

ESSAY FRONT PAGE

*Please complete this sheet electronically and attach it as the front page
for each essay submitted.*

Candidate Number:
PXHS6.....

Essay Title:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Essay
Number:

Course
Code:

Course
Title:.....

Submission
Date :

Word
Count :

Introduction

Ascertaining the superiority of either equality of outcomes or equality of opportunity is a particularly hard endeavor, due to the complexity of the two goals.

Firstly, equality of opportunity is a broad umbrella term grouping together different theories. Secondly, different conceptions of equality of outcomes specify different things which should be made equal between individuals. These two changing variables may prevent a meaningful comparison of the two goals, so I decided to approach the question by first looking at some problems raised by the opponents of equality of opportunity and then see if equality of outcomes could solve them.

Building on Phillips' work I will propose some reasons why the equality of opportunity project may conceal and overlook society's structural constraints and power relations. I will then claim that affirmative action programs can alleviate these problems and actually increase market efficiency. I will then show that meritocratic equality of opportunity as applied to the labour market is not fundamentally different from state-imposed equality of outcomes, as soon as one recognizes the democratic character of the market. Even after taking into account this latter argument and the efficiency one it is still not possible to confidently affirm the superiority of equality of outcomes over equality of opportunity, since the former applies to the limited case of labour market arrangements and the latter only proves that the two kinds of equality are very similar in some respects. What these two arguments show, instead, is that certain policies aimed at equalizing outcomes can help the cause of providing equal opportunities. Additionally, they can do so by imposing constraints on individuals that are not qualitatively different from the ones imposed by the instantiation, through market mechanisms, of meritocratic equality of opportunity.

I will therefore conclude that equality of outcomes and equality of opportunity in their practical application should not be seen as antithetical or as competing goals, but more as complementing each other.

Equality of Opportunity and Responsibility

Equality is a much contested topic. Any attempt at agreeing on what should be made equal between members of society seems to irremediably crash against our common perception of how different we are from each other and, in turn, how much we value our individuality. It therefore comes as little surprise that moral philosophers struggle to reach at least a partial consensus when equality is on the table. Despite these difference of opinion on the appropriate “currency” of egalitarian justice, there has been some convergence in consensus as to the importance of giving everyone equal opportunities or chances of success. When the equalizandum is a probability rather than an actual outcome, it is clear that the theory of distributive justice under examination is trying to incorporate two tightly connected and fundamental concerns for the social planner, namely: responsibility and choice. Quite intuitively: it feels wrong to redistribute in favour of the lazy grasshopper by taking away resources from the industrious ant.

If effort should be rewarded and choices should be respected, then the moral question becomes one of identifying which factors or characteristics the individual should be compensated for.

The common denominator of all theories of equality of opportunity is thus the attempt to make people responsible for what they can control and to equalize the morally arbitrary factors, which impede their lives for no fault of their own (Rawls, 199, 63) .

Structural Injustice in Society

The problem with the hegemonic role played by equality of opportunity both in the academic debates and in the political arenas is that ends up concealing the effects of those “structures that generate and sustain inequality” (Phillips, 2004, 27). This happens because, as soon as the distinction between morally arbitrary factors and choices is introduced, the dynamics underpinning those norms, which influence

individual preferences, fade in the background and the focus of policies turns to compensation (Phillips, 2004).

Phillips claims that by focusing on responsibility and choice, individual preferences are taken as a given and their interaction with external circumstances is not taken into account. This way, socially constructed differences are not taken into account. For instance, women may have the same opportunities than men in terms of education or access to advantage, but grow in a society where the man is seen as the “breadwinner”, thus developing lower ambitions. In other words, preferences are adapted to circumstances.

Another reason why equality of opportunity cannot overcome the problems highlighted by Phillips, is that many of the interactions between individuals, which exacerbate inequalities and reproduce stereotypes (Berik et al. 2009), happen in the labour market, where state interference is more strongly opposed than in the education sector. Indeed, market incorporate gender norms and agents’ preferences as evidenced by the fact that women receive a lower pay than men as they enter the labour market “on the assumption that they are dependent on men” (Berik et. al, 2009, 5)

The oppositions toward market intervention stems from the same need to respect responsibility and choices that motivates the equality of opportunity project.

Because our social condition is the product of causally connected choices and events, true equality of opportunity could only be achieved by continuously intervening in people’s lives in order to prevent unjustifiable inequalities form arising.

It is therefore, natural – Miller (2002) argues- to fix a moment at which the playing field has to be levelled and no individuals enjoys any unjustified advantage with the respect to others. Commonly the moment of equal opportunity is placed at the beginning of people’s adult life, which may correspond to the end of mandatory education.

This leaves the labour market open to the free interaction of individuals, subject to the prohibition of discriminatory practices and the openness of careers.

Two reasons, in addition to centrality of childhood and upbringing in an individual's life, seem to explain why the labour market is relatively untouched by egalitarian policies. Respect for private property and the belief that, provided the moment of equal opportunity was effective, the market can best reward merit seem to carry more weight. Employers seem better placed, both practically, because they possess more information, and morally, because they are responsible for their enterprise, to take the decision whether or not to hire the applicant.

From this perspective and any proponent of policies aiming at equalizing outcomes like affirmative action programs has to face considerable objections, since these policies impose strong constraints on what individuals can do with their enterprise.

However, if Phillips' focus on the structural constraints that prevent opportunities from being spread equally among groups is right, then it seems reasonable to ask if changing our goal, namely: aiming for equality of outcomes, can ameliorate the problem. Of course, this is a second and possibly very high step to make. One thing is to say that if outcomes are not equal at the group level, then opportunities were not, quite another is to claim that because of this we should be aiming for equality of outcomes.

Who's afraid of Equality of Outcomes

In order to see if equality of outcomes can remedy to the deficiencies of equality of opportunity, I will take a somewhat tangential path and first try to defeat a common criticism moved against equality of outcomes. This argument will then show that the problem of structural constraints Phillips identifies can be addressed by affirmative action policies.

A powerful argument against policies aimed at equalizing outcomes, like affirmative action programs is that productive efficiency will be harmed, if employers are interfered with in the selection process (or different selection criteria are mandated).

Decreased efficiency harms society at large, so there seem to be at least some *prima facie* reasons to oppose any change in the *status quo* in favour of a group, if this results in lower welfare for all and especially for the least well-off.

Formal equality of opportunity avoids this problem, in that it promotes hiring procedures based on merit: the best candidate ought to be appointed for the job. Overt discrimination is sanctioned and careers are open for all.

The idea is that the interaction of market participants, unconstrained by state interference, will result in the production of goods at its lowest cost, seem to be supported by a lax interpretation of the First Theorem of Welfare Economics. The Theorem states that when certain conditions are met, the market will tend to reach a Walrasian competitive equilibrium, which is the general benchmark for efficiency.

I want to show that there are no *prima facie* economic reasons to believe that labour market policies aimed at equalizing outcomes will reduce efficiency.

In order to see why this is the case, it is necessary to note that the result of the Arrow-Debreu first welfare theorem, namely that market will tend to weakly Pareto optimal equilibriums, does not depend on the content of agents preferences, but only on their regularity. This means that if preferences change and all other market conditions stay the same, then the interaction of welfare maximizing agents will still result in the production of goods at their lowest cost (Mas Colell, 1995). Such change of preferences can be translated in the labour market setting to the elimination of discrimination and the realization, on the side of employers, that the hiring of disadvantaged groups is actually efficient.

Put differently, the notion economics uses of efficiency is the result of theorems, which take agents' preferences as exogenous, so it may well be the case that the changed attitude (i.e. the new preferences) of market participants, resulting from the introduction of quotas or other "outcome-oriented" policies, will increase the efficiency of the economy.

Preconceptions about certain groups' characteristics can also be seen, from the point of view of the First Welfare Theorem, as psychological filters distorting information and thus hampering the smooth functioning of the market.

Examples of sub-optimal individual decisions influenced by prejudices toward groups that are not corrected by market-mechanism have been studied in the economics literature. For instance, Boschini (2003) looks at the distortions on educational investments due to gender norms that channel women's and men's career paths into specific jobs. These sociological dynamics harm productivity through the misallocation of resources and reinforce the outcome inequalities between sexes without overt discrimination playing any role. Example Phillips

From the perspective of choices – and most importantly by looking only at individual comparisons as equality of opportunity forces us to do – these differences can easily be justified ex post or grouped under the social factors that require compensation. In so doing, however, the structural problems are not being addressed.

Compared to formal equality of opportunity, then, forms of equality of outcomes could and in some cases do (as the evidence summarized by Berik (2009) points out) help reaching higher levels of efficiency, at least to the extent that pure meritocracy does not allow for the modification of employers' and society's preferences.

By reaching positions previously dominated by the incumbent group, disadvantaged groups can break stereotypes and change society's attitudes toward them as evidenced by De Paola et. al (2010). Moreover, these policies could concur to the real equalization of opportunities and have a positive effect on the effort individuals exert. Indeed, disadvantaged groups could realize that those positions of advantage are finally reachable, thus dedicating themselves to their attainment.

Outcomes and Opportunity: a false dichotomy?

So why are policies aimed at equalizing outcomes like affirmative actions considered antithetical to those that aim for equality of opportunity, despite their potentially efficiency-enhancing role?

As Phillips recognizes equality of outcomes does not seem to represent a morally justified goal when we move from groups' comparisons to individuals ones (Phillips, 2004). We greatly differ in our goals, aspirations and ability, so there seem to be no reason to forcefully impose the same outcomes on all.

But there is another fundamental reason, which is linked to responsibility, which does not have so much to do with how individuals value their own goals, but with how individuals' goals are valued by others. The outcomes people reach –the position they obtain, the income they earn and, to some extent even the satisfaction they feel– depend on what they can give to society and, in turn, on how society values what they can give . Through labour markets society rewards each of us differently, depending on what knowledge and skills we can offer.

In turn, pursuing any form of equality of outcomes would require the government to step in and dictate how market participants should interact and modify their valuation of a certain outcome, in order to make the rewards attached to it artificially equal to those of others.

From this perspective, equality of outcomes seems antithetical to any form of equality of opportunity based on merit and requires the ubiquitous presence of public constraints on the choices of free individuals. If one couples this argument with a strong belief in the efficiency of unfettered markets, then the only possible equality to be endorsed is one in which individuals have the same starting positions and are free to compete.

Contrary to this view, I want to suggest, following Strauss' (1992) discussion, that the nature of state-imposed equality of outcomes is equivalent to the one of meritocratic equality of opportunity.

In order to see why this might be so, we need to look closer at what equality of opportunity means in societies, like ours, that want to reward and identify merit by relying on market mechanisms.

By emphasizing the moral value of merit, meritocratic equality of opportunity eliminates the social barriers, which artificially limit what people can achieve with their talents and effort. These external factors are surely morally arbitrary, but the reason why they should be eliminated is that their presence prevents talents from

being used for socially productive activities that benefit society at large (Strauss,. The aim of this egalitarian project is then to allow individuals to fully exploit and be rewarded for their natural endowments and effort.

The free market, in this framework, is the institution that determines the success of individuals through the satisfaction of preferences. Merit corresponds to the extent that we are able to appeal through our contributions and labour to others.

We are therefore equal only in the sense that no one is able to decide alone what can or cannot be valued in the market .

Using the First Welfare Theorem's terminology: we are all price-takers. Our path to success is to some extent unpredictable, since the criteria of value are not fixed but rather fluid. In contrast,

This fluidity confers to the market mechanism a democratic connotation, in the sense that no single individual or group can dictate what can be rewarded, since value is the product of a multitude of different choices.

This democratic connotation is what makes equality of opportunity identical in nature to state-imposed equality of outcomes, since the latter is also the product of the interaction of autonomous people and no single individual can be said to have imposed his arbitrary will on others in a well-functioning democracy.

Of course, both these description pivot around a highly idealized conception of markets and of democratic procedures. The former should be competitive while the latter should make sure that decisions are impersonal and power is dispersed. Nevertheless, Scheffler's argument captures an important similarity between two seemingly antithetical concepts. Using the metaphore of the race: for both equality of opportunity and equality of outcomes, what is equal for all individuals is the impossibility of unilaterally alter the system of rewards around which they pivot.

If this argument is correct, then we should not see equality of outcomes and meritocratic equality of opportunity (as applies to the labour market) as antithetical, or as pushing in opposite direction. In turn, this reinforces the case for adopting affirmative action policies in the labour market.

Conclusion

To the extent that efficiency is considered a criteria for ascertaining superiority in egalitarian debates, we can at least conclude that certain (outcome) egalitarian labour market policies can benefit all through increased productivity and provide a better alternative to pure meritocracy. However, this result is dependent on the capacity of these policies to eliminate the structural constraints highlighted by Phillips (2004).

In addition, I tried to show that equality of outcomes can ameliorate some structural problems, which too strong a focus on equality of opportunity could conceal. Perhaps counterintuitively, these equality of outcome policies could increase the amount of effort put by disadvantaged groups to reach the positions of advantage previously closed to them.

Even if these arguments were completely correct, they would still apply only to the specific case of labour markets and can at best provide some reasons to believe that equality of outcomes should not be abandoned as an ideal and that it should be seen as helping the eradication of structural problems, which equality of outcomes do not seem to be able to ameliorate.

Bibliography

Phillips, A., 2004, 'Defending Equality of Outcome', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 12, pp. 1–19.

Miller, D., 2002, 'Liberalism, Equal Opportunities and Cultural Commitments' in Paul Kelly (ed) *Multiculturalism Reconsidered* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2002).

De Paola, M., Scoppa, V. and Lombardo, R. (2010). "Can gender quotas break down negative stereotypes? Evidence from changes in electoral rules", *Journal of Public Economics*, 94(5-6), 344-353.

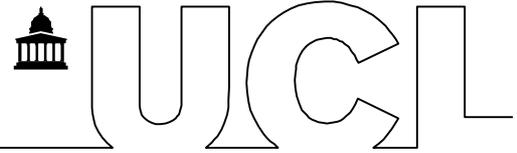
Rawls, John, 1999, *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001

Strauss, D. 1992, *The Illusory Distinction between Equality of Opportunity and Equality of Result*, Chicago Unbound

Berik, G. , van der Meulen Rodgers, Y. , Seguino, S. 2009, Feminist Economics of Inequality, Development, and Growth, *Feminist Economics*, 15:3, 1-33,

Boschini, Anne. 2003. "The Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Economic Growth." *Research Papers in Economics 2003: 4*, Department of Economics, Stockholm University.

Mas Colell, A., 1995, *Microeconomic Theory*, 1 ed, OUP USA (7 Sept. 1995)



ESSAY COVER SHEET 2016-17

Name: _____ Candidate
No: _____

Title of Essay:

Essay Number: e.g. 1 or 2

Module Code & Title:

Module Tutor:

Word Count:

Please tick, as appropriate:

Have you submitted to Turnitin (NB. Essays will not be accepted without a Turnitin receipt)

Students are required to review their Turnitin reports prior to completing essay submission.

Have you read your Turnitin similarity report & noted your similarity score (please enter score: _____)

Do you give permission for an anonymised version of your essay to be used for teaching

Notes on Submission of Essays

- ❖ You are required to submit two paper copies and one electronic copy of each essay for marking.
- ❖ Electronic copies of each essay must be submitted to Turnitin, via Moodle. You will be emailed a Turnitin receipt following electronic submission of your essay.
- ❖ Two paper copies of each essay must be put into a clear plastic wallet together with this Essay Cover sheet and your Turnitin receipt. Please staple the Turnitin receipt to the back of the Essay Cover sheet and ensure the documents are placed on top of your essays.
- ❖ Essays must be submitted to the Essay Post Box in SPP Reception and to Turnitin BEFORE 2pm on the deadline date.
- ❖ The student must sign this cover sheet, which includes a plagiarism declaration (see below).
- ❖ Each essays must have the following information on the front page:
Candidate Number, Essay Title, Essay Number, Course Code and Course Title, Submission Date, Word Count
- ❖ **Your name must NOT appear on either copy of the essay and should only be stated on this cover sheet**

purposes

PLAGIARISM

UCL will investigate and, where necessary, penalise, any conduct which is likely to give an unfair advantage to a candidate and/or affect the security of assessment, or the standards of degrees awarded by UCL: www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/academic-manual/c4/irregularities-plagiarism/breaches#top

Plagiarism *'is defined as the presentation of another person's thoughts or words or artefacts or software as though they were a student's own, and can include self-plagiarism'*.

In order to avoid plagiarism, students have been warned that they must clearly identify any quotation from published or unpublished works of other people by inserting the work or works inside quotation marks and that students must identify their sources accurately and as fully as possible.

You should note that UCL uses a sophisticated detection system (Turnitin) to scan work for evidence of plagiarism and the Department uses this for assessed coursework. This system gives access to billions of sources worldwide, including websites and journals, as well as work previously submitted to the Department, UCL and other universities.

Declaration

I can confirm that I understand and have taken note of UCL Regulations and to my knowledge the essay I have submitted does not constitute plagiarism. I confirm that I have submitted an electronic copy of this essay to Turnitin and I have reviewed my Turnitin report prior to completing my essay submission.

Signature: _____
Date: _____