there is more equality, particularly in terms of income, in the state socialist countries. Perhaps the key factor, particularly in the Soviet Union, is that there is no "private propertied class possessing great concentrations of wealth."⁴³ Because private ownership of the means of production is generally forbidden, it becomes that much more difficult for any individual to accumulate great amounts of wealth for his own or his family's personal use. For those who do accumulate much in the way of wealth or status, restrictions on inheritance lessen the ability to pass such wealth onto their children.

⁴²Lane, The End of Inequality?, p. 89.

⁴³Ibid., p. 69.

The fact that the state socialist countries also provide a great deal more in the way of free or low cost services including health care, housing, various cultural activities and transportation, helps make this more acceptable for all those concerned. Apparently the hoped-for result from such policies is that the need and desire for personal accumulation will be reduced. Whether the need or desire is still present is an open question. But it is true that the lessened personal accumulation has occurred. While an end to private property has not, as Lane points out, necessarily led to communal ownership or control, it is nevertheless true that the control that does exist is not inheritable in the same way that Western private property is.⁴⁴

Despite the above facts and figures however, it is also true that complete equality of opportunity has not been attained in the state socialist countries. While they are closer to it than the Western capitalist states, there are still very substantial obstacles blocking the path to full equality of opportunity, and such obstacles are quite similar to a number of those facing the capitalist states. For example, an interesting table in Lane's book examines the relationship between parental occupation and their aspirations for their children in a number of state socialist states. The findings indicate that there is a positive correlation between the two variables. The higher in status the parent's

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 46-47.

occupation, the higher will be the aspirations for the children. This indicates that either complete equality of opportunity does not exist in such countries, or is perceived not to exist by a substantial portion of the population, or that most parents have a tendency to feel that their children are simply not going to be able to get much higher on the occupational ladder for reasons of parental failure, inherited traits or whatever. Whichever of the above possibilities is the case, the result is reduced opportunities for upward mobility among the lower levels of the occupational ladder. While there is some upward mobility, and to a significantly greater extent than exists in the United States, it is primarily from manual occupations into industrial or "applied" occupations. Those entering the more highly placed occupations tend to come from families who are themselves non-manual workers with strong educational backgrounds.⁴⁵

Regarding education in such societies, Lane also points out that while school is open to all in the state socialist countries, success in school tends to be correlated with the educational background of the parents and their social position. Even with the financial costs of education being relatively low, and with the income differentials in society being far less extreme than in capitalist states, nevertheless the educational, and hence occupational, equality of opportunity that does exist is undermined by the family of

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 114.

the child, or as Lane refers to it, by the differences in "family milieux."⁴⁶ The environment which a family creates, in terms of hopes and aspirations for the children, in terms of cultural environment, and in terms of values is influenced by the educational and occupational background of the parents. Since such backgrounds differ, so too will the opportunities for the children of each family. This relates to many of the same conclusions which have been discussed regarding opportunities in the United States. The difference, and it is a significant difference, being that in the United States such inequalities of opportunity are greatly compounded by factors such as more inherited wealth, greater income differentials and fewer free or low cost services available to the citizenry, as well as a prevailing ideology which is far less egalitarian than that in the state socialist countries.

Hence, as long as current relationships in terms of property, political power, the division of labor, and the nuclear family continue to exist, so too will the inability to attain a truly egalitarian society with equality of opportunity. Focusing on the last two of these reasons, we see the same basic arguments used by Kohn and others to explain some of the reasons why the United States has not yet attained equality of opportunity. Thus Kohn's findings do have some application to the Soviet Union. But this is not

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 119.

surprising given that a hierarchical division of labor does exist in the Soviet Union.

However, it is important to reiterate that the state socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have advanced further along toward equality of opportunity than the capitalist states. This would seem to indicate that a more egalitarian framework than currently exists in the United States is a precondition for more, if not full, equality of opportunity. On the other hand, equality of opportunity in the United States is generally thought to necessarily and justifiably lead to the very stratification which is so contradictory to the attainment of equality of opportunity. If this seems peculiar it is because what passes for equality of opportunity in the United States never has been more than a political facade to justify existing class relationships. To view equality of opportunity as requiring an egalitarian setting undermines these justifications.

Affirmative Action and Reverse Discrimination

Having shown that complete equality of opportunity is impossible anywhere in the foreseeable future, and that, more importantly, high levels of stratification and inequality render even a substantial closing of the gap between the reality and the ideal to be highly unlikely within the existing American economic, social and political frameworks, it is instructive to examine a few of the more recent attempts to advance toward equality of opportunity. It is clear that

the ostensible purpose behind programs such as affirmative action in hiring, the use of quotas in accepting various minority groups and women into college undergraduate and graduate programs, and in some cases, policies of "open admissions," is to help foster equality of opportunity. The basic rationale being that since certain groups historically have been discriminated against, the most viable and fair way to alleviate this past discrimination is to discriminate in their favor today.

Such programs have come under fire both from proponents and opponents of traditional Western-style equality of opportunity. Daniel Bell labels such programs as a return to an ascriptive, as opposed to an achievement oriented, society, and thus against the very core of American tradition. Further, he regards such programs as damaging both to the society as a whole, and to the supposed beneficiaries. Reverse discrimination, he feels, leads to the lowering of societal and professional standards, damage to those still operating under the achievement ethic, and a significant blow to the self-esteem of those who are admitted or hired under such circumstances.⁴⁷ According to Bell, an advocate of equality of opportunity must reject an allocation of rewards on any principle other than competition open to all with talent and ambition determining who gets what.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Bell, "On Meritocracy and Equality," 37.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 41.

It is unfortunate that Bell does not specify how competition is to be made open to all in the light of what is known of the effect of past discrimination upon a group or individual's abilities and aspirations. Even within his own framework regarding the need for sharp differentials in wages and authority, Bell is very vague in terms of how past discriminations are to be handled. He acknowledges "the priority of the disadvantaged,"⁴⁹ while also opposing most measures which would seem to offer any remote hope of more than temporarily alleviating their disadvantages. He apparently would favor the continuation of the various welfare type programs as a means of granting to the disadvantaged their "priority," but ignores the more encompassing effects of past discrimination by opposing reverse discrimination in their favor.

Bell's position is quite consistent if we realize that he is not merely attempting to illustrate the value of meritocratic society, but also that he is assuming that the United States already is that meritocratic society. If we take the position that the contemporary United States is not a meritocratic society or even particularly close to being a meritocratic society, then we must deal with the possibility that existing inequalities of opportunity may well lead to many persons not developing their talents. Such a situation is a loss both to the individuals involved and to the community. Given Bell's assumptions, however, it makes

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 67.

little sense for him to accept the need for quotas, affirmative action, open admission, or any other form of reverse discrimination.

A somewhat more favorable approach to such reverse discrimination has been taken by George Sher in an article entitled, "On Justifying Reverse Discrimination in Employment."⁵⁰ While he states that other methods of compensating past victims of discrimination are preferable, and while his conclusions regarding the relative merits of such discrimination for Blacks as opposed to women are questionable, nevertheless he does present a position favoring reverse discrimination in a way which examines issues that Bell ignores. That is, he sees that equality of opportunity cannot come about without reverse discrimination.

The key to an adequate justification of reverse discrimination is to see that practice, not as the redressing of past privations, but rather as a way of neutralizing the present competitive disadvantage caused by those past privations and thus as a way of restoring equal access to those goods which society distributes competitively.⁵¹

Hence, in response to those like Bell and Robert Nozick, the latter claiming that reverse discrimination unfairly punishes those who themselves have had no hand in creating the victims' current position,⁵² Sher responds that

⁵⁰George Sher, "Justifying Reverse Discrimination in Employment," Philosophy and Public Affairs, IV (Winter, 1975), pp. 159-170.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 163.

⁵²Nozick, Anarchy, the State and Utopia, pp. 235-237.

their responsibility is not the issue. What is important is that they are the beneficiaries of such past discrimination, and it is a benefit to which they have no right. In comparison to those who reject reverse discrimination in total, Sher presents a position which does offer a reasonable justification for its utilization.

A critique of reverse discrimination which is quite different from that of Bell, Nozick and many others, is presented by Jean Bethke Elshtain. Criticizing the way in which reverse discrimination has recently been applied in the United States, and specifically dealing with the compensatory programs that have been pushed for women in America, Elshtain cites a number of problems which have arisen as a result of these programs. First, such programs tend to discriminate against young White males, leading them to bear a disproportionate share of the burden for past discrimination. (In this regard, Sher's argument may still hold, but nevertheless it does not make it any more of a pleasant situation for the young White males and may well lead to an increase in resentment towards those disadvantaged persons receiving the benefits.) Secondly, if reverse discrimination were to be completely fair, it would benefit all of those individuals, Black and White, male and female, who have been the victims of past discrimination. For example, it would include White workers as its beneficiaries. Finally, reverse discrimination involves, at best, a reshuffling of positions within

the system, not a change in the system itself.⁵³ This final point is crucial for Elshtain and for numerous other critics both of reverse discrimination and of equality of opportunity as practiced in the American context. They are concerned that more than a closer approximation to equality of opportunity is necessary for the attainment of a good society.

Implicit in proposals to bring about equality of opportunity via numerous forms of reverse discrimination is the problem that even if such programs could be implemented to a greater degree than is currently the case, the result would still be a substantial distance removed from equality of opportunity as it has been defined. There certainly are no proposals regarding the abolition of the hierarchical division of labor, the ending of the class system, or significant alterations in the traditional nuclear family which have a serious chance of being undertaken. Thus, even if we could discount the relative lack of comprehensiveness of most reverse discrimination programs, their lack of full implementation, and the sharp resentments that have arisen from many quarters regarding such programs, it is nevertheless clear that, insofar as equality of opportunity is their goal, they are doomed to fail.

For example, if we wish to create educational equality of opportunity via open admissions and the desegregation of public schools, then it makes little sense to stop at that

⁵³Elshtain, "The Feminist Movement," 473.

point. It would also be necessary to try to equalize the home environment as well. Christopher Jencks, in Inequality, deals with this issue by calling an end to income inequality as a far more important and effective method of attaining equality of opportunity than merely spending more money and in a more evenly allocated manner upon schooling.⁵⁴ Jencks denies that schooling per se has very much to do with either cognitive inequality or poverty. He therefore calls for income to be redistributed in a more equal manner, with both merit and need taken into account.⁵⁵ His rationale for this emphasis being:

variations in what children learn in school depend largely on variations in what they bring to school, not on variations in what schools offer them.⁵⁶

Further, a better indicator than schooling or test scores of where persons eventually ends up in terms of occupation is what Jencks refers to as "noncognitive traits," specifically, what type of personality they possess and the attitude that they hold.⁵⁷ Programs such as busing and quota

⁵⁴Jencks, Inequality, p. 10.

⁵⁵Ibid. For a critique of Jencks' assertions regarding both the relative lack of significance of schooling and the need for income equalization, see Patricia Cayo Sexton, "The Inequality Affair: A Critique of Jencks," Social Policy, IV (September/October, 1973), 53-61. Sexton argues that Jencks is mistaken in his low appraisal of the impact of schooling and that he is vague and impractical in his recommendations for reform.

⁵⁶Jencks, Inequality, p. 53.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 198.

systems in college admissions will have relatively little effect in this regard. As Kohn has shown, and Jencks appears to agree, the personality of the child, especially in terms of values, is connected with the occupational status of the parents. Therefore, a high degree of occupational inequality will inevitably lead to a high degree of unequal aspirations and subsequent low degree of equality of opportunity.

We need not totally agree with Jencks's specific recommendations for alleviating current difficulties, nor with his specific views on the role and value of educational institutions, to see that it is necessary to go beyond educational reform to attain a closer approximation to equality of opportunity than currently exists. And if, in realistic terms, it makes little sense to call for the creation of "test tube" babies, or for children to be raised in total isolation from their parents, it is reasonable to call for various structural reforms, in terms of income differentials, the hierarchical division of labor, and the social relations within the nuclear family without being a utopian theorist. For if such reforms are utopian, either within or without of a capitalist framework, then so too is the desire for anything more than a mere illusion of equality of opportunity. As has been shown, the significant problem is not that total equality of opportunity is impossible. What is more important is that an honest attempt to approximate equality of opportunity requires a more egalitarian setting. The fact that few

policy makers have attempted to move in this direction indicates how strongly the goal of equality of opportunity actually is held in the United States. It has become a political device utilized to avoid more substantive questions of social justice.

The next chapter will deal with the question of one response that has been made to the problems that have arisen when the image of equality of opportunity has been more difficult to maintain. When the same groups continually fall into the lower levels of the occupational and income hierarchies, then either we must admit that equality of opportunity does not exist, or we fall back on a more genetic approach to the subject and thereby claim that the victim is still to blame for his situation. Thus, genetic theories of intelligence have been utilized to rescue the image from the empirical evidence. Chapter IV will deal with the specifics of this attempt.

C H A P T E R I V
BIOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS TO EQUALITY
OF OPPORTUNITY

The Theories of Herrnstein and Jensen

As mentioned in the last chapter there are two types of obstacles to the establishment of equality of opportunity. The first, with which Chapter III has already dealt, involves the social factors which appear as inherent limitations to full equality of opportunity. The second obstacle concerns possible biological or genetic barriers to the achievement of equality of opportunity. It is this latter obstacle that will be dealt with in this chapter.

Two of the key figures involved in the genetic (I.Q.) controversy are Arthur Jensen and Richard Herrnstein. While Jensen concentrates upon the I.Q. situation of Blacks, Herrnstein is both less specific and more encompassing in relating genetic inferiority more to class than to race. Herrnstein argues that most of the poor are genetically incapable of achieving high levels of intelligence. He includes women among those individuals who tend to be less intelligent than the average white middle class male.¹ The positions of both Jensen and Herrnstein shall be discussed in terms of

¹Richard Herrnstein, I.Q. in the Meritocracy (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1973), p. 197.

their connection to the problem of attaining equality of opportunity, then critiques of Jensen and Herrnstein shall be examined with regard both to the validity of their theories as a whole and with regard to their implications for equality of opportunity. However, detailed analysis of their findings in statistical terms will not be emphasized since such an approach would go somewhat far afield from the specific implications of their theories to equality of opportunity.²

Richard Herrnstein's position regarding the heritability of intelligence and its implications for equality of opportunity can be summed up in the syllogism which he presents:

1. If differences in mental abilities are inherited;
2. If success requires such abilities;
3. If earnings and prestige depend upon success;
4. Then social standing will be based on inherited differences.³

As shall be seen, each of the above three "if" statements are far from certain. Herrnstein claims that as society improves the environment for all citizens, the heritability of I.Q. (which Herrnstein, like Jensen, equates with intelligence) will increase. This will occur because improved and more standardized environments will naturally lead to less external environmental influence upon I.Q.

²Articles dealing with this issue from a historical perspective may be found in Shaping the American Educational State, ed. by Clarence J. Karier (New York: The Free Press, Inc., 1975).

³Herrnstein, I.Q. in the Meritocracy, p. 199.

Or, if the effect of environment is still present, with equal environments it will be the same effect for all. Therefore, subsequent differences in I.Q. can be due only to genetic causes and thus, the effect of heritability on I.Q. will increase as the role of environment decreases.⁴

Indeed, Herrnstein claims that the removal of all environmental inequities and artificial barriers will not bring about more social mobility, since equality of social opportunity can only emphasize innate differences between individuals or groups based upon respective differences in inheritance. He concludes that full equality of opportunity is not a viable possibility.⁵ According to Herrnstein, if a limited form of equality of opportunity was put into effect it would ensure that those in the lower classes who had the highest I.Q.'s would, by virtue of that intelligence, rise out of the lower classes. The result of this process would be that the lower classes would soon be lacking any individuals with a high, or even average, level of intelligence. This process would not only render the lower classes less intelligent as a whole, but also would increase the distance between themselves and the middle and upper classes.⁶

Still another significant aspect of Herrnstein's

⁴Ibid., pp. 205-208.

⁵Ibid., p. 209.

⁶Ibid., p. 211.

theory is his belief that the combination of a genetically inferior class of people, permanently inferior by birth, plus the trend in today's society for the most menial and least intellectually demanding jobs to be taken over by machines - while other positions requiring a relatively high level of intelligence are increasing - will eventually lead to a sort of class of "unemployables." This group would be comprised of those too stupid to get jobs and eventually thus constitute a class of the heriditarily unemployable.⁷

Finally Herrnstein, in order to offset some of the problems of equality of opportunity, connects his theory with the educational process. He asserts that one's success in school is based largely upon one's I.Q., with both ability and attitude seen as a function of I.Q., and not upon such factors as the home or school environment. Therefore, the poor are generally poor because of low intelligence, and since it is virtually impossible to raise the I.Q. of students to any significant or permanent degree, the solution for the poor is not more schooling, but a different form of schooling more suited to their relatively low I.Q.'s. They should be trained for the types of jobs that they are intellectually capable of handling, not for positions for which their low I.Q.'s render them unfit. Hence, the solution is not more schooling, but more "diversified" education.⁸

⁷Ibid., p. 214.

⁸Ibid., p. 164.

It is clear that Herrnstein attaches a great deal of weight to both the importance and accuracy of I.Q. and I.Q. testing. He accepts the notion that I.Q., by itself, is not a sufficient explanation for academic and occupational success, but he does regard it as a necessary condition. On the whole, he also accepts the claim that the American occupational hierarchy is functional, necessary and stratified by intelligence. Further, his strong belief in the heritability of I.Q. to the extent that he portrays it as 85 percent inherited, 10 percent environmental, and 5 percent attributable to "test unreliability," renders him pessimistic with regard to the possibility of adequate compensatory educational programs. Just as present programs have failed, so too will any future attempts. Compensatory education programs are, therefore, "impractical."⁹

Arthur Jensen's position is in most respects similar to that of Herrnstein. Jensen too, cites the "failure" of existing compensatory educational programs and the meritocratic nature of the occupational hierarchy within the United States. Further, while recognizing that the environments of children can differ substantially, he downplays their effects by claiming that genes create the environment.¹⁰

⁹Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁰Arthur Jensen, "How Much Can We Boost I.Q. and Scholastic Achievement?" in Environment, Heredity and Intelligence, compiled from The Harvard Educational Review (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review, 1969), pp. 1-123.

Where Jensen does differ somewhat from Herrnstein is in the former's emphasis upon racial differences in I.Q. as opposed to Herrnstein's emphasis upon class. Jensen sees an average 15 point difference between Blacks and Whites on I.Q. tests with Whites consistently scoring higher. Therefore, when Jensen speaks of the problems of equality of opportunity, he is referring to attempts to give both Blacks and Whites the same opportunities. For example, he speaks of the intense pressure and frustration in the schools which derives from the assumption that all are relatively equal in intellectual capacity. Furthermore, he claims that environmental equality of opportunity would lead to even less equality of achievement between Blacks and Whites. Finally he cautions that without birth control, the high rate of reproduction among low status, low intelligence Blacks is potentially dangerous in that it is leading to an ever larger proportion of low intelligence individuals, thus bringing down the average intelligence level of society as a whole.¹¹

Critiques of Jensen and Herrnstein

There are several errors and untested assumptions made by Jensen and Herrnstein. Those relating to the specifics of their data collection as well as with the various problems and inconsistencies connected with the specific questions of heritability and the twin studies that they both utilize will

¹¹Ibid., p. 85.

not be dealt with in this chapter. Problems regarding their implicit assumptions about human nature, the status they give I.Q. tests, both as measures of intelligence and predictors of occupational and economic success, their casual and premature rejection of existing and future compensatory programs, and, particularly in Jensen's case, the racial implications drawn all are relevant to my thesis and thus subject to examination.

The status of I.Q. tests as accurate measures of what is regarded as intelligence is very much open to question. While both Herrnstein and Jensen, as well as various other proponents of I.Q. testing, define intelligence as being that which I.Q. tests measure, numerous other students of I.Q. testing are more cautious, if not skeptical, of such a claim. This skepticism has its basis in several aspects of I.Q. testing both as a measure and as a criterion of intelligence. Jensen and Herrnstein are confident not only that I.Q. equals intelligence, but also that the process by which they determine I.Q. is sufficiently accurate and reliable as to be applicable throughout Western culture.¹²

Rather than going into any specific detailed explanation of the concept "intelligence," Herrnstein and Jensen prefer instead to equate I.Q. with intelligence. Herrnstein admits that in defining intelligence, "subjective judgment must decide what we want the measure of intelligence to

¹²Herrnstein, I.Q. in the Meritocracy, p. 74.

measure."¹³ His next step is to maintain that such abilities are measured by I.Q. tests and therefore, that one's score on an I.Q. test is equivalent to one's intelligence. To buttress his argument, Herrnstein states that intelligence tests satisfy "common expectation" in terms of their ability to predict educational and occupational levels.¹⁴ This definition of intelligence has a number of difficulties. In the first place, "intelligence" is used to describe different things, not only between cultures, but within the same culture as well. There is no one way in which intelligence, or intelligent behavior, is understood. Furthermore, to describe intelligence in terms of "common expectations" as both Jensen and Herrnstein do, also presents a number of problems.

N. J. Block and Gerald Dworkin describe such problems as:

1. Too many different qualities satisfy "common expectations" as to what intelligence is.
2. Some such common expectations may be incorrect, but the lack of a theory of intelligence does not allow one to choose any for rejection.
3. The fact that some qualities are highly susceptible to measurement on an I.Q. test can in no way lead one to the conclusion that such qualities are the measure of intelligence.¹⁵

Block and Dworkin conclude that the very notion of a quality called "general intelligence" is itself highly

¹³Richard Herrnstein, "I.Q.," Atlantic, September, 1971, p. 50.

¹⁴Herrnstein, I.Q. in the Meritocracy, p. 106.

¹⁵N. J. Block and Gerald Dworkin, "I.Q.: Heritability and Inequality," Philosophy and Public Affairs, IV (Summer, 1974), 67-68.

problematical, and that if it does exist, there is certainly no consensus over what it entails. Jensen and Herrnstein, without much evidence, not only assume that it does exist, but also that it can be accurately measured via I.Q. tests. Thus, their position is weak even prior to a critique of the tests themselves.

Another possibility regarding the nature of intelligence which Jensen and Herrnstein appear to ignore, is the Piagetian interactionist model. This view sees intelligence not as being innate or 85 percent inherited, but instead as part of a developmental process in which intellectual abilities develop in a step by step interaction between the individual and his environment. David Layzer uses the analogy of building a house. The finished product is partly a result of the skill of the builder, and partly a result of his intentions and the environmental challenge that he faces. Hence intelligence is partly genetic, but it is also partly an adaptation to, and hence is influenced by, the external environment.¹⁶ Such an ongoing interaction cannot be separated into its component parts for the purpose of determining "how much" is genetic and "how much" is environmental because there are no separate and distinct parts.

The claim that I.Q. tests do measure intelligence as well as the further claim that they successfully predict educational and occupational success are even more suspect,

¹⁶David Layzer, "Science or Superstition?," in The Fallacy of I.Q., ed. by Carl Senna (New York: Third Press, 1973), p. 133.

particularly in light of the substantial criticisms of the "culture-bound" nature of these tests. What I.Q. tests do measure are certain specific abilities under certain developmental conditions. Any relation between such abilities and "general intelligence," assuming the latter does exist, is coincidental. On the other hand, the conditions are such that a strong case can be made that the results of the tests are inconclusive since the tests themselves are biased, many feel deliberately, in favor of those with an upper class background.

To gauge whether this is the purpose of I.Q. tests, along with the specifics of its "culture-bound" aspects, we must examine the tests themselves, both in terms of their content and the test situation. Numerous studies of such tests have found significant elements of bias in favor of one kind of socioeconomic background over another without any direct connection to the level of intelligence of the subjects. To begin with, those who draw conclusions regarding intelligence on the basis of I.Q. testing either must accept the proposition that, to a very substantial degree, equality of opportunity already exists in the United States, or that environment has very little, if any, effect upon the intellectual level that one attains. This assumption pervades Jensen's conclusions regarding class differences in intelligence. Either the environment of all children in the United States is equally conducive to intellectual

development, or the environment is equally irrelevant to intellectual development. If both of the above are rejected, then the whole structure of Herrnstein's and Jensen's positions collapses. They appear to assume a little of both of those positions. With these assumptions, differences in I.Q. level, which are presumed to reflect differences in intelligence, are explainable only by genetic factors. All other factors have been accounted for by the general equality of learning environments for all children. Even assuming that environmental factors have a limited effect upon I.Q. scores, it is still a significant step, requiring further assumptions about the tests themselves and their relationship to intelligence, before we can draw inferences about the heritability of intelligence. However, it is important to realize that the assumption that environmental factors have little effect upon I.Q. scores is itself false. The best evidence indicates that such tests do, in fact, discriminate against both non-Whites in particular, and the poor in general.

There is first, the test situation itself. The fact that the tester is most often White, poses an immediate problem for many Black children who have already begun to associate various fears, suspicions, and hostilities with White-controlled activities. An analogous problem may exist for poor children by virtue of the tester generally being middle class. It is generally accepted that fear, anxiety, and suspicion on the part of individuals taking such tests

may well depress the score achieved. This will especially be evident in that section of the test when the child is asked to repeat digits in the reverse order in which the tester says them. Anxiety regarding the test and/or tester will inevitably lower the score here.¹⁷ Hence, even before the test is actually administered, it is possible to see factors which may render the results inapplicable to the measuring of intelligence, particularly if we are attempting to compare levels of intelligence between the classes or between the races based upon such tests.

An even more significant problem regarding the usefulness of I.Q. tests has to do with the actual content of the tests, particularly their vocabulary and comprehension sections. For example, the vocabulary section measures the subject's ability to give accurate responses to a large number of words of varying degrees of difficulty. The more words that the subject can define, the higher his score and hence, the higher level of intelligence that he will be judged to possess. The problem is that this implicitly assumes that children somehow develop a vocabulary in a vacuum - that the quantity and quality of their verbal ability is attained in isolation from, or with a significant degree of irrelevance to, the environment in which they are being raised. Such an assumption is not warranted by evidence. A vocabulary is developed in various ways; through

¹⁷Jane R. Mercer and Wayne Curtis Brown, "Racial Differences in I.Q.," in The Fallacy of I.Q., pp. 79-82.

verbal interactions with others, through contact with radio and television, and through reading. It is not necessary to go into the very obvious problems experienced by children whose parents do not speak English in the home. Obviously environmental factors are crucial in vocabulary development. For example, if the subject is brought up in a poor area, in which most of his contacts, family, friends, etc., are not well educated, it is unlikely that he will readily attain a familiarity with the kinds of words which appear on the vocabulary section of the test, and whose comprehension is essential to attaining a high score. Hence, in this respect, the score on the vocabulary section will be, in part, a reflection of his class background, rather than innate intelligence, even assuming that innate intelligence does exist.

To score very well on the vocabulary section would probably require that the child have done a substantial amount of reading. However, a child does not simply "decide" to do a great amount of reading. A number of factors in his environment will render such a decision more or less likely. Certainly the motivation will be influenced by the parents. If the parents themselves do very little reading, they will be less likely to provide a motivating force for extensive reading by the child. Furthermore, in another obvious reflection of the role that socioeconomic class has upon reading, even if the child is motivated, either by friends, parents, or teachers, the chances for finding a physical environment conducive to reading are diminished as we descend

the class ladder. For example, the families of the poor are generally larger than the national average. Large family size, combined with low income level, will generally result in the unlikelihood of the child having a room of his own or being able to find any quiet place in the home in which to read or study. Furthermore, it will result in the parents being unable to spend much time in terms of individual attention to and encouragement of each child. The child, in turn, is forced to take a greater degree of responsibility for his own physical well being. The result, quite naturally, is for the child of a poor family to have less inclination, time, and a less favorable physical setting to read and study. Subsequently such a child will have less of a chance to score well on the vocabulary section of the test for reasons which have no connection to intelligence as an inherited trait.

Another aspect of the test which actually measures something other than intelligence is the comprehension section. This section basically contains a series of questions based upon "What would you do if...?" type situations. The subject is to choose one of a number of possible responses which are deemed "correct" or "incorrect" depending upon what the test designer regards as appropriate attitudes or behavior. While it is conceivable that intelligence may figure into certain attitudes and values, it is by no means clear that they are one and the same. To assert that such attitudes and values are somehow genetically inherited is to

make a highly tendentious claim.

Thus, in several aspects of the test, for reasons having little to do with either genes or intelligence, a child from a middle or upper class home is likely to score significantly higher than a child from a working class home. It is almost inevitable, as Melvin Kohn has shown, that not only genes but also values will be transmitted intergenerationally. Such values will affect how one does on the I.Q. test. It is, therefore, difficult to see how tests, based upon a statistical norm bound to favor the most numerous group in society, can possibly determine either the level or the heritability of intelligence in individuals and/or groups.¹⁸

The shortcomings of the I.Q. test as a measure of intelligence is only one of the questionable aspects of Herrnstein's and Jensen's theories. Another significant mistake that they and their supporters make is in their tendency to see I.Q., or even accepting their definition, "intelligence," as being an accurate predictor of educational, economic, and occupational status. They make the error of assuming that equality of opportunity and the meritocracy already exist in the United States and that, on the whole, more intelligent individuals are in more socially important, higher status, and better paid positions. There are two errors in this assumption. It is wrong with regard to high I.Q. and/or intelligence being the chief criterion of educational,

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 64-66.

economic and occupational success; and it is wrong in the assumption that the higher paying and more socially important positions are one and the same, and that, particularly for the latter, a high intelligence level is even a prerequisite.

Herrnstein indicates that I.Q. is the chief predictor for success in school, occupation, and income as well as for possibilities of social mobility and that the school acts as a "channel" through which the individual's I.Q. carries him to his proper place in society.¹⁹ Furthermore, for Herrnstein, it is not just that the attitudes of the child are important to his success or failure, but also that the child's attitudes and behavior, like his environment, is the result of the child's genes.

Children with high I.Q.'s simply behave differently from those with low I.Q.'s and thereby the two types of children (and the adults they grow into) create different environments for themselves.²⁰

Critics of these views have attacked Jensen and Herrnstein on several interrelated issues. Overall, the position of many such critics is that the correlation between I.Q. and success is irrelevant and/or not so much a result of the importance of I.Q. itself, but rather because both I.Q. and success depend largely upon class background and its attendant attitudes. A stronger correlation can be made between

¹⁹Herrnstein, I.Q. in the Meritocracy, p. 127.

²⁰Ibid., p. 181.

I.Q. and the amount of time spent in school as well as "success" in school. Bowles and Gintis, for example, find that the really crucial associations are between years of schooling and economic success, and between family background and economic success. While high I.Q. often goes with success, it is not necessarily a major cause of success.²¹ The possibility of economic success is to a large degree inherited, but it has little to do with any genetic transmission of I.Q. In fact, in terms of the question of poverty and equality of opportunity, Bowles and Gintis find that the matter of I.Q. level, along with the question of whether it is or is not inherited, is largely irrelevant. Hence, even if I.Q. could be equalized, it would make little difference in terms of the social and economic structure in existence.²²

Regarding the same issue, Block and Dworkin find little correlation between the grades that students earned and their eventual occupational status. If higher I.Q. children usually do stay in school longer than low I.Q. children, it is because I.Q. tests measure abilities useful in school.²³ This relationship is compounded by the tendency of teachers, administrators, and vocational guidance counselors to take I.Q.

²¹Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, "I.Q. in the U. S. Class Structure," Social Policy, III (January/February, 1973), 71.

²²Ibid.

²³Block and Dworkin, "I.Q.," 368.

scores into account when evaluating and advising their pupils. More important yet, children with high I.Q.'s tend to come from home environments having economic and cultural characteristics conducive to their remaining in school.²⁴

Therefore, staying in school for a longer period of time, aside from the obvious economic factor that children from the lower classes are less able to afford to stay in school, also involves certain attitudes, such as persistence and ambition, which have little to do with intelligence per se. As has been shown, however, these attitudes may well have a significant effect upon one's score on an I.Q. test. The various factors influencing how long the individual child stays in school have been analyzed by Jencks. He finds that children from well-to-do families generally stay in school longer and therefore get more educational credentials for a number of reasons of which genes have less of an effect than do cultural attitudes and values.²⁵

Samuel Bowles, in looking at the criteria utilized by employers in deciding who to hire, also finds that the prospective employee's intelligence plays a minor role. He argues that a number of noncognitive traits are of greater importance. Briefly summarizing his findings, Bowles sees five criteria used by employers:

²⁴Ibid., 369.

²⁵Jencks, Inequality, pp. 138-141.

1. Cognitive traits - This involves specific skills required for the job as well as overall educational achievement. Such traits are described as being of "limited importance" insofar as the more prestigious and higher paying jobs are concerned.
2. Personality traits - For example, being willing and able to follow rules, docility or dominance depending upon the position, and perserverance.
3. Modes of self presentation - This involves characteristics such as manner of speaking and dress, and what groups one identifies with.
4. Ascriptive characteristics - Mainly race, sex and age.
5. Credentials - Level and quality of one's education.²⁶

Of these five characteristics, only number one is directly involved with what is commonly referred to as intelligence, particularly given the information already revealed with regard to the criteria for educational credentials. It is true that Herrnstein and Jensen attempt to connect virtually all such characteristics to I.Q., to show that such characteristics are inherited, and that therefore, we have a meritocracy. However, the correlation that they attempt to draw between I.Q. and educational and occupational success is weak. This is further shown by Chomsky when he points out that to make it to the top in American society usually will require that one be:

...ruthless, cunning, avaricious, self-seeking, lacking in compassion, subservient to

²⁶Samuel Bowles, "Understanding Unequal Economic Opportunity," American Economic Review, LXIII (May, 1973), 352-353.

authority, willing to abandon principle for material gain.²⁷

It is doubtful that this is the kind of different behavior that Herrnstein has in mind when he speaks of how children with high I.Q.'s "behave differently." If it is, and he wishes to equate such behavior with intelligence, then he will be using a definition of intelligence which has little connection with the "common expectations" of which both he and Jensen speak.

Thus, to those like Herrnstein who claim that a meritocracy does exist in the United States and that therefore, both those who "make it" and those who do not, each deserve their respective positions on the basis of their ability or lack of ability, critics charge that instead:

The disturbing truth is that we live in a "pseudo meritocracy," whose ideology is that "success" springs solely from merit but whose reality is that some with ability get substantial rewards, while many with equal ability are left in the dust, and others with less ability may on numerous occasions attain even higher rewards.²⁸

Further, that:

To get a job at any particular level in the hierarchy of production one has to meet two tests: first, one must be able and willing to do the work; and second, one must be of appropriate age, race, sex, education and

²⁷Noam Chomsky, "The Fallacy of Richard Herrnstein's 'I.Q.'," Social Policy, III (May/June, 1972), 21.

²⁸S. M. Miller and Ronnie Steinberg Ratner, "The American Resignation: The New Assault on Equality," Social Policy, III (May/June, 1972), 13.

demeanor so that one's assignment job will contribute to the sense that the social order of the firm is just.²⁹

Herrnstein is also wrong in his claim that it is "no coincidence" that society's values puts its "brightest" people in the best jobs, and that the trend is toward more and more skilled and managerial jobs requiring above average I.Q.'s and away from the more menial jobs which can be done by those with below average I.Q.'s.³⁰ For the most part, any ranking of occupation in terms of social importance, prestige, and rewards is going to be in terms of contribution to the maintenance of the system. This will be further intensified in a market economy where so much of the pay level is dictated by supply and demand, and where both supply and demand can be manipulated by those with the greatest power so as to increase their own wealth and power. The relationship that Herrnstein sees between intelligence and the ability to do the most socially useful work serves those who are already in a position to define "useful" and is particularly self-serving in cases where the supply of various professionals is deliberately kept low so as to keep demand, and therefore fees, very high. As for the correlation between high pay and social usefulness, Philip Green points out that Herrnstein's own occupational hierarchy, based upon a World War II study of occupation and I.Q.'s,

²⁹Bowles, "Understanding Unequal Economic Opportunity," 354.

³⁰Herrnstein, I.Q. in the Meritocracy, p. 124.

either directly or by implication rates more highly the job which, first, pays more, and second, is either totally nonproductive, or involves only paperwork that is often irrelevant to any effort at extending the real wealth and thus the well being of society.³¹

In addition, with the advent of more and more advanced technology, the amount of skill, training, and intelligence required to fill most positions may well decrease. Further, the average I.Q. of all groups studied has been rising over the years and there is little reason to believe that it will fail to keep pace with whatever higher levels of intelligence may be required to fill most positions in the future.³²

An additional point made by both Jensen and Herrnstein which has very serious implications for equality of opportunity is their assertion that, in Jensen's words, "Compensatory education has been tried and apparently it has failed."³³ The implication of this claim is that I.Q. is inherited since environmental alteration has failed to raise the test scores. Therefore, equality of opportunity cannot overcome these inherited genetic deficiencies.

There are two major criticisms which can be made with reference to Jensen's and Herrnstein's conclusions regarding the failure of compensatory education programs. In the first place, such conclusions may well be both premature and

³¹Philip Green, "I.Q. and the Future of Equality," Dissent, XXIII (Fall, 1976), 407.

³²Ibid., 410-412. See Ivar Berg, Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), for an elaboration of this point.

³³Jensen, "I.Q. and Scholastic Achievement," p. 2.

wrongly focused. Jensen's condemnation of such programs, which Herrnstein also cites, is based upon a 1967 government report on the Headstart Program. This report stated that, thus far, the achievement gains of those participating were negligible. However, 1967 was only two years after the Headstart Program first came into existence, so it may have been too early to evaluate both its overall success or failure, or to draw conclusions from that to the possibility of success in any other subsequent environmental intervention. Many War on Poverty programs, including Headstart, were poorly funded and poorly organized. To draw the kind of premature conclusions that Jensen does, is poor analysis.³⁴

Nevertheless Herrnstein and Jensen look at the early results of these programs, and conclude that because they illustrate that participating pupils do not show significant improvement in I.Q. scores, such pupils cannot be helped through environmental programs. Thus, they place the blame squarely upon the pupils, though there is no reason to believe that the blame should in part, if not wholly, be placed upon the administration of such programs. It might well be that these programs were not only poorly funded and poorly organized, but also that those running the programs did not have sufficient knowledge to know how to make them more conducive to learning or to the raising of I.Q. scores.³⁵

³⁴Richard Lewontin, "Race and Intelligence," in The Fallacy of I.Q., p. 3.

³⁵Philip Green, "Race and I.Q.: The Fallacy of Heritability," Dissent, XXIII (Spring, 1976) 188.

However it is much easier to blame the victim, in this case the pupil. Such an approach is wholly consistent with the American notion of equality of opportunity and individual responsibility.

The fact that criticism of compensatory programs may be premature or misdirected is only part of the weakness of the Herrnstein-Jensen position. Of more significance is the apparent evidence indicating that compensatory programs can work. How well they can work is difficult to know since results vary between different programs. However, any raising of I.Q. via environmental intervention would serve either to discredit, or at least throw into serious doubt, the whole heritability versus environment aspect of their theories. A few such studies can be cited to illustrate the point.

The Headstart Program itself, which Jensen cites as being indicative of the futility of attempting to raise I.Q. scores, in fact does indicate that pupils in the program gained between 5 and 10 points in I.Q. test scores. Jensen discounts this by claiming that when these pupils left the program and entered school, their I.Q. scores returned to their earlier lower levels. While Jensen implies that this is indicative of the very temporary nature of such environmentally induced gains, it is at least as reasonable to assume that the source of the subsequent drop is more due to a failure of the public school teachers and programs than it is due to a failure of the child. Several other studies, on smaller scale compensatory programs, also indicate that

I.Q. can be raised significantly through environmental intervention. Jensen cites one of his own studies to show how, after making a young subject more at ease and less inhibited with him, the child's I.Q. score would increase from 8 to 10 points.³⁶

Other studies show even more significant increases in I.Q. scores after the child was enrolled in compensatory programs, or when the child was placed in an adoptive home.³⁷ Still another study (Klineberg), indicates that the I.Q.'s of Blacks in the urban North were higher than that of Blacks in the rural South.³⁸ Each of these studies presents evidence in direct contradiction to the conclusions that Jensen and Herrnstein draw with regard to the effect of compensatory programs upon test scores. Insofar as equality of opportunity is concerned, such studies do not, therefore, negate the possibility of attaining more equality of opportunity via environmental engineering, assuming that I.Q. does have some relation to equality of opportunity. Herrnstein himself says that it is "possible" that science could discover ways of significantly raising I.Q. scores via environmental intervention, but dismisses such a possibility as being

³⁶Jensen, "I.Q. and Scholastic Achievement," p. 81.

³⁷See the Skodak - Skeels study in Influences on Human Development, ed. by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1972).

³⁸Cited in Green, "Race and I.Q.," 187.

"impractical in today's world."³⁹ The "impractical" aspect is directly related to the perception that such intervention would have to go beyond the educational process and deal with the economic structure as a whole.

Underlying many of the criticisms made of Jensen and Herrnstein is a general critique of their acceptance of the functionalist position.⁴⁰ The question of whether a functionalist, and therefore meritocratic, society exists in the United States has already been alluded to in the discussion relating I.Q. and intelligence to chances for educational, economic and occupational success. Likewise, the establishment of criteria to determine which positions are "most important" and therefore most deserving of reward has been studiously - ideologically - avoided by both Jensen and Herrnstein. Indeed, it is not at all clear that the greater rewards offered to managers than are offered to factory workers bears any relationship to objective criteria regarding the relative importance of the two positions. Thus, by simply identifying "brightest" with "most important positions" and further, by seeing a congruence between highest rewards and positions most important to society, the question of establishing criteria for which positions are most important becomes a matter of seeing where the brightest,

³⁹Herrnstein, I.Q. in the Meritocracy, p. 180.

⁴⁰See the Davis and Moore debate with Melvin Tumin in Readings in Social Stratification, ed. by Melvin Tumin (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970).

and apparently wealthiest, individuals are located. This however is an example of circular reasoning rather than evidence to support their position.

Even more significantly, Herrnstein and Jensen, with their functionalist image of human nature, assume that it is necessary to offer unequal rewards in order to get the more important societal positions filled. Herrnstein is very clear about this. In an attack upon the possibility of socialism and particularly in opposition to the dictum, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need," Herrnstein states that a person's ability "expresses itself only for some sort of gain."⁴¹ Hence, given his view of men being very unequal in terms of abilities combined with the need for society to utilize especially those with the most ability, it follows that this latter group must be rewarded with far greater rewards than those whose abilities are less in demand. It also follows that an egalitarian society is quite out of the question because if all received relatively equal rewards, or rewards based upon need, there would be little, if any, incentive for those with the most ability to develop and use their ability.

This position is based upon a number of assumptions. Even if socialism is not workable, there would still be fundamental weaknesses in the argument. The assertion that men exercise their abilities only for some sort of gain says

⁴¹Herrnstein, I.Q. in the Meritocracy, p. 216.

very little by itself. If what Herrnstein means by this is that men exercise abilities only for material gain, especially wealth, he is obviously wrong. Such a position denies the possibility of men working for various intrinsic job satisfactions such as creativity, contributing to the well-being of society, or working with others on a common project. If Herrnstein is denying that such motivations have an effect upon how well he does his work, then he is again mistaken. While it is true that in a capitalist economy the primary motivating force for work itself often is merely an attempt to earn money, particularly for those for whom loss of a job may affect their very survival, it is also true that as one rises on the class ladder, other incentives gain in importance. As Chomsky has said, it is unlikely that Herrnstein would become a baker or lumberjack even if such positions paid him more than he earns as a professor.⁴²

The point is that people do, in fact, express their abilities for reasons other than material gain. However, functionalism, like capitalism itself, must see man in more quantitative terms. To see man as being willing to work hard for non-material rewards is thereby to deny that economic man is universal man, unchanging regardless of social circumstances. If economic man is not universal man, then the possibility of socialist man becomes that much more tenable, and with it, the increased viability of arguments asserting that the latter may be more rational and desirable. It also

⁴²Chomsky, "Fallacy of Herrnstein's I.Q.," 410.

becomes more valid to argue for a more genuine form of equality of opportunity via the "impractical" changes that are dismissed by Herrnstein.

Carl Senna makes an analogous point by tracing Herrnstein's position to the equality of opportunity view of life as a race. Not only do Herrnstein and other functionalists make the assumption that life is a race, but they also assume that all run it and that all have the same goal in mind.⁴³ Their view would, therefore, regard anyone who either did not run the race, or who ran it and lost, as being in some way "inferior," either in ability or attitude. To Jensen and Herrnstein the inferiority would be primarily genetic. Obviously this position does not allow for a great deal of diversity in either life-style or goals. Those who do not act like economic man must either be "sick" or genetically inferior.

If, however, what Herrnstein means by his claim that individuals use their abilities only for gain is a notion of gain sufficiently broad so as to encompass non-material incentives such as creative work and community service, then he is correct. However, such an assertion proves very little, particularly with reference either to the viability of capitalism or the impossibility of socialism. Nothing in socialist theory precludes the possibility of rewards of some kind, especially intrinsic rewards, for various labors,

⁴³Carl Senna, "Speed and Direction," in The Fallacy of I.Q., pp. 51-52.

though it would be unlikely that the rewards would be so varied as to involve very large material inequalities. Given this second interpretation of Herrnstein's assertion regarding motivations, it would not be necessary to make the reward differentials very large at all. If this broad interpretation of what Herrnstein means by "gain" is utilized, it can encompass virtually any system: from slavery, wherein the slave works so as to survive; to capitalism, wherein the worker works so as to gain money and perhaps power; to socialism, wherein one works, in part, so as to achieve rewards emanating from the labor process itself.

In drawing conclusions from the work and critiques of Jensen, Herrnstein, and other proponents of their genetic theories, it is difficult to make a solid case either for or against the possibility of equality of opportunity. Certainly Herrnstein and Jensen would have it that, for genetic reasons, full equality of opportunity is an impossibility. Since people are born with very unequal capacities, especially on the intellectual level, it follows that they will not have the same opportunity to achieve success in society. Nor can this ever be remedied, or at least it cannot in the near future. On the other hand, since they do imply that environment has a relatively minor effect upon the individual's capacities, and that in the United States, those with the greatest abilities generally do receive the greatest rewards and are at, or near, the top in terms of power, prestige and wealth, a kind of equality of opportunity already

does exist in the United States. It is an equality of opportunity which gives all persons equal access to virtually all resources except for genetic makeup. The fact that this latter factor is more crucial than any other is unfortunate for the advocates of more equality of opportunity, but there is little that can be done about it. Thus, for Jensen and Herrnstein, the United States probably has as much equality of opportunity as is possible.

What is very important to remember is how much the above conclusion is dependent upon acceptance of the various assumptions and claims made by Jensen and Herrnstein. To accept their positions regarding the possibility of equality of opportunity, it is necessary to accept such points as:

1. I.Q. score is crucial to chances for occupational and economic success.
2. I.Q. score is virtually permanent and cannot significantly be altered via environmental intervention.
3. I.Q. score is primarily inherited.
4. Economic man is universal, regardless of social and economic circumstances.

The fact that each of the above points is either unsubstantiated or incorrect renders their arguments regarding the possibility of equality of opportunity wholly unsatisfactory. Their arguments are far more important in terms of their social significance, for what they do is to provide a rationale for those who would argue that equality of opportunity must inevitably lead to stratification because of the traits of persons rather than because of a particular social structure.

Conclusions

In this chapter, and in Chapter III, I have attempted to explore the question of whether equality of opportunity is a conceivable goal. In Chapter III it was shown that if we are speaking of total and complete equality of opportunity, it is indeed an inconceivable goal. Opportunities, in terms of physical and intellectual capacities, motivations, and social setting will be influenced by such an infinite number of diverse factors that controlling them would be impossible. It would require a more highly controlled society than has ever existed.

While it is difficult to draw a firm line as to where inconceivable turns into possible as regards equality of opportunity, it is possible at least to approximate it. It has been shown that a number of social factors could be altered so as to greatly encourage the attainment of a more complete equality of opportunity than currently exists. The abolition of large differentials of wealth, the equalizing, in relative terms, of the now highly unequal home and educational environments through which children are channeled, and most importantly, and inherent in both of the above, the elimination of the hierarchical division of labor, are all measures which would have a critical impact upon the attainment of equality of opportunity. While this would not entail "complete" equality of opportunity, it would involve a much closer approximation than is present today. Hence, if

we are attempting to discover an answer to the question of whether equality of opportunity is socially conceivable, the response is positive to a limited extent. Most existing social barriers could be overcome, but it would involve a heavy price in terms of certain long accepted social values.

In response to the question of whether biological limitations severely reduce, if not eliminate, the possibility of equality of opportunity, the answer is negative. This does not take into account unusual circumstances such as whether a child born retarded has an equal opportunity to develop and succeed as those who are born without such a disadvantage. As has already been shown, biological limitations regarding intellectual capacities usually are either illusory or remedial. Thus, such biological factors, particularly those relating to intelligence, do not present a serious limitation to equality of opportunity. Both their source and their remedy do not lie within the individual, but instead are based upon societal factors which could be surmounted given a more egalitarian framework.

Within the existing social arrangements in the United States, equality of opportunity is impossible to even approximate. What is more important is that the function that the myth of equality of opportunity serves in this society is such that its realization is undesirable from the perspective of those deriving the greatest benefit from the myth. The

stabilizing and legitimizing function of this myth has been most evident in American educational policy. It is with this latter area that the next chapter will deal.

C H A P T E R V

EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY: A CASE STUDY

In this chapter I will examine the related questions of who benefits most from equality of opportunity and how it has been utilized in American society. In particular I will explore the development of the goal of equality of opportunity in American educational policy with specific reference to which groups and individuals have secured the most advantages and which the least by the propagation and occasional implementation of the equality of opportunity ideology. Some of the points already raised regarding the problems of equality of opportunity are also at the root of the benefits which accrue to certain individuals and groups via this ideology.

It is understandable why equality of opportunity has become so widely accepted a goal. In a very real sense, it has something for everyone. For the wealthy and successful, there is the satisfaction of knowing, believing, or at least hoping others believe that their position has been "earned." If equality of opportunity implies that all persons deserve to be where they are, then those who are in the most desirable positions can project the image that they are the most deserving people in that society. From this, it is but a short step to a self-image of being among the superior group

in society. For those individuals who are at the middle or lower levels of the social and economic hierarchy there is the hope that they eventually will "make it" and are therefore not locked into a particular position. Or, as is more likely, they can hope that their children will make it to a higher level. Finally, for those whose chief concern is the well-being and stability of society as a whole, there is the belief that with equality of opportunity, not only will the most deserving and efficient persons get into the most crucial positions, thereby bringing about a meritocracy, but also that the opportunity structure will be such as to diffuse the likelihood of serious class conflict. The one group that such an ideology does not benefit are those deemed incapable of ever really advancing to a decent level and who are likely to have children also deemed incapable of significant advancement. However this latter group is unlikely to be particularly functional to society or to possess the capacity to seriously disrupt society. It is possible to argue that they have an important role in that they may constitute the "reserve army of unemployed," but this is not as overtly functional a role as that of the regularly employed worker. Therefore this group generally is perceived neither by others nor by themselves as having a vital role to play in the system. With this self-image, their potential for seriously threatening the established order is significantly undermined.

It is not surprising that equality of opportunity has

become so highly valued a goal. Criticism of it is often regarded as either an attempt to return to an inefficient, unfair, and anti-democratic ascriptive society, or as indicative of fear and a lack of confidence in the individual's and/or group's ability to handle fair and open competition. The latter is the more damaging criticism since it is probably less offensive to be labeled an aristocratic reactionary than an inferior or incapable coward. In either case, the result is to ensure some hesitancy in criticizing the desirability, if not attainability, of equality of opportunity.

This explanation is insufficient to explain the pervasiveness of this ideological goal. To probe more deeply into the matter, especially as it relates to the context of American society, I will analyze the relationship of equality of opportunity to American educational policy. Educational policy has been chosen because it is the most significant policy area insofar as equality of opportunity is concerned. Not only have there been considerable legislation and court rulings specifically dealing with equality of educational opportunity,¹ but it is this policy toward which most Americans, the busing issue notwithstanding, have been most favorably inclined. This is due to the crucial role which

¹Joel H. Spring, The Sorting Machine (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1976), goes into some detail regarding many of these measures and decisions since 1945. A more process-oriented examination of a specific educational policy may be found in Eugene Eidenberg and Ray D. Morey, An Act of Congress (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1969).

education, and specifically schooling, is viewed as playing in the life chances of the American child. This attitude was best exemplified by Lyndon Johnson, who felt that poverty and other assorted social problems could be relieved, if not eliminated, by a combination of education and equality of opportunity.² Further, education is viewed widely as a common experience all American children share. Finally there is the belief that education can solve problems without upsetting the status-quo - its gradualist emphasis is on the individual as the problem, not society, and it can be provided to the poor without decreasing the amount made available to wealthier children.³

Equality of Educational Opportunity -
A Definition

The major conflict over equality of opportunity is over the question of whether an interdependence exists between equality of educational opportunity and equality in the results of schooling. Those who stress the need to deal with results are by no means in agreement regarding the specific results to be considered. Educational credentials, knowledge, personal development or eventual income are all taken as indicative of educational opportunity. On the other

²Edgar B. Gumbert and Joel H. Spring, Superschool and the Superstate: American Education in the Twentieth Century: 1918-1970 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1974), p. 45.

³Robert L. Church and Michael W. Sedlak, Education in the United States (New York: The Free Press, 1976), pp. 433-434.

hand, many attempt to isolate, or at least distinguish, between the opportunity and the results. For this group, the key elements of equality of educational opportunity include such possibilities as free education up to a given point (though the location of this point in age, grade level, and competence can differ), and equality of resources for all schools with no class, racial or sexual discrimination within the school. As a general means of classifying these differing approaches, I will refer to the results orientation as an outputs approach and the resources orientations as an inputs approach.⁴

The inputs model is most in line with the traditional view of equality of opportunity in the American context. Referring again to the analogy of a race as well as to an extension of the liberal capitalist laissez faire view of equality of opportunity, the crucial emphasis is on seeing to it that all contestants are given the opportunity to start the race at the same point. Because school is a form of race, equality of opportunity in education consists of granting to each child the opportunity to attend schools of relatively equal quality and for a period of years whose minimum duration is specified by law. Advocates generally

⁴This schema owes much to Thomas F. Green, "Equal Educational Opportunity: The Durable Injustice," in Philosophy of Education 1971: Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society (Edwardsville, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1970); and to Thomas I. Ribitch, "The Case for Equal Educational Opportunity," in Schooling in a Corporate Society, ed. by Martin Carnoy (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1972).

maintain that if compulsory education is perhaps antithetical to the liberal ideal of freedom, it is nevertheless one of those points at which it is permissible and necessary for the state to interfere with the liberty of its individual citizens for their own, as well as society's good. What the state, or any other level of government is not permitted to do however, is to intervene to guarantee or impose equality of results upon those attending the schools. As in the analogy of the race, the state can see to it that all start at the same point and at the same time, and can see to it that none cheat during its course. At the end of the race, the only role of the state is to confirm victories and defeats, and reward them accordingly. The emphasis is upon the ability and effort of each individual.

One result of this inputs model is a public emphasis upon trying to equalize expenditures for all school districts. Since equality of educational opportunity requires an equal start, sharp differences in the quality of education that children receive must be reduced. This view is reflected in the movement to void the constitutionality of the property tax basis of public school financing in favor of an across-the-board equalization of funds regardless of disparities in wealth between districts.⁵

⁵See Spring, The Sorting Machine, pp. 242-243; and W. Lee Hansen and Burton A. Weisbrod, "Bottom Dogs Subsidize Top Dogs: The Equality Fiction in Higher Education," in Up the Mainstream: A Critique of Ideology in American Politics and Everyday Life, ed. by Herbert G. Reid (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1974).

Another attempt to bring about an inputs oriented kind of equality of opportunity in the schools has been the recent busing programs in which pupils are bused across district lines in order to achieve racial integration. This, in theory, serves to accomplish two interrelated input objectives by seeing to it that all public school pupils are given an equal start in terms of racial integration, while also making less relevant the usually unequal tax base between White districts and Black districts. However in terms of equalizing school quality (or at least making it more random) busing to achieve racial balance cannot cope adequately with this kind of unequal opportunity. To do so in terms of a busing program would require that the busing be class based as well as racially based. Busing to achieve racial integration has some justifications, but as an attempt to equalize school resources its success is unlikely. What often happens is a kind of racial integration, but not class integration and certainly not a situation where school quality is rendered equal to the schools in the more affluent suburbs which normally are not touched by such programs. Clearly such a situation is some distance removed from equality of educational opportunity.

Thus the two key points of emphasis in the input model are what resources are made available to schools in terms of materials, libraries, pleasant surroundings, teacher quantity and quality, and the question of access. What this latter point entails is that all should have access to

schools of approximately equal quality regardless of factors deemed educationally irrelevant, like race, sex and religion. As with most notions of equality of opportunity, the question of access, not results, is given the emphasis. School is the beginning of an important race and the question of resources and access is a means to ensure that the race is "fair" and that victory or defeat is based only upon what the schooling system is supposedly designed to do - develop all pupils while at the same time separating the more capable from the less capable.

Defining equal educational opportunity in terms of inputs is inadequate for several reasons. One of these reasons already discussed in Chapter III, has to do with the notion of ensuring that all arrive at the starting line with an equal opportunity. The inputs model appears to draw a line at the point of equalizing school resources and access. It is unclear whether we can go beyond that line to guarantee each child about to enter school an equal opportunity to develop the capacities, attitudes, and motivations which will foster academic success. Is it enough to throw open the school door to all with "Here it is-do with it what you will?"

That this will not provide equality of opportunity has been shown in a number of recent works. The resources a school possesses have relatively little effect upon the cognitive development of its students, particularly as measured by test scores and when students' eventual income levels are

noted, schools really become "marginal institutions."⁶ A major proponent of this position, Christopher Jencks, has been criticized on the grounds that he accepts the validity of I.Q. tests as reliable measuring devices, is "unrealistic" in terms of his proposals for dealing with this situation and to see the school's potential as a liberating institution.⁷ Nevertheless, the most popular criterion for comparing the adequacy of schools in terms of their intellectual role, remains the test scores of their pupils. If expenditures per pupil have little effect upon such scores, then the validity and rationale of the inputs approach is undermined. There is little purpose in equalizing expenditures to achieve equality of opportunity if their effect on education is negligible. An input advocate may instead emphasize making the school, particularly the poorer school, a more pleasant place via giving it the same amount of funding as the wealthier school on the grounds that, regardless of test scores or cognitive development, all children are deserving of an equally attractive environment in which to spend their time, with an equal amount of resources available to them.⁸ However, this leaves open the question of the purpose of the

⁶See, for example, Godfrey Hodgson, "Do Schools Make a Difference?" in The "Inequality" Controversy, ed. by Donald M. Levine and Mary Jo Bane (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1975); and Jencks, Inequality.

⁷See Sexton, "The Inequality Affair," 53-61.

⁸Mary Jo Bane and Christopher Jencks, "The Schools and Equal Opportunity," The Saturday Review of Education, October, 1972, p. 6.

school itself. Different individuals give differing emphasis to the socially integrative, cognitive, and egalitarian functions of the school. Few persons however are willing to assert that the sole, or even major, purpose of the school is to provide a pleasant environment for the child, unless it is on the instrumental grounds that such an environment is more conducive to learning. Therefore, to make this latter goal the basis for equality of educational opportunity, as measured by inputs, is a position which is unlikely to be defended with any tenacity.

This argument shows the impossibility of maintaining a sharp distinction between the inputs and outputs models. To attempt to do so is to make an arbitrary decision about where the line between input and output is to be drawn. There is little reason to believe, and good reason not to believe, that the equalization of financial resources made available to schools will have any significant role in bringing about equality of educational opportunity.⁹

Advocates of the outputs model see equality of educational opportunity being achieved if all students have not only the same opportunity to complete a given number of years of schooling, but in addition, having completed such schooling, have an equal opportunity to achieve similar occupational and income levels and/or, that the gaps in cognitive

⁹An attack upon further increases in education expenditures is made in Daniel P. Moynihan, "Equalizing Education: In Whose Benefit?" in The "Inequality" Controversy.

abilities between students have narrowed substantially. How this latter level is to be measured is a subject of considerable debate. But the particulars of how to measure such abilities are of less importance here than the issue of equality of results in terms of these measures.

The major premise of the outputs model is that there is little sense in discussing equality of opportunity independently of the only adequate means of determining whether it has been attained. To test whether such equality exists in a given setting, we must look at the end of the race rather than the starting point. It is only by a close analysis of the results that we can perceive what factors must be equalized and which are less crucial. For example, if expenditures between school districts were to be equalized, and the differences in the cognitive, income and occupational levels of the students from different districts remained very high, this would lead one of two possible alternative explanations. We could take a Jensen-Herrnstein position and maintain that there is nothing more than can be done. The equal opportunity was there and it was the genetic inferiority of some of the students, due either to their class, race or both, and not their schools or the social structure, which led to their lower test scores and ultimate positions in society. Since a functionalist meritocracy is assumed to exist, such genetic inferiority in cognitive ability of necessity leads to the income and occupational inequalities as well. The shortcomings of this approach

have already been discussed in the preceeding chapter. As an alternative, we could claim that if such results are highly unequal despite an equalization in per pupil expenditures for all districts, then expenditures by themselves, are insufficient to attain equality of educational opportunity. Something else must be done to bring it about.

The "something else" which has been called for and occasionally implemented has proceeded in two different directions. On the one hand, there has been the pressure for affirmative action programs and quotas on the grounds that such policies are necessary to bring about equality of opportunity because past policies deliberately excluded various minorities and women from equality of opportunity in both education and jobs. This involves some tampering with the race itself as well as with ultimate results, but it is justifiable in order to redress past discrimination.

Another policy which fits into the outputs model is the Head Start Program initiated in the mid 1960's. Unlike the affirmative action programs which deal with the race itself, Head Start is an effort to achieve a more equal result by focusing on the pre-school period - a period which is prior to the school race. It is based upon the realization that regardless of the quality of the school, if the child reaches this starting line with substantial handicaps based upon his pre-school life experiences, he will not have an equal opportunity in the school. Head Start attempts to reach the child before these handicaps can have a significant

effect upon the eventual outcome. The rationale is less to ensure an equality of outcomes than to ensure that the child not be put at an insurmountable and unfair disadvantage in the competition. In this case, "unfair" refers to the handicaps and disadvantages for which the individual child is not responsible. Head start acknowledges the need to take into account more than the child's performance in school.

This rationale is typified in a 1965 speech by Lyndon Johnson at Howard University.

You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bringing him up to the starting line of a race and then say "You're free to compete" and justly believe that you have been completely fair.¹⁰

While Head Start does deal with some of the root causes of inequality of performance in the school, it too suffers from some fundamental defects. Clearly it is impossible for any program or programs to penetrate far enough and comprehensively enough so as to overcome the inequalities of opportunity based upon physical environment and socioeconomic background. Head Start programs can make a dent here, but no more than that. A second problem is that were such a comprehensive pre-school program to be developed, it probably would first be utilized by those with the most money and power or the program might be countered by other

¹⁰Cited in J. S. Fuerst, "Quotas as an Instrument of the Public Interest," Society, XIII (January/February, 1976), 18.

efforts to retain the differences in power and wealth between the classes.¹¹ In a sense this has already been done via expensive private nurseries and day care centers.

The most fundamental problem in utilizing Head Start as a means of overcoming inequality in educational opportunity is that it overlooks the basic cause of the inequality - the inegalitarian economic and social system as a whole. When a system both encourages and requires substantial inequality of result in terms of wealth, power, prestige and work life, programs designed to foster equality of educational opportunity, even with an emphasis upon educational results, cannot be successful within the context of that particular system. Hence, while it is possible that efforts to reach the child prior to his entering the school "race" may be a necessary condition for equality of educational opportunity, they are not a sufficient condition. Further, it is likely that in a more egalitarian society lacking such widespread inequalities, a program like Head Start would, except in certain exceptional cases, quickly become superfluous. Therefore, two conclusions are possible. Either there have been a series of misjudgments on the part of those who have formulated and implemented these programs; or at least some of those concerned are using these policies, and the image of equality of educational opportunity in general, as a means of legitimizing a highly inegalitarian system.

¹¹Thomas F. Green, "Equal Educational Opportunity," p. 137.

Despite the above problems with output oriented programs, it is clear that of the two models of equality of educational opportunity, the output model is superior. It involves both a perception of, and an attempt to deal with, the interrelatedness of opportunity and result. The more simplistic premises of the input model which imply that equality of opportunity can be attained via an equalization of financial resources on a per pupil basis, ignores this interrelationship. The main strength of the input model is that it envisions a clear and attainable means of bringing such equality of opportunity about. This is hardly a fruitful method of conceptual analysis and is unlikely to be a successful basis for policy.

Objectives of Equality of Educational Opportunity

The widely accepted version of American educational policy, as it has evolved over the last two centuries, places great emphasis on its role in promoting the development and success of the individual, and on its role in promoting the prosperity of society. This view sees American education as having three major purposes: to integrate the individual into society, to foster his intellectual and moral development, and to act as an equalizing force in society. It is within this context that American educators have taken so much pride in their historical efforts to increase upward social mobility for various immigrant groups,

racial minorities and others of the poorer classes.¹²

Another set of goals which many claim to have been met by American education are the societal needs, particularly those created by technology. As American technology develops, particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century, so too does the need for more skilled and educated workers. Technological requirements dictate the increased push both for mass education and for educational reform which play so important a role during the Progressive Era. This need has continued into the present, though today the demand and need has been upgraded so as to require college educated labor rather than high school graduates. These technological needs, combined with equality of educational opportunity, have resulted in the functional meritocracy which adherents to this perspective often claim exists in the United States. The overall role of equality of opportunity here is to serve both individual and social needs by seeing to it that the "best" reach the top positions and therefore keep things running smoothly and efficiently, while also maximizing the "fairness" of the process by granting to all persons the same opportunity to achieve educational, and eventual financial and occupational success.

Compulsory Education

The most encompassing critique of the liberal inter-

¹²See Colin Greer, The Great School Legend (New York: Viking Press, Inc., 1973), for a critique of this position.

pretation of American educational policy has to do with the overall and underlying purposes of such policies over the past century. The orthodox liberal interpretation stresses both technological prerequisites and the desire to accommodate and fulfill democratic ideals. In short, both a materialistic and idealistic basis are cited, though which of the two is given greater emphasis varies from author to author. In reality, the idealistic basis is greatly exaggerated, and the materialistic basis, while important, has been so in a manner very different from that which is generally acknowledged. As for the notion of educational policy being directed toward the personal development of the individual student, this is true only if we accept a view of personal development which equates it with fostering in the child both the ability and the desire to "fit" into the existing social, political and economic order without upsetting the class structure.

If the attainment of equality of opportunity is perceived as being at the forefront of American education, then one of the essential tools for achieving this goal has been the policy of compulsory education. It is, to paraphrase Rousseau, a "forcing to be free" kind of policy which theoretically, helps to ensure equality of opportunity. Since, for the sake of individual prosperity if not survival itself, all are going to be running in a similar race and striving for similar rewards, especially the reward of wealth, it follows that education must be made available to all so as

to ensure that all will have an equal opportunity. However, because all parents may not be sufficiently responsible or aware of the necessity for the education of their offspring, the state has but two alternatives. It can leave this matter solely in the hands of the individual parents, and thereby face the inevitable result that some children will not attend school and will not have equality of opportunity; or the state can actively intervene in the process and see to it that all children do get at least some minimal amount of schooling. Thus laws are passed which place the state in the position of compelling attendance by the child in school regardless of the wishes of the parent or the child.¹³

Here, equality of educational opportunity is not the goal so much as a means to a particular end - systemic stability. Neither democratic ideals nor technological necessity are at the roots of such programs. Instead, these policies serve to socialize the child and thereby to legitimize such aspects of life in the United States as the competitive ethic, the virtues and necessity of the existing factory system, and the overall distribution of wealth and power.

Compulsory education, as applied to the children of the immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

¹³See Bane and Jencks, "Schools and Equal Opportunity," and Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society (New York: Harper and Row, Inc., 1971) for attacks upon compulsory education.

centuries, remove such children from the influence of their parents and their "old country" and perhaps radical ways, and "Americanizes" them. However, the Americanization is not merely a process by which the child learns the laws, norms, traditions and mores of American society. It is also a process through which the child is fit into a particular role within the system, generally a working class role, and is taught to accept the desirability, or at least inevitability, of this role. Without compulsory education, the children of both the American-born workers and immigrants could eventually constitute a disruptive force. On the one hand, it would mean large numbers of children being left to the influences of their families and neighborhoods, neither of which could always be expected to influence the child in a system-legitimizing direction. The destabilizing potential would tend to increase as the poverty and resentment of the child's parents and neighborhood increased. Hence, the need to get these children into school where they could temporarily be insulated from their home environment. At the same time, the school could attempt to offset the negative and potentially disruptive influences of family and neighbors via a socializing process designed to foster a sense of pride and gratitude in being an American. This process might have been further enhanced by the push for school centralization with its resultant decrease in community control over education.¹⁴

¹⁴Greer, The Great School Legend, p. 81.

Nor is this argument negated by the often stated claim that the factory system and urbanization, particularly in the late nineteenth century, had the tendency to reduce the socializing role of the family.¹⁵ We can hold to such a view and still regard compulsory education as an attempt to make the school a major agency for bringing up the child. Whether the school's role is to replace, supplement or complement the parent would probably depend upon the strength and direction of parental influence. In any case, compulsory education eventually does help to stabilize a potentially unstable situation via increasing the school's custodial role.¹⁶

Regardless of how positively inclined toward the American system immigrant parents happened to be, the fact that most of these families lived in impoverished conditions left the authorities with essentially three choices. They could ignore the situation in the immigrant ghettos of the cities, but this was potentially dangerous to the overall stability of the system. They could attempt to alter the existing distribution of wealth and power in the United States such that the poor, both immigrant and native-born, were given a more equal share of the benefits. However, this was highly unlikely since it would necessarily require a substantial diminution of the wealth and power of those in

¹⁵Samuel Bowles, "Unequal Education and the Reproduction of the Social Division of Labor," in Schooling in a Corporate Society, p. 39.

¹⁶Grumbert and Spring, Superschool and the Superstate, pp. 118-121.

control of American society. The final choice, and the one taken, was to deal with the problem in such a way as to lessen discontent, or at least channel it away from those on top, thereby avoiding any threat to the existing class system and inducing the young to accept the authority of the state as transmitted by its agent - the teacher.¹⁷ This third choice involved presenting education as a means of escaping poverty in a legitimate manner, and is exemplified by compulsory education and the ethos of equality of opportunity itself. Thus, educational reformers like Horace Mann could call for universal compulsory education as a means of securing equality of opportunity but the reality of the situation was that the chief result of the schooling was to integrate youth into the labor force.¹⁸

Technological Prerequisites

The alleged need for technological training so often cited as being a major source of the expansion of American schooling and the push for equality of educational opportunity is itself subject to serious question on at least two levels. Advanced industrialization has not and does not bear any necessary connection to the need for more schooling. Even if more skill is required at the average job than

¹⁷Bowles, "Unequal Education," p. 40.

¹⁸Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), p. 11; Spring, The Sorting Machine, p. 17; and Greer, The Great School Legend, p. 75.

was the case one or two centuries earlier, a proposition which is subject to dispute, there is little reason to believe that more schooling in terms of greater number of years spent in school is especially conducive to the development of such skills. Educated labor is not necessarily more competent in the skills required for the job. This has been shown to be the case in a number of studies which attempt to find correlations between education level, job competence and job satisfaction. The mainstream view is that more and more jobs need highly educated workers, that almost all jobs require at least a high school degree, and that, in general, the more schooling an individual has received, the better a worker he is likely to be. The result of this view has been an increased push for more education credentials regardless of the job, greater deference and privilege granted to college students, as typified until recently by the practice of granting college students deferments from the military draft, and an increased drive for equality of opportunity in education on the grounds that it was fair, technologically functional and helpful in alleviating poverty.

Ivar Berg has demonstrated both that the connection between today's jobs and the need for greater schooling is limited, and that more schooling does not necessarily lead to better workers.¹⁹ For example, it is undeniably true that today there exists a greater demand for workers with educa-

¹⁹Berg, Education and Jobs, pp.

tional credentials, be it high school degree, a college degree, or something higher up the scale. However Berg shows that such demands have relatively little to do with any increased difficulty or complexity of the jobs being sought.²⁰ It is not schooling per se that gives a worker greater competence to perform most contemporary jobs which have raised their educational requirements. Instead what has occurred has been a reversal of the traditional supply and demand cycle. As the supply of college educated workers has continued to increase, more and more jobs are "educationally upgraded."²¹ The effect of this has been to increase the need and demand for college degrees by those about to enter the labor market, a need for college graduates to be satisfied with lesser jobs than they expected, and the increased occupational displacement of those without college degrees. Hence, it is not the jobs themselves that require increased education as much as it is the contemporary market forces which have created the current relationship between increased education and jobs. The supply has created a false demand. Supply has expanded, not because of technological needs but because of social needs relating to the stability of the system. Hence, the production of attitudes and

²⁰See H. Schelsky, "Technical Change and Educational Consequences," in Education, Economy and Society: A Reader in the Sociology of Education (New York: The Free Press, Inc., 1965); for a different perspective regarding increased skill requirement.

²¹Berg, Education and Jobs, p. 66.

personalities not skills or cognitive abilities is the major role for the school.²²

Berg elaborates on this point by reviewing various surveys and examinations of the relation between workers' educational attainments and their job performance, rate of absenteeism and job satisfaction. He finds little evidence that education leads to significant improvement in any of these three areas.²³ Nor does educational level bear much connection to a worker's chances for promotion. Seniority is far more important in this regard. These results apply both to blue collar and white collar workers. The alleged connection so often cited by employers between educational credentials and job competence exists neither in terms of the specifics of a particular job nor in any "generalized ability" which education supposedly develops in a person. The argument that the vast upgrading of educational requirements for many jobs is necessary so as to ensure adequate performance in a technological age is weak. Neither efficiency nor job satisfaction is necessarily increased by such credentials. In fact, Berg finds that in many cases job satisfaction is decreased with greater educational credentials, particularly in jobs requiring relatively little skill. The reason for this is not difficult to discern. If an individual has gone through the trouble of securing a

²²Bowles and Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America, p. 9.

²³Berg, Education and Jobs, p. 87.

college degree, he generally expects, or at least hopes, that his eventual position will make some use of a capacity for independent and critical thinking. If it does not, then much of his original rationale for going to college is undermined along with his sense of self-respect.²⁴ If a person goes to college with the expectation that upon graduation he will get a good paying and interesting job, and then finds himself in an uninteresting position requiring little skill, then even if such a position pays well, dissatisfaction is likely to occur. This will also be the case if we are dealing with a high school graduate who gets a job which has skill requirements far below his abilities and training. Berg notes that the most dissatisfied are those with a high educational level who hold low skill jobs, while the most content are those workers having low educational levels who hold high skill jobs.²⁵ The former are dissatisfied because their education has, in effect, been "wasted" as far as occupation is concerned, while the latter workers are more satisfied because they have, to an extent, "beat the system" by making it without the added time and expense required to secure educational credentials. Dissatisfaction is increased by the instrumental view of education in which it

²⁴See Davis and Moore, "Principles of Stratification," 242-249, for a presentation of the functionalist position on what kinds of inducements are required to get persons to attend college.

²⁵Berg, Education and Jobs, pp. 125-127.

is seen as a means to an end - a good paying, interesting, high status job. The present market situation should therefore be of little comfort to employers for it indicates that as they continue to educationally upgrade their low pay and low skill jobs, they can also expect increases in job dissatisfaction on the part of those with the credentials who must take such positions. This can be checked only by a lowering of occupational and status expectations on the part of those entering college. Given the pervasiveness of the American Dream, particularly with regard to education and equality of opportunity, such a lowering of expectations is unlikely to occur. If it did occur, it might well lead to the very kind of problems that the ideal of equality of opportunity is designed to avoid, such as increased despair, frustration, hopelessness and potentially more explosive reactions on the part of those told to lower their expectations.

Either today's jobs do not require educational upgrading or the schooling that most Americans receive is insufficient for, or irrelevant to, the performance of most jobs. In either case, we must look more deeply into why there has been such an increased demand for educational credentials. Even if it is merely a matter of the demand responding to an ever increasing supply, the question remains as to why there has been and continues to be such an expansion of the supply. If it is a question of the schools being inadequate, then we may either accept it with the view that society is running sufficiently well despite the educational system, or look to

some form of change in the schools so as to make them more closely related to specific job training. To a degree, particularly since the increased fear of Soviet technological advances in the 1950's, this latter effort has been made, though not to the extent that many of its proponents would wish.²⁶ The crucial issue is the interrelated question of why the increase in supply and why, if job performance is not noticeably improved by schooling, do employers continue to insist upon their prospective employees possessing a high level of education prior to their being considered for hiring.

The Sorting Function

The issue of "credentialism" must be viewed as an aspect of one of the school's more significant roles - that of acting as a sorting and selecting mechanism. This bears a close relationship to the ideal of equality of educational opportunity since the ostensible object here is for the school to grant each of its pupils an equal opportunity to "prove himself" in an open and competitive setting. Given the nature of the job market and the demand for such credentials, the importance of the school in determining the future status and occupation of its pupils takes on added significance.

²⁶See Spring, The Sorting Machine, regarding this post 1945 period and, in particular, the emphasis on "career education" during the Nixon Administration.

To explore this selecting and certifying function of the school, we must discuss how the school operates upon its students, particularly in the elementary and secondary school. In this connection, the issues of who gets the credentials and why are important, as is the question of the specific role that instruments such as tracking and I.Q. tests tend to serve in this context. The school as selecting agency is not consistent with the image of school as equalizing agency in the same way that equality of opportunity in the American context is inconsistent both with equality of results and with an adequate vision of equality of opportunity itself. It is clear that if American schools have been utilized to act as a selecting mechanism, their status as an equalizing factor is very low. The usual picture of American education is that even if the latter point is true, at least this education has served to advance the United States closer to a meritocracy. However, unless we accept the arguments of Jensen and Herrnstein regarding the racial and/or class based nature of "merit," then we are left with the problem of how to account for the relatively consistent manner in which the selecting and awarding of credentials has tended to favor children from the upper and middle classes to the detriment of those from the poorer classes.

The selecting process operates on two levels. There is the selection for occupational position which basically entails the kind of credentials, if any, that one receives

and thereby has an important effect upon the kind of occupational position that one is deemed capable of filling. Prior to this is the within-school process by which the student is classified as being of college potential or not. This is the most fundamental classificatory process which the student undergoes. The process includes I.Q. tests and other so-called "achievement criteria" as Talcott Parsons²⁷ among others, refers to them, and thus fits quite well with equality of opportunity. According to Parsons, the selecting is based upon "earned" status in which the school setting is a race with the evaluations of teachers determining the winners. By the ninth grade the process of determining whether or not the child will be taking college preparatory courses has generally been completed. This, and the resulting intellectual segregation via tracking that takes place is seen by Parsons as being both fair and acceptable to most concerned because it is based upon achievement in a context of equality of opportunity. Parsons goes so far as to claim that the elementary school classroom is the embodiment of equality of opportunity, with both winners and losers being willing to accept the results.²⁸ Further, the blow to the losers is softened somewhat because, says Parsons, despite their possessing a lower intellectual level, the teacher may "like" such students more than he likes those who are higher

²⁷Talcott Parsons, "The School Class as a Social System: Some of Its Functions in American Society," in Educational, Economy and Society.

²⁸Ibid., p. 445.

achievers.²⁹

The danger that this kind of tracking holds for the attainment and preservation of a democratic community is to be offset via such institutions as the homeroom. In the high school homeroom there is to be a democratic mix of students with varied interests, abilities and backgrounds, and it is from this source that student government officers are to be elected.³⁰ The heterogeneity of the homeroom is to compensate for the potentially elitist nature of the more intellectually homogeneous classroom.

The tracking that takes place involves the presumption that some are capable of doing college work while others are not. Once the school decides which students fit into each category, the comprehensive high school sets up their course work accordingly. Curricula are differentiated so that those students who seem to have the intellectual resources to handle college work, are given high school courses of a pre-college nature, including the sciences and math. For those who are deemed incapable of going on to college, the curriculum becomes more "vocationally" oriented, including subjects like carpentry, drafting, electronics and, for women, the so-called "homemaking" skills. Such tracking may also occur in terms of the type of high school that the child is encouraged or assigned to attend. Some go on to more

²⁹Ibid., p. 447.

³⁰Spring, The Sorting Machine, p. 49.

academic high schools while others go to vocational or technical high schools. The rationale behind both kinds of tracking, and the resulting intellectual segregation, is that it is both wasteful and unfair to make a college bound student waste his time on courses which will do him little good in his occupational future. It is equally wasteful and unfair, as well as ego damaging, to make or encourage a student with more limited intellectual potential to suffer through courses for which he will have little vocational use and probably will be incapable of handling adequately. Therefore, the tracking program is beneficial not only to society by encouraging the attainment of a meritocracy, but also to the individual student, be he a high or a low achiever, by seeing to it that he is placed in the school, class or course most suited to his own particular capacities and interests.

In like manner, the use of I.Q. tests is based upon a similar rationale. Where the I.Q. tests supposedly are most valuable is in their "objective" nature. If the teacher's evaluations are the only criterion, then personal feelings about a given student may interfere with the judgment. However, by bringing in an allegedly objective test which all pupils take under similar circumstances, personality factors are avoided. The I.Q. test thereby typifies American equality of opportunity. It is designed to measure intelligence and all those who take it have the same opportunity to display their intelligence, regardless of any external factors.

Such scores are of great value in determining who are the most intelligent and therefore, who are the most capable of going on to and graduating from college.

The numerous problems connected with I.Q. tests have been discussed in some detail in Chapter IV. However, the self-fulfilling nature of these tests, like that of tracking in general, is a vital issue in terms of educational opportunity. For if a person scores poorly on such a test in combination with low evaluations by his teachers, it is very unlikely that that person will ever get out of a lower track. His assigned curriculum, his vocational guidance and the image that teachers have of him all will combine to solidify and stabilize his track and will render him fit only for a given occupational and status level. Further, the intellectual segregation that inevitably occurs, despite Parsons' claim that friendship lines cross-cut achievement lines,³¹ render it even less likely that, once set into a low track, a pupil will be encouraged to leave it by the words or examples of close friends. This latter point is intensified in those cases where separate vocational schools for those on the lower tracks exist, but is strong also when pupils attend the same comprehensive high school but are assigned to different kinds of courses.³²

³¹Parsons, "The School Class," p. 447.

³²Patricia Cayo Sexton, Education and Income: Inequality of Opportunity in Our Public Schools (New York: Viking Press, Inc., 1961), p. 153.

Such a system is acceptable and conducive to equality of opportunity only if we assume that I.Q. tests are valid indicators of a child's intelligence, that such scores and intelligence levels are unlikely to change over time, and that the resulting intellectual segregation does indeed serve some useful purpose which outweighs the undemocratic nature of the process. If not, then all that has been accomplished via tracking is to separate at an early age those destined for the leadership positions in society from those destined for the less prestigious and powerful roles. As was shown in Chapter II, this intellectual segregation has a very strong tendency to follow existing class lines. It may well be that such a tendency is no coincidence or accident but instead is part of the underlying purpose behind the selecting and sorting function of education in general.

Parsons' description of the achievement basis for tracking and its subsequent "fair" results are filled with misinterpretations. Upper class homes tend to produce pre-school environments more conducive to high achievement in school. Therefore, even if the selecting and tracking is accurate regarding who are and who are not capable of achieving educational credentials, this is still some distance removed from equality of opportunity.³³ Parsons is too willing to accept the objectivity of I.Q. tests and the

³³An examination of the tracking process can be found in Florence Howe and Paul Lauter, "How the School System is Rigged for Failure," The New York Review of Books, June 18, 1970, pp. 14-21.

accuracy of teacher's evaluations, thereby ignoring the class bias inherent in both selecting mechanisms. In terms of the teacher's bias, it is likely that several non-academic factors can enter into how a teacher views and evaluates students, and that such factors tend to favor those pupils from middle and upper class homes.

Finally, Parsons is misleading when he claims that both winners and losers "accept" the results of the race and subsequent tracking on the grounds that it has been conducted in a context of equality of opportunity. Such an acceptance is both exaggerated in factual terms and irrelevant in moral terms. It is difficult to ascertain what percentage of pupils, and parents of pupils, who are relegated to non-college tracks accept this as just and fair. This difficulty is heightened by the question of determining how non-acceptance would be manifested. If pupils do not wish to accept their delegated tracks, do they, or their parents, protest to the appropriate teachers or administrators, go to a different school, take to the streets, or withdraw in anger and despair? Or do they simply go along out of the conviction that they have no real choice in the matter? Any of these possibilities can be viewed as evidence of a lack of acceptance of the process and/or results of the tracking system. Yet many of these responses, particularly the latter two, are difficult to measure. For example, if a student withdraws from school, is that to be taken as evidence that he does not accept as just and legitimate the tracking process,

or does the withdrawal serve only to fulfill the prophecy inherent in the tracking decision that the student is not up to college level work and perhaps is not up to high school standards as well? Obviously the answer could be either.

Even if Parsons is correct regarding the widespread acceptance of the results by both winners and losers, there are still significant problems with tracking and the general acceptance that it may engender. If tracking does not give rise to a large number of disputes, it is mainly due to the selling job that the school administrators and other leadership groups have done on the public. Like equality of opportunity itself, tracking is seen as fair, efficient and necessary. If, in fact, it is none of these, but instead operates mainly to ensure the preservation of the existing class order, then the acceptance it supposedly receives is built upon a distorted foundation and says little about the value of the process.

Hence, class based processes, particularly tracking and I.Q. testing, are combined to produce situations whereby the awarding of educational credentials is itself class based. The children of the well-to-do are likely to get qualitatively and quantitatively better credentials than are children from families not as well off. Since the possession of such credentials has become a very convenient criterion for employers to utilize at several different levels in determining cut off points regarding who is and

who is not eligible for various positions, the class based nature of the educational process is uninterruptedly carried over into the post high school hiring process. The convenience of such a criterion for the employer is increased by the fact that the more powerful and influential the employer, the more likely it is that his own children will possess adequate or superior credentials. Despite the manner in which these processes inevitably favor the children of those who already possess the most wealth, power and status, the entire process has been placed under the banner of equality of opportunity. What occurs is a procedure by which the system as a whole is stabilized via this banner while at the same time the positions of individuals and their families in the hierarchy is rendered more stable by the educational process being structured so as to reward best the children of the elite. Children from lower class homes, on the other hand, are given less attention since the meritocratic stress is always on the more "gifted" children. Tracking provides a rationale for such relative neglect which is more palatable than, for example, the fact that control of most school boards is in the hands of upper income groups.³⁴

Another aspect of the sorting function of the schools can be seen in the rise of the junior colleges in the United

³⁴Sexton, Education and Income, pp. 228-230. See also Zbigniew Brzezinski, "America in the Technotronic Age," Inquiry, X (January, 1968), 16-26.

States. What is most interesting regarding this development is that it is both a response to one problem and a potential source of another. The problem to which community and junior colleges attempt to respond is that of the increased demand for college training by the young at a time when the traditional rewards of status and wealth are becoming less attainable. For example, between 1940-1960, enrollment in American colleges almost doubled,³⁵ but the number of upper level positions in the division of labor did not. The rewards to be gained from a college degree have, in recent years, become more difficult to obtain. The problem is exacerbated by the pressures on the young to earn some kind of college degree if they expect to earn any sort of decent living. The situation that exists is one in which a college degree has become increasingly important while the rewards in terms of status and income which used to derive from the achieving of a college degree have declined markedly. The two year college is a response to this problem.

If more and more jobs, middle level as well as upper level, demand some type of college credentials, and if equality of opportunity involves all having "equal access to a range of specified resources...", then it is clear that more and more students must be allowed into the colleges and given the chance to achieve these credentials. The two year

³⁵Cited in Richard Parker, The Myth of the Middle Class (New York: Liveright, 1972), p. 26.

college responds to this situation by continuing the tracking process on the college level. It creates an intellectually hierarchical structure among those who possess college credentials. In principle this is not unprecedented. It traditionally has been the case that those who receive their degrees from the most prestigious institutions, especially the expensive Ivy League schools, have gone on to fill the more prestigious, financially rewarding and powerful positions in American society. Such students have generally been from families already considered a part of the social, financial and/or political elite. The less prestigious institutions take most of their students from the middle and working class and send them out into middle or upper middle level positions.

The two year college fits into this pattern by accommodating, at least symbolically, many of those from working class families who still believe in the possibility of upward social mobility via education. In the past, equality of educational opportunity was centered upon the opportunity that all had, if they exercised the requisite abilities in high school, to enter college. Today it is less a matter of some few doing well enough to get into college as it is a question of being able to finish college, the quality of the college attended, and the willingness and ability to stay in school beyond the B.A. or B.S. degrees so as to achieve some graduate or professional credentials. To attempt to retain the older levels, both quantitatively and

qualitatively, that determined whether a student was admitted to college, is no longer a viable policy. The creation of new colleges, particularly two year colleges, can be seen as a means to ensure stability for the existing class structure.

The rise of the two year school can also be viewed as a way by which American education avoids the problems of, for example, the British system in which a clear and final determination of each child's potential is made at a relatively early age, and this determination remains with the child for the rest of his or her life. In the United States, a college education increasingly has been viewed as both an economic necessity and a social right.³⁶ The two year college serves as a kind of compromise between those who believe that all should be allowed at least a try at college, and those who stress the need to maintain academic and occupational standards.

The expansion of college enrollments, particularly in the two year schools, is of far less consequence regarding upward mobility than has generally been implied. The graduate of the two year college is in the process of occupationally replacing, or at least supplementing, the high school graduate. The parallel is reinforced by the fact that the student who formerly ended his schooling with high school

³⁶See Ralph H. Turner, "Modes of Social Ascent Through Education: Sponsored and Contest Mobility," in Education, Economy and Society, for an examination of the American and British systems of mobility.

tends to come out of the same class background as today's junior college graduate. In addition, as formerly was the case with the non-college individuals, women and racial minorities are disproportionately represented in the student body of the two year school.

The results of this situation are varied. Most clearly, the rise of these schools has done little to effect the overall distribution of wealth and power in the United States. While it would be a mistake to claim that an individual who gains a degree from such institutions has no better a chance of securing a decent, well-paying job than a high school graduate or high school dropout, it would also be an error to assert that such a college degree is a ticket to elite or near-elite status. It is a credential designed to fit individuals into the middle, and often lower middle level positions offering relatively little in the way of independence, creativity, power and status, and no more than a middle class pay scale. In times of economic contraction, such jobs are not undesirable in comparison with the types of positions which are becoming increasingly likely for those with no college background. However, they are not the sort of positions traditionally associated with the possession of a college degree. The upward social mobility which may accrue from such a degree is usually very minor and is more a result of the generally poor background of the students in the two year schools rather than any rags to riches scenario played out within these schools.

The growth of two year colleges as a response to the increased demand for college credentials both from employers and future employees, does serve to strengthen the image of American as the land of opportunity. This is not merely a symbolic point. If such an image becomes badly tarnished, as it already has to large segments of the American population on various occasions, then a serious erosion of loyalty and support for the system is possible. Regardless of the reality, the image of equality of opportunity is very helpful to the stability of a society which has so many citizens living at or near the poverty level while others are so much more comfortable. Ironically, the two year college strengthens such an image by its very class based nature. What it has done is to provide for those groups and individuals who traditionally have been shut off from the four year institutions, the opportunity to attend a college and receive a college degree. The poor are now offered the opportunity to get a low cost education which does not even require a particularly strong academic background as a prerequisite for admission. In this way those who in the past were excluded from even entering the race, are now granted an opportunity, even if not an equal opportunity, not only to run in the race but perhaps also to hope to finish it well. The image of equality of opportunity is thereby strengthened and a potential source of instability is rendered less threatening.

This solution is necessarily limited, particularly over

a long period of time. For as more and more high school graduates, especially those coming from working class and/or poor families, enter into and graduate from two year colleges, the level of jobs made available to them may decline proportionately. It can be expected that as the total number of college graduates increase, not only will there not be a similar increase in the number of high pay and status occupations to accommodate them, but also that the number of middle level white collar positions is unlikely to increase significantly. Hence it is possible to anticipate that eventually those graduating from the lowest level of the college hierarchy (the junior colleges) will have positions made available to them at an occupational level in which their parents, who probably had no college training, already are located. Under such circumstances, social mobility would not be enhanced and the idea that such schools provide equality of opportunity for the poor would be weakened. The favorable image of American society which the two year schools appear to provide may, at best, be only a temporary phenomenon.

Another effect of these institutions is that they, unlike most four year schools, provide specific vocational training. In this sense, the two year school does fulfill a specific societal function by training a skilled strata of workers whose abilities, aspirations and prospects are all

set at approximately the same level.³⁷ Clark describes how such colleges channel most of their students away from any expectation of attaining upper level positions via transferring to four year institutions. Far more students enter junior colleges with the hope of transferring to four year schools than are ever able to do so. A major function of the two year school is to inculcate an awareness and an acceptance of this fact to the majority of its students. When the student has accepted this, it becomes that much easier to get that student to accept as permanent his or her own non-elite status. As with I.Q. tests and tracking, the ostensible emphasis is upon the student's intellectual resources rather than racial, sexual, or socioeconomic background. As Clark points out, were this "cooling-out" function widely known, fewer students would desire to attend two year schools and there would be greater pressure upon the four year schools. The two year college would accurately be perceived as, at best, irrelevant to equality of opportunity and perhaps detrimental to it. Instead, the "cooling-out" leads to less psychological stress upon the individuals involved and therefore to less overall stress upon the social system deriving from unfulfilled hopes and expectations.³⁸

³⁷See Spring, The Sorting Machine, pp. 233-235, regarding the proposals of Nixon's Commissioner of Education, Sidney Marland.

³⁸Burton Clark, "The Cooling-Out Function in Higher Education," in Education, Economy and Society, pp. 515-521.

Social Relations in the School

An aspect of the educational system deserving of some examination has to do with the kinds of character traits that different schools tend to develop in their students. This is of great importance in all aspects of education, from the elementary school to the most prestigious of four year schools. However, different schools serve different classes and render their students fit for different positions within the hierarchical division of labor. The term "fit" should not be taken to mean only in terms of intellectual or skill capacities. Fit also involves the idea of individuals being rendered emotionally and psychologically capable of filling some kinds of positions and incapable of filling others. This relates to Melvin Kohn's findings,³⁹ but here the emphasis is on the educational system rather than specific occupational position. We have only to look at the kinds of social relations which are encouraged or discouraged at various levels of the educational system, to see that different schools socialize in different ways.

For example, referring again to the average two year college, there are significant and substantial differences in the social relations there when compared with those existing in the more elite four year colleges and institutions. The relative independence in selecting courses, the more

³⁹See Chapter III of this paper.

lenient sets of rules and standards regarding students' activities, and the more open atmosphere which characterize the latter institutions are either absent or present to a lesser degree in the two year colleges. Within these latter schools there is far more rigidity in degree prerequisites and therefore less leeway in selecting curricula, more pervasive advisement from guidance counselors - particularly those counselors skillful enough to give the student the false belief that he is making his own choices - a more hierarchical arrangement between student and teacher, and generally stricter rules regarding codes of conduct.⁴⁰

The general relationship of the social relations in the educational structure to the social relations within the production structure can also be seen in the ethic of competition. This ethic transcends class lines insofar as it is stressed in the high school, regardless of the particular track, and in virtually all colleges and universities. The results of this situation for the child and the ultimate effect of the process upon the societal framework has been examined by William E. Brownson in "The Structure of Competition in the School and Its Consequences."⁴¹

In his discussion, Brownson sees five preconditions

⁴⁰Bowles and Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America, p. 212; and Clark, "The Cooling-Out Function," pp. 518-520.

⁴¹William E. Brownson, "The Structure of Competition in the School and Its Consequences," in Philosophy of Education 1974: Proceedings of the Thirtieth Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society (Edwardsville, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1973).

necessary to a competitive setting, all of which he finds present in the American public school. The first of these conditions is the "measurability of success." Brownson sees this as typified by the tendency to keep students in school for as long as possible. Schooling is dominated by predetermined and measurable criteria of success and failure.⁴² Therefore, to keep students in school for a maximum length of time extends the ability to measure in quantifiable terms and classify the student at the same time that the value of perseverance is encouraged.

"Scarcity of rewards" is another precondition mentioned by Brownson. The scarcity is an obvious requirement since if there were enough of the desired object(s) to go around, there would be little need to compete for them in the first place. A more important point brought out by Brownson is that, because the ideal reward to be gained via education is knowledge, and the quest for the attainment of knowledge is not a zero-sum endeavor requiring that some have little in order for others to have a great deal, therefore the school creates an artificial scarcity of artificial or distorted rewards.⁴³ Since it clearly is not the case that knowledge per se comprises a finite sum which somehow must be distributed among a certain number of knowledge seekers, it follows that if the competitive framework is to be

⁴²Ibid., p. 230.

⁴³Ibid., p. 231.

developed and maintained, some other kinds of more scarce rewards must be substituted. Hence the emphasis on grades and tests. The quest for knowledge is made more indirect with grades mediating between the student and his level of knowledge, and supposedly acting as an indicator of how successful the student has been at a given point in his quest.

There is no inherent reason why even the reward of a grade must necessarily be a "scarce reward," yet this is precisely what occurs in the educational process. The "value" of high grades is increased because all do not get such grades. In most classes, both high school and college, there are only so many "A's" and "B's" to go around. The teacher who gives out an "excess" of such grades is regarded as too lenient. His judgments are often not as highly regarded by students and by other teachers whose overall grading exhibits a better "balance." Thus, in an educational replication of market supply and demand, knowledge itself, as expressed in grades, becomes a commodity whose value is determined by the number of other students getting better, similar or lesser grades.

Closely related to the scarcity of rewards is what Brownson refers to as the "comparability of judgments." Just as the value of high grades becomes dependent upon their relative scarcity, so too the judgments made of the students themselves. The student's "value" is based upon the

allegedly objective nature of the testing and process.⁴⁴ It is not just for the grades themselves that the student is encouraged to compete anymore than it is for knowledge itself that the child is encouraged and/or forced to attend school in the first place. Knowledge and grades quickly are perceived as means, by students, future employers, colleges and professional schools, for selecting out those students viewed as being most likely to satisfy a particular position's requirements. It is this underlying function of the school to sort and select that keeps the competition between students so keen. Grades alone are not able to maintain this ethic. The fact that tests, grades and curricula are regarded as being both objective in themselves, and a crucial factor in determining the student's future, helps establish a highly competitive atmosphere in the classroom. This reflects a characteristically functionalist view that the promise of material reward is the most effective way to induce individuals to continue their education.

The fourth precondition that Brownson sees as necessary for a competitive framework is the "externality of rules." This refers to the fact that generally the child is not given any responsibility or rights regarding the enactment and enforcement of the rules governing the education process.⁴⁵ The competition is structured by an external

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 232.

source able to define its forms and purposes.

The final precondition Brownson discusses, "sameness of actors," is more specifically related to the issue of equality of opportunity. Here the goal of ensuring fair competition connects to the difficulty of ensuring that all who enter school are the "same." If the conditions for fair competition are to be met, the disadvantaged child must be brought up to the contemporary average level of other children. Brownson points to an offshoot of this condition which is that, since it is so difficult to create a situation whereby all are at approximately the same level when they enter school, a justification is created by teachers and administrators for differential treatment toward children on the grounds that they are "different."⁴⁶ Here "different" should be taken to mean academically or intellectually unequal and thus deserving of unequal treatment. Generally this leads to those students who are regarded as being superior receiving the most favorable treatment.

The highly competitive framework in the educational process obviously has significant effects upon the child and the society. For the child, success, in terms of schooling and eventual economic and status rewards, becomes dependent upon acceptance of the competitive ethic. However, the student must not only be willing to compete, he must also be able to win. It is not a matter of "how you play the game."

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 233.

It happens that "playing the game" requires competing, but it should not be forgotten that the game's purpose and meaning is not in the activity itself so much as it is the sought after victory. Hence activity, particularly learning activity, but also competitive activity in general, is not valued for its own sake. The child is encouraged and pressured to compete, but winning is the fundamental goal and the stakes in the education competition are so high, that implicitly the child is encouraged to do whatever he can get away with in order to win. Cheating becomes rational and acceptable behavior as long as the student can escape detection.⁴⁷ If he does not cheat, then "stretching" the rules and attempting to project the image that the teacher favors become effective ways to be successful in school.

Another related development, closely connected to the stabilizing purpose behind both the competitive ethic and the kind of equality of opportunity desired in the American context, is the discouragement of personal responsibility. The activities of school are controlled by rules which determine the "where," "when," and "how" of the child's activities. The teacher and/or administrator sets and enforces the rules and gives the activities their meaning. Brownson uses the examples of neatness and reading. In and of themselves, these are not competitive activities, but in the setting of the school they become so. The student's

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 236.

success in school becomes a function of his willingness and ability to excel in such activities so as to be "better" at them than his fellow students.⁴⁸ In such a way is he judged and in such a way does he judge himself. Because the standards are imposed from above, a situation is created in the school, as it is later in the workplace, whereby legitimization and stability, if not contentment, is maintained via the competition with peers and conformity to structure imposed by superiors.

Legitimization

Legitimization has been defined by Bowles and Gintis as the:

fostering of a generalized consciousness among individuals which prevents the formation of social bonds and critical understanding where social conditions might be transformed.⁴⁹

It is clear how such institutions as tracking and the competitive ethic fit into this description of legitimization. It is also clear that the kinds of character traits most likely to be rewarded, particularly at the elementary and secondary school levels, are also those most appropriate for the work habits called for in most occupations. The disciplined, hard-working, neat, punctual, unquestioning worker is the sort in which most factories and offices are

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 235.

⁴⁹Bowles and Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America, p. 11.

interested for the majority of their low and middle level positions. This is an example of the "correspondence principle" in which the social relations of production of the school parallel those in the workplace.⁵⁰ In like fashion, those being prepared for the leadership positions in society tend to have different social relations of production in school.

The legitimization is carried beyond the immediate school and occupational levels to an acceptance of the overall authority structure and stratification which permeates the entire society. The educational system not only prepares individuals to accept their future roles as necessary, inevitable, and just, but also to accept the authority of those who give the orders that they obey. American education thereby both legitimizes and reproduces inequality.⁵¹

However, such legitimization is not easy and contradictions tend to emerge. An example of this, as well as of the recurring American view of education as a panacea for all social problems, can be seen in the educational aspects of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. It is clear that Johnson

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 126; and Spring, The Sorting Machine, pp. 86-87.

⁵¹See John McDermott, "Technology: The Opiate of the Intellectuals," The New York Review of Books, July 31, 1969, p. 34, for a view which sees less likelihood of such a process adequately fulfilling this purpose. McDermott claims that as a political, economic and educational system requires greater centralization, individuals, with their increased education, become more willing and able to manage their own affairs.

and several of his advisors believed, or claimed to believe, that the root cause of poverty in the United States lay not with the economic system, but with the inferior education and lack of educational opportunity with which the poor were faced.⁵² Such poverty and lack of education both fed and was fed by what became known as the "culture of poverty."⁵³ The ability and will to break up this culture of poverty via education would, it was thought, lead to the elimination of poverty itself. Thus, in an indirect way, equality of educational opportunity, achieved through programs such as Head Start, was to bring about individuals who, in their cognitive abilities, skills, and attitudes would be able to bring themselves up from poverty.

The problem in such an approach is that educational reform, in isolation from economic reforms, can at best lead to increased mobility. Since for each individual's or group's upward movement there must also be an equal amount of downward for some other individual or group, only the identity of the poverty group changes. Poverty itself is not eliminated. Spring describes such an approach to the problem as a desire

⁵²Spring, The Sorting Machine, p. 194.

⁵³For a detailed analysis and critique of this position, see S. M. Miller and Ronnie Steinberg Ratner, "The American Resignation: The New Assault on Equality," Social Policy, III (May/June, 1972), 5-15.

to integrate the poor into the social and economic system that was responsible for their poverty.⁵⁴

The purpose of this integration is less to eliminate poverty than to ensure stability. Its proponents deny that a fundamental and inevitable conflict of interest exists between the rich and the poor. Just as the poor have need of structural changes in the economic and social systems to bring about their own interests, so too do the wealthy have need of a means of maintaining the existing order, an order which involves keeping the poor where they are. The War on Poverty approach, with its equality of educational opportunity emphasis, sees the problem as being one of getting the poor up to the middle class levels in culture, income, education and power, none of which, it is felt, require any major change or threat to stability. In the view of the War on Poverty policy makers, "education was considered the hope of the poor and the method of the middle class."⁵⁵

Conclusion

In general, equality of educational opportunity in the American context can be judged to have purposes other than education, social mobility and democracy. Its ultimate purposes can be seen in its "sorting out" ability and in its stabilizing function whereby the authority of those indivi-

⁵⁴Spring, The Sorting Machine, p. 228.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 228-229.

duals at or near the top of the economic and political hierarchies is legitimized.⁵⁶ The various mechanisms which are deemed to be the basis for equality of educational opportunity, such as tracking, testing, different types of high schools and colleges and the competitive ethic are but a series of measures designed to convince both observer and participant that a meritocratic process is taking place whereby all are given an equal chance and, educationally and occupationally, the best come out on top.

The stability of the system which is dependent upon the authority, not just the power, of the relatively few who control the work of many, is partially dependent upon this ability to convince people of the justice of such an arrangement. It is for this reason that the stakes are so high in the effort to legitimize authority via the notion of equality of educational opportunity. In a society where educational credentials have become so highly valued and are perceived to be one of the only fair ways to gain economic power, to undercut the legitimacy of the process by which such credentials are obtained is to undercut the legitimacy of the existing hierarchy itself. Ultimately, what education in the American context accomplishes is to provide the crucial arena in which equality of opportunity takes place. Those sought after values that allegedly flow from education such as wealth, status and authority are seen as justly

⁵⁶Bowles and Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America, p. 104.

distributed because the educational system itself is just and fair.

Hence, it is not that the economic inequalities, inefficiencies and instabilities are a result of an inegalitarian educational system and can, therefore, be cured through greater equality of opportunity within that educational system. Rather, it is the case that the structure and problems of the educational system are themselves a product of an inegalitarian economic system. It is for this reason that much of the "free school" and "deschooling" proposals are doomed either to fail on their own, be co-opted by the economic system or produce "occupational misfits."⁵⁷ There is little possibility of achieving an egalitarian educational process within the context of an inegalitarian economic system. If equality of opportunity cannot be attained without far greater equality of result, and if substantial inequality of result is inherent in the economic system, then equality of educational opportunity is also unattainable under existing conditions.

This is not to imply that there is no movement between upper and lower classes. Some such movement obviously does occur. However this mobility is rare, and certainly does not justify the claim that equality of opportunity exists. To make such a claim, or even assert that it can exist under present economic conditions, serves only to legitimize

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 252-264.

further the economic, political, and social system. This is not a condemnation of equality of educational opportunity per se as much as a critique of its possibilities and manifestations within the context of a liberal democratic capitalist system such as exists in the United States. Thus we come to the final question to be explored: would a different context allow equality of opportunity to serve the personal development of all members of society rather than only the interests of those in power?

C H A P T E R V I

CONCLUSIONS AND ALTERNATIVES

A series of problems connected with equality of opportunity have been dealt with in this thesis. The relationship between the concepts of equality, equality of opportunity, egalitarianism and equality of treatment was examined in order to show the distinctions between them. This was necessary owing to the prevailing feeling in the United States that we are a people who take equality seriously, despite the very inegalitarian nature of the existing order.

Having shown that Americans generally understand, or prefer, equality to mean equality of opportunity, criticisms of equality of opportunity, from both radical and conservative perspectives, were then discussed. Equality of opportunity, particularly in a liberal capitalist context is not a universally held ideal. In Chapter III it was demonstrated that it is neither fully attainable, nor likely to be approximated, in the United States, while in Chapter IV it was concluded that the genetic factors which recently have been used to justify the lack of complete equality of opportunity and to defend the idea that America has gone as far as possible to approximate it, are inconsequential factors.

The underlying function of the image of equality of

opportunity, and the manner in which it has been used, was analyzed in the educational policy case study. With educational policy providing perhaps the most critical device to reproduce the various classes in American society and to justify the relative lack of intergenerational mobility, it is clear that the claim of equality of educational opportunity provides one of the key ideological underpinnings for the political, economic and social system.

Hence, both as a desirable and as an attainable goal, equality of opportunity in the United States is beset by serious limitations and obstacles. While some of these obstacles may be impossible to overcome fully, others are more context dependent and therefore can be significantly ameliorated, if not eliminated, through substantial alterations in the American political, economic and social framework. What passes for equality of opportunity in the contemporary United States is primarily a means to secure acceptance of, and stability for, the prevailing order. It has brought neither full democracy nor a fair and efficient meritocracy. Further, the measures which have been proposed, put into law, and occasionally implemented with the ostensible purpose of bringing about full equality of opportunity in education, the labor market and political affairs have, at best, managed only to provide incremental progress toward this widely sought-after goal.

Clearly the ostensible thrust of many reformist programs which have arisen in the United States has been the

effort to secure equality of opportunity for various groups in American society. Whether through the attempt to secure voting rights for minorities, equal pay for equal work, more fair and open hiring practices, or the current debate over affirmative action and quotas, the basic push has been for equality of opportunity. If the usual result of such movements is to stabilize the system rather than to bring about fundamental and necessary change, and to bring in a reaction which includes a reawakened interest in I.Q. scores and their supposed inherited, immutable, racial and class based components, then the essential debate over these movements is not between those who desire to change the system and those who desire stability. Instead, regardless of the intentions of the participants, the fundamental debate is over how best to retain the overall political, economic and social status quo. For those who wish for substantive change in a more egalitarian direction, the question of alternatives to contemporary American-style equality of opportunity must be confronted, and this confrontation involves the consideration of how to select persons for the various positions in society.

There are four, not necessarily distinct, methods of dealing with this problem. One approach involves the equality of opportunity that supposedly exists in the United States. Another method is to return to an hereditary-style ascriptive society in which position and rank is attained via some characteristic over which the individual has no

control. In these two possibilities can be seen, respectively, the liberal capitalist and conservative aristocrat approaches. It is within these two possibilities that defenders of equality of opportunity generally frame their positions and thereby seal the debate in their favor.

There are, however, two other means of allocating at least some positions which many egalitarians regard as being far more just and equitable. Such proposals involve positions being allocated by chance via, for example, a lottery, and/or a rotation of positions among various individuals with no one individual holding the same position at all times. No one suggests that all jobs be distributed in this manner. For example, we obviously would prefer a surgeon to have a high level of training and not be chosen completely at random. However, there are serious arguments which can be made for seeing to it that many of the less desirable occupations are rotated or even that the highly trained surgeon be required and/or permitted to do various other jobs as well.¹ Nevertheless, it does seem clear that overall, as both a fair and efficient method of filling many of the key positions in society, some form of equality of opportunity is a prerequisite.

If equality of opportunity does, or at least can, fill an important purpose in the creation and maintenance of a

¹See some of the literature on Cuba and China such as: Robert M. Bernardo, The Theory of Moral Incentives in Cuba (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1971); and John W. Gurley, "The New Man in the New China," The Center Magazine, III (May, 1970), 24-33.

just society, then the real problem with the American system is not that it does or does not fulfill the dominant interpretation of what equality of opportunity entails. Instead, the basic difficulty lies with the context in which the debate is framed. As has been maintained on several occasions in this essay, equality of opportunity requires as a precondition a far more egalitarian framework than currently exists in the United States. Granted that equality of opportunity in any context does presuppose a competitive ethic, and that competition itself is not always beneficial to the participants in particular or to the society in general, still it is not competition per se that is at the heart of either the conservative or radical critiques of equality of opportunity. Rather it is a particular kind of competition in which the stakes are both distorted and too high, and in which the contest itself is heavily biased in one group's favor. It is not true that equality of opportunity and egalitarianism are inherently opposed to one another; rather it is the case that the former requires the latter.

Equality and Freedom

In taking such a position it is important to consider the arguments of those who assert that equality of opportunity with stratification is necessary for the attainment of a fair, free and efficient society and that an egalitarian society, particularly when it is equated with the abolition of the hierarchical division of labor, will necessarily run

afoul of such values as freedom and efficiency. This, in essence, is the argument that liberals make against those calling for a more egalitarian system, be it via a lessening of income differentials, a rotation of positions or any restrictions placed upon individual freedom in the economic sphere.

Liberal advocates of equality of opportunity, and those who either deny the possibility or oppose the creation of an egalitarian society, often charge that the latter would require an extremely powerful government. This government would have as one of its primary purposes the restriction of individual freedom so as to ensure the development and maintenance of equality. Left to themselves, it is argued, persons would soon arrange society in a more stratified direction. Hence the choice presented is between an egalitarian system, which is equated with conformity and despotism,² and a system which has inequalities of result which are acceptable because they are inequalities deriving from the exercise of individual freedom and the free market. Robert Nozick personifies this liberal perspective with its inevitable choice in favor of freedom and the "entitlement" to that for which one has rights regardless of the resulting inequalities.³ Otherwise, so the liberal argument goes, to

²Isaiah Berlin, "Equality as an Ideal," in Justice and Social Policy: A Collection of Essays, ed. by Frederick Olafson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), pp. 139-141.

³Nozick, Anarchy, the State and Utopia, pp. 232-233.

ensure some form of equality of result and/or condition, or a distribution according to need, individuals could not be allowed unrestricted freedom to amass as much as they could. Because men are not angels and are motivated by ambition, the desire to surpass others, and an ever-increasing appetite for material goods, power and prestige, the only possible check that could restrain these desires and maintain an egalitarian system would be an extremely powerful government. But this is dangerous for two reasons. First, the restrictions it would place upon individual ambition and initiative would themselves be unjust and antithetical to the liberal view of freedom. Second, the potential for such a powerful institution to go beyond ensuring an egalitarian society and to become instead a self-serving and unchallengable elite is too great. Thus, the liberal advocate of equality of opportunity states that while it might be good if all could be given the same amount of material comfort, though on this point there is substantial disagreement among liberals, nevertheless the combination of differential abilities and human nature render unlikely such a state of affairs unless it were enforced by massive governmental power and subsequent unacceptable restrictions on individual freedom. Nor does the liberal accept a possible interaction between restrictions and freedom that could result in a "forcing to be free," since forcing implies coercion and coercion is regarded as antithetical to freedom. The idea of utilizing external coercion (the state, other individuals, etc.) to overcome

internal coercion (compulsions, fears, etc.) is generally ignored in this perspective.

One of the deficiencies of the liberal approach lies with its very conception of freedom. To the liberal, freedom can be summed up as the absence of restrictions, especially physical restrictions. The fewer the restrictions, the greater the freedom. Society, for the sake of stability and out of some sense of obligation to ensure the survival of its citizens, must impose various restrictions upon its people, but the overall inclination, particularly in the economic sphere, is to minimize the scope and impact of governmental authority. The liberal capitalist notion of equality of opportunity is consistent with this perspective, particularly if efforts to implement and enforce it are restricted to the formal legal sphere.

Liberalism treats the notions of "restriction" and "coercion" in a very shallow manner. By its emphasis on physical coercion, liberalism tends to ignore the more subtle, but equally effective, kinds of coercion which may derive from education, socialization, psychotherapy and other non-physical manipulators of actions and beliefs.⁴ Even assuming that the intention behind such processes may be the development of intelligent autonomous beings, nevertheless the potential for their being utilized to ensure unthinking conformity without the need for physical coercion

⁴See Connolly, The Terms of Political Discourse, pp. 148-150; and Benjamin R. Barber, Superman and Common Man (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1971), pp. 64-68.

is great. Further, if and when such processes do succeed in terms of their more ideal objectives, what has then occurred could well be described as a "forcing to be free." Liberalism, with its emphasis on restrictions in terms of acts rather than in the formation of thoughts cannot adequately deal with such phenomena. This inability renders this whole conception of freedom inferior to a conception which views a free act as involving, not the absence of restraint since the two often interact, but instead the self-conscious intentions of the actor.⁵

In addition, the liberal perspective fails to take into account the interdependence of freedom and equality. It is not the antithetical relationship posited by contemporary critics of egalitarianism. It is clear that poverty can, and generally does, act as a severe constraint upon an individual's freedom.

Poverty and ignorance, for instance, do limit profoundly the ability of those afflicted to formulate social options knowledgeably and to act upon those formulations.⁶

Nor is it a viable argument to claim that a society valuing "freedom" must not take steps to promote egalitarianism via restrictions upon the actions of the wealthy. It is not a society-wide freedom which is thereby promoted. Instead, as Tawney points out, in a stratified society the question becomes not one of freedom versus unfreedom so much

⁵Connolly, The Terms of Political Discourse, pp. 157-158.

⁶Ibid., pp. 168-169.

as a question of "freedom for whom?" To allow the wealthy their freedom implies a lack of freedom for the poor. The absence of state intervention on behalf of the poor in terms of policy ensures only that private power shall make the decisions, not that each individual will freely make his own decisions.⁷ It is true that a stronger government with greater power to intervene in the economic sector to ensure greater equality is a potential danger to freedom. But such a danger may be outweighed by the reality of the existing restrictions on freedom which derive from allowing private power to go largely unrestricted. When private power, generally a function of private wealth, is distributed unequally, so too will individual freedom be unequally distributed. Either equality and freedom must complement each other, or freedom will be largely a possession of the wealthier classes.⁸

The essence of the problem with egalitarianism versus equality of opportunity is not that egalitarianism inevitably leads to less or no freedom for the citizens of a society. Rather, the point is that "versus" is the wrong description of the relationship. The presence of widespread inequality and stratification is itself contradictory both to freedom and to equality of opportunity. With such inequality, freedom becomes far more restricted in its

⁷R. H. Tawney, Equality (London: Unwin Books, Inc., 1964), pp. 228-229.

⁸See Nozick, Anarchy, the State and Utopia, for a conservative position on the morality of restrictions upon the use of wealth.

application. The choices made by persons are more likely to be a result of manipulation or pressure by those at the upper levels of the hierarchy, while the scope and effect of such choices becomes largely a function of position in the class hierarchy. While this obviously is not the ideal of freedom which has been at the heart of democratic theory, it is an accurate assessment of the reality of freedom in modern stratified society.

Equality and Efficiency

Some advocates of equality of opportunity within a stratified context acknowledge that freedom is lessened by stratification, particularly stratification deriving from the hierarchical division of labor, but insist that the latter is made necessary by the dictates of efficient production. Modern technology and mass production require such a division of labor. From the functionalist perspective, it is necessary that some positions receive greater prestige and income than others. To attempt to arrange society in a more egalitarian way is dysfunctional. If inequalities are not inevitable, then they are at least necessary unless we are willing to make substantial sacrifices in terms of material comforts. Arthur M. Okun asserts that material incentives for workers, and the inevitable inequalities that result, are required to promote efficiency. It is this value of efficiency, and not freedom, that is at the heart of private ownership and inequality in the United States.

Socialism, to Okun, with its planning and emphasis on equality, will be less efficient even if individual rights and freedoms can be preserved.⁹ However, equality of opportunity combined with stratification, results in greater freedom, greater efficiency and greater equality between groups, if not individuals.¹⁰

In replying to critiques of such equality of opportunity, Okun asserts that if the "races" in society are not maintained, individuals will not have the incentives to work as hard and therefore efficiency will be reduced. Nor can alternative incentive systems be utilized since the market ethic is so "deeply ingrained" in the United States. To promote a different form of incentives, for example, working for the good of the community, would require a massive indoctrination program sharply at odds with traditional American values.¹¹

While expressing the belief that inequalities are necessary for efficient production in contemporary society, many advocates of equality of opportunity, Okun included, do believe that poverty can and should be eliminated. Okun calls for a "compromise" between equality and efficiency and appears to accept a prima facie case for equality when he states that greater inequality is justifiable only when it

⁹Arthur M. Okun, Equality and Efficiency: The Big Tradeoff (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1975), p. 61.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 83-85.

¹¹Ibid., p. 86.

helps lead to greater efficiency.¹² The market, with its built in efficiency producing mechanisms, should not be allowed to go so far as to "legislate life and death," by which Okun means that, for example, those who serve no productive purpose should not be left to die. Nevertheless, it is clear that Okun is placing the most emphasis upon the value of efficiency with equality taking a very secondary role.

What commentators like Okun fail to take into account is that poverty and unemployment serve a number of important functions in a capitalist system, and therefore cannot be eliminated within such a structure. An argument can be made that the presence of an impoverished group in society is an integral part of the efficiency for which liberal equality of opportunity is so highly praised. Herbert Gans, for example, identifies fifteen functions - economic, political, social and cultural - that poverty fulfills. Perhaps the most important of these functions is the "reserve army of unemployed" comprised of the poor and marginally employed. Other functions include seeing to it that the least desirable jobs get done and that poor quality goods which otherwise might not get purchased, are consumed by this group. The problem in Okun's prescriptions for eliminating poverty is that from the perspective of a capitalist functionalist analysis of society, a "compromise" between equality and efficiency cannot go very far. The elimination of poverty

¹²Ibid., p. 88.

would seriously alter the existing social, political and especially economic relationships in society to the detriment of the more affluent classes since it is the affluent who derive the greatest benefit from the existence of poverty.¹³

Obviously there is a moral issue involved here with regard to whether the material comforts of the affluent can justify the subsistence existence of the poor. The argument has been made that the greater efficiency, and hence greater production, which is engendered by the inequalities provides greater comfort for all concerned. This "trickle down" theory thereby concludes that while some may enjoy the benefits of such efficiency more than others, on the whole, everyone derives some benefit. Thus, there is so much emphasis by advocates of this theory on comparing American G.N.P., or per capita income, with the more egalitarian socialist countries. However, there is increasing evidence that even on its own terms of efficiency, an inegalitarian society is not all that efficient. Like Sennett and Cobb, Alan Fox discusses how an inegalitarian capitalist society promotes "low trust" relationships between its citizens. This low trust in turn, promotes indifference to the quality of how well a person does his job so long as the person can get away with it; it promotes both social and psychological instability;

¹³See Herbert Gans, More Equality (New York: Vintage Books, Inc., 1973), pp. 106-114, for a description of some of the functions that poverty serves in the American system.

and it reduces the patriotism that the poor feel toward their country.¹⁴ All of these characteristics are inefficient and dysfunctional, both to the particular productive enterprise and to the system itself. Of course, the classical liberal view of human nature, as typified by Hobbes, would tend to see low trust relationships as being the only kinds of relationships possible between self-interested persons. Given the abstract manner of viewing individuals that is so much a part of liberalism, the particular social context can do little to alter the character of individuals or their relationships.

Nevertheless, there are indications that the hierarchical division of labor and the inequalities inherent within it, are not as efficient as its defenders have maintained; that it, in itself, negates the possibility of equality of opportunity; and that therefore, reforms within this basic structure can bring about neither equality of opportunity nor the optimum level of efficiency, nor a more egalitarian form of society. We must look to alternatives to accomplish any or all of the above goals.

Moral Incentives

One such alternative which has gained increasing attention, both positive and negative, is the idea of utilizing moral incentives instead of, or in addition to, material

¹⁴Alan Fox, "Is Equality a Necessity?" Dissent, XXII (Winter, 1975), pp. 53-55.

incentives. Essentially, such attention has been focused upon Cuba and China. It is clear that both of these societies place far greater emphasis upon equality of result and/or distribution according to need, while also making more serious efforts toward the realization of equality of opportunity.

The key element in the system of moral incentives lies in its advocates' view of human nature. If we conceive of man as working solely for the purpose of gaining material rewards for himself and perhaps, his family, then the capitalist system is the most fitting system of production. If man views labor as inherently undesirable, if he regards his life away from work as the only time that he can engage in interesting and pleasurable activity, and if this is the way man is and always will be, then only a system which provides individual material incentives for working and material penalties for not working can ensure that the socially necessary jobs in a society will be accomplished. It also justifies the hierarchical division of labor because those who put the most time into training for a position must be provided with greater material rewards or they will have no incentive to undergo such training in the first place. Training, like work itself, is viewed as inherently undesirable. In fact, given this perspective, almost any sort of productive activity, with the possible exception of human procreation, is seen as, at best, a necessary evil. Given this view of man, it is clear that only the very limited form

of equality of opportunity which exists in the United States is really possible. To ensure the stability of this system, such a view of human nature must be made as widespread as possible.

For men to be motivated by non-material incentives, especially in a framework which has as one of its major goals the elimination of large differences in wealth and power, obviously a different view of human nature must be envisioned. This is why leadership groups in Cuba and China place so much emphasis on creating "socialist man" or "communist morality." The theory is that if communist society is to be created, then the development of socialist man must take place at the same time as the development of a socialist economy, rather than first creating the latter and then expecting the former to evolve from it.¹⁵ It is for this reason that Cuba and China unlike for example, Yugoslavia, have placed so much emphasis on the downplaying, if not elimination, of material incentives in the productive process, even at the risk of reducing overall productive efficiency.

What is entailed by the notion of moral incentives is that people should work for other than personal material gain. Income differentials are to be sharply reduced while distribution of goods is either rationed according to need or provided freely. In addition, the hierarchical division

¹⁵See Che Guevara, "Man and Socialism in Cuba," in Venceremos: The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara, ed. by John Gerassi (New York: The Macmillan Company, Inc., 1968), p. 391.

of labor is to be significantly reduced. In Cuba this has taken the form of office workers cutting cane at various times during the year and other attempts to reduce the differences between urban and rural workers and manual and intellectual work in the hope of creating an integrated community via common work experience and equality.¹⁶

If wage differentials and the role of the hierarchical division of labor are to be sharply reduced, then the question of how else to motivate persons in their work must be examined. The substituting of moral for material incentives involves the channelling of competitive drives into a socially and individually useful direction without the resulting inequalities of material incentives. This already assumes that such competitive drives are inherent in human nature. If they are not, and persons can get along quite well without competition, then moral incentives are less necessary. But, to an even greater extent, so too would capitalism and inequality be less justifiable. Assuming that persons do have competitive urges, the response of a system of moral incentives, as it is supposed to operate in Cuba, is to foster "socialist emulation," and in China, to encourage a concern with the "collective material welfare."¹⁷ Though

¹⁶Nita R. Manitzas, "Social Class and the Definition of the Cuban Nation," in Cuba: The Logic of the Revolution, ed. by David P. Barkin and Nita R. Manitzas (Andover, MA: Warner Modular Publications, 1973), M261, pp. 10-11.

¹⁷Carl Riskin, "Incentive Systems and Work Motivations," Working Papers for a New Society, I (Winter, 1974), pp. 84-85.

there are differences between the Cuban and Chinese systems, the essentials of both are that a form of competition is encouraged, which involves a great deal of cooperation as well. In Cuba, for example, the competition is for social status, not for cash prizes, with an emphasis on group solidarity. Further, the criteria for achieving such distinctions is not so much the quantity of goods produced, such as is the case with piece work pay scales, as it is the effort that one gives to the work. The symbolic awards that are granted cannot be used to purchase goods or services. Hence, competitive urges are taken into account, but they are not allowed to interfere with the ultimate goal of an egalitarian society.¹⁸ It is a difficult combination of getting each individual to do his best while he also helps his group of neighbors to succeed.

China's system of collective material welfare, which is but one of three different incentive systems utilized in the Chinese economy, bears many similarities to Cuba's socialist emulation. As in Cuba, the emphasis is on competition between groups and cooperation within the group. The rewards in China can be of a material nature, but they are collective, not individual, rewards. It is the group's performance that may merit reward, and this tends to ensure an interdependence and willingness to help one another within the group. Further, the distribution of such material rewards within the group is based more on need than upon

¹⁸See Bernardo, Moral Incentives.

individual performance. Another similarity to Cuba's system is that a major criterion for such awards, both on the group and individual levels, is the worker's attitude, including ideological commitment, selflessness and enthusiasm, rather than abilities or productive performance. As Riskin points out, such criteria, though on a very different level from capitalist criteria, are still based upon a notion of desert rather than need, even if the distribution within the group is not.¹⁹

Because the desert criterion still exists in these incentive systems, it is clear that further progress must be made toward transcending even these more cooperative and sharing incentive systems before an ideal communist system is attained. The "socialist morality" of which Guevara spoke and which Mao was apparently attempting to achieve, has not yet been attained. However there are indications that both Cuba and China are making some progress toward this goal. For example, in Cuba the initial goal sought is to make work a social duty rather than a means to personal advancement. The eventual goal, in Marxist terms, is the replacement of work as a duty or necessity by work as a creative activity.²⁰ While there is importance in what is produced and how it is produced, of equal importance is the

¹⁹Riskin, "Incentive Systems," p. 84.

²⁰Bertram Silverman, "Economic Organization and Social Conscience: Some Dilemmas of Cuban Socialism," in The Chilean Road to Socialism, ed. by J. Ann Zammit (University of Sussex: Institute of Development Studies, 1973), p. 405.

issue of why an individual produces at all.

In China, Riskin finds that some industrial workers do approach this communist ideal. In many of the large industrial enterprises there is combined a highly egalitarian structure with little distinction between workers and managers, and a great deal of rank and file participation in the decision making of the firm with shared responsibility and power. The ultimate goal being that work becomes inherently satisfying, not merely a means to some external reward, material or non-material, individual or collective.²¹ When this latter goal is achieved, the need and desire for the hierarchical division of labor is terminated as is the alienation of labor which Marx saw as inherent in capitalist production. Further, equality of opportunity is more likely to be a reality than under the confines of a profit-oriented inegalitarian system.

The means, ends and relative degree of success of the Cuban and Chinese approaches have all come under criticism. These attacks center upon two elements which critics tend to see as virtually inevitable with moral incentives. The first of these is that such a system is regarded as leading to too much state control. Cuba, in particular, is seen as becoming too repressive, in part as a result of the attempt by the Cuban government to impose such a system upon the society. Critics like Rene Dumont focus attention upon the

²¹Riskin, "Incentive Systems," p. 87.

"militarization of the economy" as shown in the ever greater role by the Cuban army in production, and the ensuing barracks-like atmosphere of Cuban society.²² Because of this tendency, the participation of the rank and file and freedom itself is seen as having been sacrificed in the interests of greater control from a few individuals in Havana. Whether this is inherent in the system of moral incentives however, is an open question. The problem of the amount of allowable coercion is a problem for any society - it is intensified when such coercion is done in the name of an egalitarian ideology like Marxism.

The other criticism levelled against moral incentives is that they are inefficient because they fail to take into account the need for profits on an individual level. Even a number of Marxist economists argue that profits per se are not the real problem with capitalism. Evsei Liberman claims that utilizing profits as an incentive is fine, the key is how the profits are spent - for individual gain or for the good of the community.²³ For even if a system of moral incentives has been or can be achieved in Cuba, China or anywhere else, the problem of maintaining such community oriented incentives remains. As Guevara asserts, it is vital to "perpetuate heroic attitudes in everyday life."²⁴ While

²²Rene Dumont, Is Cuba Socialist? (London: Deutsch, 1974), p. 96.

²³Cited in Bernardo, Moral Incentives, p. 134.

²⁴Guevara, "Man and Socialism," p. 388.

times of crisis, such as natural disasters or the presence of a threat from a foreign power, can encourage the very high national morale which is so much a part of the incentive systems of Cuba and China, the question remains as to whether these attitudes can be maintained should such threats diminish. If they can be maintained, which many deny, then this particular problem is eliminated. However, if these attitudes cannot be retained in the absence of such threats, then either a more profit oriented approach may need to be imposed, or dangerous enemies and threats may have to be created where there are none. The latter is certainly not an unusual occurrence in history as evidenced by the numerous instances in which national leaders have found it convenient to create crises for domestic political purposes. Nevertheless such a manipulative procedure is inconsistent with the ideal of a Marxist society. Given this perceived choice between a limited Liberman style profit system or a more hierarchical and manipulative government, many observers like Dumont, who are relatively sympathetic both to Cuba and to socialism, have opted for the use of more material incentives as a means of attaining efficiency and freedom on the one hand, and a socialist society on the other. Their conclusion is that to depend solely upon "voluntary mobilizations" of the labor force and to expect "heroic attitudes" to be maintained is to ask too much of a people.

There are three responses which can be made to such

criticisms. On the one hand, there is evidence to indicate that, in fact, the Cuban and Chinese systems have not been inefficient, particularly given the international setting in which they have been operating. For example, by distributing goods more evenly and increasing output, China has had less malnutrition than any other underdeveloped country over the last twenty years.²⁵ Cuba has made extraordinary advances in education which, in itself, implies an increase in potential productive power. These examples relate to the second response that can be made to the critics of moral incentives; namely that these societies are utilizing a different conception of efficiency. It is not the notion of efficiency which is reflected in G.N.P. or increased per capita income. Rather, efficiency is measured in terms of balanced growth between, for example, rural and urban areas to the extent that technology can be slowed so as, in John Gurley's words, "to not leave anyone behind."²⁶ If this results in a temporary slowing of economic growth, the cost is seen as being outweighed by the benefits. The lower rate of malnutrition in China, and the increased literacy rate in Cuba, both reflect this preference for an egalitarian society over a society with a skyrocketing G.N.P. in the midst of poverty and a highly unbalanced distribution of wealth. To those who measure economic efficiency solely

²⁵Gurley, "The New Man in the New China," p. 31.

²⁶Ibid., p. 27.

in terms of economic growth, China and Cuba appear to be inefficient societies, and doubts regarding non-material incentives are thereby given further substance. However, it is clear that it is not merely a matter of efficiency versus inefficiency. Further, equality of opportunity is not eliminated but is increased in both the Cuban and Chinese approaches. The context, however, is so significantly different from that of the United States that many have difficulty in recognizing it as such once the material incentives and resulting inequalities are removed.

The third response that can be made to the critics is that "heroism" and "sacrifice" are not the proper terms to use if such a system is operating properly. Persons will work efficiently because they want to help their community and, ideally, because much of the work itself is pleasurable and interesting. Work does not always need to be seen as unpleasant, and working for the good of the community need not always be regarded as a "sacrifice." To view it as such implies an acceptance of the functionalist vision of human nature - and such an acceptance biases our perceptions of how well alternative systems might work. Moral incentive systems are not designed to produce martyrs and saints.

Limits to Growth

The arguments regarding losses in freedom and efficiency which liberal advocates of equality of opportunity in a capitalist context make against egalitarians ultimately may

become irrelevant regardless of the success or failure of an alternative like moral incentives. This is due to what has become known as the "limits to growth" problem. Equality of opportunity requires a constantly expanding economy. When the economy stagnates or contracts, those most in need of opportunity are the first to suffer unemployment, just as those educational programs designed to provide greater opportunities for the poor are usually the first to be scrapped in the interests of budget tightening. Thus, even fraudulent efforts to bring about equality of opportunity decline and with them go the varied stabilizing features of the myth of equality of opportunity such as increased, or the hope of increased, status and comfort for those at or near the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. An expanding economy generally implies, in absolute not relative terms, material improvement for all segments of society. While the poor will always constitute a significant segment of the population in capitalist society, with economic expansion it is more likely that the standard of living for almost all classes will improve somewhat. Hence, continued economic expansion serves crucial material and symbolic functions in the society and is tightly tied into the goal of equality of opportunity.

A problem that has been gaining increased attention is that such expansion is becoming less likely and acceptable for reasons independent of the traditional capitalist boom and bust patterns. The costs of such expansion in terms of decreasing resources, increasing pollution and other

threatening possibilities are making it more and more likely that strict controls over what is produced, how it is produced, and how much is produced may be required. Nor do such controls apply only to material technological products. The production of human beings may also have to be regulated.²⁷

If the ecological crises which many are predicting for the not very distant future do come to pass, new definitions of freedom and efficiency will have to be found. What today is called efficient production in terms of producing larger and larger quantities of technological material will become inefficient as its energy wasting and polluting qualities become increasingly antithetical to human survival. Likewise, what in a market economy is called "freedom" to produce or consume whatever we can, will soon become reckless and irresponsible behavior which must be controlled for the sake of all in society. Economic expansion, therefore, will have to be restrained. If this comes to pass, then a society which has already instituted a system of moral incentives will have an easier time in adjusting to such restrictions, particularly if such a society has downgraded consumerism and has geared its technology more toward the production of socially beneficial products rather than toward

²⁷See Robert L. Heilbroner, An Enquiry into the Human Prospect (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1975); and Donella H. Meadows, et al., The Limits to Growth (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1974).

luxury items. An egalitarian society, with more emphasis on contributing to the community and the intrinsic benefits of labor, may not need an ever-expanding economy. Equality of opportunity could also exist under such circumstances, though the rewards and goals might have to be modified somewhat.

Persons living under a market economy will be more likely to respond only to direct coercion since the "every man for himself" individualistic ethic so pervasive in such a system will render persons less willing to go along with the tight controls that an ecological crisis would necessitate. Further, the continued existence of very wealthy and very poor groups suddenly frozen into their respective positions with little hope of change, would increase tensions within the society, and render even less viable the arguments that equality of opportunity does exist. The contemporary liberal arguments that egalitarianism involves less freedom and efficiency may thereby be turned against them, even by their own criteria of freedom and efficiency, should the ecological crises arrive and be perceived as such.²⁸

Conclusion

Obviously such topics as the theory of moral incentives and limits to growth, particularly as they relate to equality

²⁸It should be noted that Heilbroner also is not particularly optimistic regarding future possibilities for socialist societies.

of opportunity, require far more examination than has been given in this chapter. What can be surmised is that moral incentives do provide a potential substitute for the kind of equality of opportunity existing in the United States; and that the future problems which the limits to growth posit render this capitalist style equality of opportunity less and less acceptable within any context. The popular conception that society has a choice of allocating positions by an achievement process or by an ascriptive process, and that the former is exemplified by the very limited kind of equality of opportunity existing in the United States, is not an adequate portrayal of the alternatives. Other choices do exist, and they may not necessarily require permanent, or even temporary, dictatorship, nor any substantive loss in efficiency.

There are unresolved issues regarding these alternatives, and the existing attempts to put such systems into effect on a national scale are not without their problems. However, given the fact that equality of opportunity is unattainable within a stratified society; that under stratified conditions, the belief that it exists can and does do serious harm, both materially and psychologically, to many of those caught up in it; and that the future may render capitalist equality of opportunity totally inimicable to human survival, it does seem that more attention should be paid to resolving the problems of alternative contexts, rather than continuing to try to justify the image of equality of

opportunity as it currently exists.

The examination of alternatives does not mean that equality of opportunity per se is to be eliminated. On the contrary, the goal can and should be retained while the context is altered. What we have in the United States is only the image of equality of opportunity, along with the various problems flowing from that image. We do not have the reality because we do not have an egalitarian society. It is ironic that so liberal an ideal is today most nearly approximated in some of the more socialist countries of the world.

It is clear that what is required is a more egalitarian and democratic version of equality of opportunity. John Schaar characterizes this version as: "No member of the community should be denied the basic conditions for the fullest possible participation in the common life."²⁹ It is toward the two goals of equality and participation in the political, economic and social spheres that any worthwhile notion of equality of opportunity must aim.

²⁹John Schaar, "Equality of Opportunity," pp. 151-152.

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