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Openness, Priority, and Free Museums

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ABSTRACT *This article develops a fairness-based criticism of the UK's policy of promoting free admissions at major museums. With a focus on geographic inequalities and per-capita museums spending, I argue that free admissions can be a surprisingly bad way of promoting cultural opportunities for disadvantaged groups. My criticism emphasises the fact that free admissions consume resources without necessarily providing targeted benefits to disadvantaged groups and addressing background inequalities. Given that museums vary in their location, visitor profile, and operating costs, this critique does not apply to all museums. It applies to the largest and most popular museums in the most advantaged areas, which can expect to keep drawing significant numbers while charging. If we are aiming to prioritise the interests of less advantaged groups, we should be in favour of charging at London's major museums, to finance 'levelling up' across regions, and more direct access-promoting measures in targeted outreach, collaboration, and programming.*

1. Introduction

Museums are currently facing a range of ethical criticisms, relating to cultural repatriation, the ethics of display, and ongoing colonial dynamics.[1] In this article I examine an important question that has largely been neglected in philosophical debates about museums, namely, whether making museums free to all visitors is a good way to improve their accessibility.[2] This translates into a specific public policy question: is a general policy of free admissions worth prioritising in museums funding, in a place like England?[3]

Free admissions are only one of a broad suite of measures aimed at making museums more inclusive and democratic. Other measures include outreach and engagement practices granting influence over what museums do, diverse curating and programming, investments that expand the geographic reach of a museum's collections (e.g. touring of works), and funding for museums (old and new) in less developed areas.[4]

Suppose we think that museums *should* promote cultural accessibility. There is something intuitive in the idea that free admissions, along with all these other measures, would help with this. They remove barriers of access for less well-off groups, boost attendance, and can symbolise a commitment to cultural accessibility. But whether we think a nation-wide policy of free admissions will effectively advance cultural accessibility depends on how we understand that idea.

We might think that cultural accessibility is all about increasing opportunities to engage with cultural goods. Perhaps we would all benefit from living in a society where citizens attend museums in large numbers. Insofar as free admissions promote attendance, they might promote a more cultured society,[5] even if museums cluster in wealthier areas, and mainly attract advantaged groups.

On the other hand, we might think of cultural accessibility as something that involves a more concerted commitment to fairness. Perhaps we don't simply want to promote cultural opportunities but improve cultural access for less advantaged citizens in particular. The worry with free museums – free admissions to major museums[6] in particular – is that although they are often motivated by these fairness-related concerns, they don't appear to effectively promote cultural accessibility for marginalised and disadvantaged groups. In fact, depending on what other access-promoting measures are adopted already, they may even *impede* it.

The UK provides an ideal case study for exploring this because (i) the UK's museum system is a prominent and influential one, (ii) it has a general policy of free admissions, and (iii) that policy has been explained and defended on the basis of increasing cultural accessibility for all, including disadvantaged groups. As former UK culture secretary Jeremy Hunt once put it, the UK's 'free museums and galleries ensure that culture is for everyone, not just the lucky few'.[7] The scheme has two prongs: (a) allocation of tax breaks to museums that offer free admissions, and (b) grant-in-aid to select 'national' institutions.[8] While all museums are eligible for these tax breaks, grants-in-aid target 15 prominent 'national' institutions including the British Museum, the National Gallery, the Natural History Museum, the V&A, and the Tate Galleries.[9] Grants operate at an average of over £450 m annually in recent years.[10] The tax breaks were estimated to be about £40 m per year in 2007 (£60 m by current standards).[11] As I will emphasise, the scheme upholds an arrangement by which Londoners have received over four times more national funding to their local institutions (2017–22), relative to other English residents.[12]

My criticism has two parts. First, given a finite pool of funding, England's policy of free admissions pulls resources away from measures that are more effective in improving accessibility for less advantaged groups. Research suggests that free admission is not crucial to diversifying audiences or imparting benefits to less well-off groups.[13] After all, museums can be free but not engage in targeted outreach and programming activities, and cluster in areas whose residents are wealthier and more educated.

Second, free museums may not be just an ineffective but a *damaging* means of improving cultural accessibility for less advantaged citizens. This is because (a) the benefits of museums attendance have *competitive aspects* (e.g. informal education, cultural capital), and (b) museums are mainly visited by upper-income groups. By removing barriers of access to museums in wealthier areas, free admissions can confer positional advantages on those closer to them, making those further away (especially disadvantaged groups) worse off than they would have been if museums were ticketed. At the same time, such museums can *seem* more accessible and attract praise that helps stabilise existing arrangements.

These criticisms are contextual and work by degree. They are not weighty in all cases. However, they raise concerns about free admissions to major museums in relatively advantaged areas, such as London, Stockholm, and New York. While *other* (non-fairness-based) reasons might justify making major museums in these areas free, my point is that an explicitly fairness-based justification for making major museums free is often specious.

I start by unpacking what I will now refer to as *Openness*: the idea that we should try and promote cultural accessibility (Section 2). I enumerate four civic benefits museums can provide, and defend an explicitly fairness-based conception of Openness understood in 'prioritarian' terms.[14] I then describe three prominent arguments for free museums in

England (Section 3). I argue that the first argument (based on audience diversity) is empirically dubious. Meanwhile, the latter two (relating to opportunity and audience experience) don't satisfy a prioritarian conception of Openness unless poor and marginalised groups already have relatively good access to national museums in England, whereas they often don't. If the motivation for free museums is fairness-based, English cultural policy ought to be rearranged so that it more actively favours less advantaged groups. This creates a qualified case for abolishing free admissions to major museums, to generate and re-allocate funds for other access-promoting measures, such as outreach and targeted programming at major museums, and grants for organisations and projects in less developed areas.

In Sections 4–6 I make these criticisms more precise and explore their upshots. For instance, I seem committed to saying that Thatcher's 1974 policy of ticketing at major museums actually *helped* poor and disadvantaged people, despite not being coupled with a redistributive agenda for building or relocating national institutions outside of London.[15] While I accept this implication, I explain why my account would never recommend a policy like Thatcher's, because it didn't aim to redistribute any resources. My argument entails not only a *pro tanto* case against universal free admissions, but a case for major cultural investments in less advantaged regions, or 'levelling up'. I conclude in Section 7.

My argument is critical of existing policy arrangements in England. However, it should not be misread as a call to decrease museums funding, or as a criticism of the important work that practitioners are doing to broaden access and participation in museums. This article aims to contribute to ongoing discussions about how to make arts and cultural funding fairer. In doing so, it highlights the importance of thinking about communal infrastructure in a way that also attends to spatial inequality[16] and raises concerns that may also apply to museums beyond the UK, and to educational institutions as well.

2. Openness

I am using Openness to refer to the view that we should try to promote cultural opportunities. This broad definition allows room to interpret the value of increased cultural accessibility in different ways (not necessarily with an emphasis on *fairness*).

For present purposes, cultural opportunities are opportunities to engage with *cultural goods*. There are various ways of understanding cultural goods.[17] They include the physical materials, intellectual and artistic works, experiences, and social affiliations facilitated by cultural platforms and institutions like museums, radio and television, bookstores and libraries, theatre companies, sporting clubs, and bars and restaurants. However, the cultural goods I am concerned with are those facilitated by *museums*.

Museums differ substantially and change over time.[18] They vary, for example, in (a) their physical size and architecture, (b) their funding arrangements and resources, (c) their subject matter, (d) their specialist skills and knowledge, (e) the size and profile of their audiences, (f) the manner and degree to which they aim to engage with the public/expand their audiences, and (g) their geographic, social, economic, and political contexts.

My argument will focus on the 15 'national museums' in England.[19] To account for some variation among them, I will use the term *major museum* to refer to the largest and

most visited among them (e.g. Tate Galleries, Natural History Museum, British Museum, National Gallery, and V&A).[20] National museums vary, for example, in their size and architecture, themes and contents, and local geographic context. However, they have at least three features in common: (1) their permanent collections are free to all (i.e. tourists, residents), (2) they receive national public funds on an ongoing basis (from a UK-wide department, DCMS), and (3) they are all in England and (with the exception of National Museums Liverpool) are at least partly in London, with most mainly there.[21] The cultural goods facilitated by these museums include exhibitions and programmes in art museums like the Tate Modern, as well as those with a more anthropological focus, like the Museum of the Home, or the British Museum, along with the work of museums focusing on science or natural history, such as the Science Museum and the Natural History Museum.

On the other hand, my argument relies on a theory of the cultural value of museums that is intentionally *broader* than the national museums in England. This is because one of my core goals is to encourage us to imagine how resources could be allocated to museums in ways that are different to the current arrangements. An important step in this process is highlighting some of the *general values* that museums can serve despite their differences. This will allow us to then evaluate how fair and effective the current arrangements are in promoting benefits for less well-off groups.

2.1. Four Benefits

There is a huge literature on the benefits of museums.[22] My goal here is not to provide a definitive or exhaustive account of these, but just to highlight some of the benefits citizens might recognise as worth promoting, even if they do not tend to visit museums themselves.[23]

Why try and promote access to museums? The simplest reason is that museums provide benefits that all of us as citizens seem to have an interest in getting. Some of these benefits are (a) *educational*.[24] When states fund museums, they are also supporting visits (whether from school groups, university students, or other adults) that prompt curiosity, wonder, and conversation on topics that might otherwise have felt abstract, boring, or irrelevant.[25] The educational qualities of museums can be enumerated with respect to their own specific goals, and can be valued for their own sake, or for their utility.

A related but not purely educational benefit is in promoting (b) *cultural recognition and understanding* ('cultural literacy', for short). Museums can provide public recognition of,[26] and affect deeper understanding of, the diversity of beliefs, experiences, and cultures within our societies.[27] They can thus support what we might call 'a culturally literate society',[28] by helping to fill gaps in the resources citizens can draw on to understand themselves and each other, and avoid forms of anxiety, ignorance, and confusion that entrench stigma and marginalisation.

Museums can also provide spaces for planned and spontaneous interaction among citizens.[29] They can be spaces for public events, performances, and programmes where participants can exchange perspectives, feel heard, and gain confidence to participate in civil society. Museums can therefore facilitate (c) *social inclusion*, for which there are collective benefits. A society that invests in communal spaces and programmes (what I will refer to as 'communal infrastructure') also fosters 'fraternal or solidaristic social relationships' because it makes participation in civil society less determined by factors like gender, race,

or class.[30] Health practitioners increasingly recognise this potential through 'social prescribing', whereby patients are linked with community organisations to partake in activities that help reduce the long-term effects of different health conditions, isolation, and loneliness.[31]

Museums can also assist with equality of opportunity in cultural careers and beyond. They provide direct opportunities for various forms of work, such as that of a curator, exhibited artist, critic, museum manager, or tour guide.[32] They may also encourage careers of those they don't employ, for example, by illustrating that creative careers are possible, and helping people to dream of different futures for themselves. Cultural media that depict people of diverse backgrounds in esteemed positions can help people to expand their sense of what is possible, and to feel their ambitions are in reach.[33] For instance, museums might explore the contributions of women and minoritised groups to science and politics. Through targeted efforts, museums can therefore help promote (d) *fair equality of opportunity*,[34] so that competition is less predetermined by factors like gender, race, or class.

2.2. *Allocating Benefits*

These benefits have general civic appeal. Besides any interest we have in attaining them for ourselves, they also have *shared* aspects. In promoting cultural literacy or social inclusion, we seem to be supporting general characteristics of a society that we all stand to benefit from as citizens, even when we aren't the direct beneficiaries of specific investments. On the other hand, some of these benefits are *rival*. Museum locals will enjoy more convenient access, lower or nil costs of commuting for visits or any possible employment, and any positive spill-over benefits to local businesses and real estate.

As I suggested earlier, there are ways of thinking about the value of increased cultural accessibility that don't necessarily prioritise disadvantaged groups or require us to focus on equality. We could just promote museum attendance for the education and enjoyment it brings, which is valuable for its own sake. And regardless of whether the primary beneficiaries are advantaged groups, policies promoting educational and cultural opportunities can yield collective benefits. These can be enumerated with respect to living in a more 'educated' or 'culturally literate' society.[35]

However, I want to defend a more explicitly fairness-based view of Openness. And as I highlight in the sections that follow, the considerations offered in favour of free admissions often express a similar sentiment. They emphasise the importance of inclusion and solidarity, stressing 'that culture is for everyone, not just the lucky few', and that ticketing 'would immediately exclude a vast proportion of our society'.[36] In my view, a fairness-based approach to cultural accessibility calls on us to prioritise measures that are, relative to other options, likely to improve cultural opportunities for less advantaged groups. I am advocating for a *prioritarian view* of Openness.

2.3. *A Prioritarian View*

One reason why I am attracted to a fairness-laden view is that cultural policies can sometimes promote competitive or 'positional' goods.[37] These are goods whose value for us partly depends on how much others have. Museums aren't ordinarily thought of as supplying competitive goods. It is much more common to discuss the intrinsic or shared value

of the benefits they provide. Even when we emphasise their educational utility, this is not usually construed in terms of competitive advantages.

However, the educational and cultural benefits of museums also have competitive *aspects*. For instance, the utility of my cultural, historical, or art-historical knowledge seems partly determined by how much others possess. If I am the only person in my community with art-history knowledge, I enjoy a kind of monopoly in the marketplace for art historians. As others gain more expertise than me, my expertise becomes less competitively valuable. So those who trade (or want to trade) in the provision of cultural skills stand to lose, in some ways, from their neighbours gaining more. Museum attendance supports these kinds of skills. This means that inequality of convenient museum access can promote unfair competition.

It is important not to overstate these benefits.[38] By contrast, formal education is a *paradigm* competitive good.[39] Higher levels of formal education help individuals to attain positions of advantage, for example, in labour markets. Museum attendance would hardly compete with formal education in these respects. The benefits of children attending well-resourced schools or having a private tutor are likely to be far greater than museum attendance. And even in domains where it is more likely to play a pronounced role – in tracking citizens toward arts and cultural jobs – it won't always be a key factor.

However, museum attendance can still help us attain advantaged positions. For instance, whether an individual and their parents attend museums has been found to be a predictor of access to elite American universities, even while controlling for things like socio-economic status, gender, math and reading scores, and self-esteem.[40] Museum attendance in England has also been associated with better long-term health.[41] Again, this is true even while controlling for other variables, such as socio-economic status, gender, and other demographic variables.

And even if museums don't give us specialised knowledge, they can still help in transmitting 'cultural capital', that is, an understanding of social norms linked with upward mobility and higher social status.[42] The people most likely to work at and attend museums are well-educated, upper-income groups.[43] In that way, museums are *de facto* settings of exposure and practice for ways of thinking and speaking that are more common to the upper-middle class. Greater familiarity with this stuff helps remove social barriers to attaining positions where related norms are in play.[44]

Of course, it is important to keep a discussion of the competitive benefits of museums in the context of their many other roles and values. As my overall argument emphasises, museums have *civic value*. Promoting competitive benefits is obviously not all that they do. Nor can they all do this in the same way or to the same degree (they vary in their resources, subject matter, and so on). Moreover, any such benefits are not *exclusive* to those with higher educational attainment, since many museum visitors don't fit that profile.

Still, the competitive aspects of museums funding are a part of the overall picture, and they deserve attention. Even if the effects in question are subtle, they can still be significant, especially if they accumulate in certain groups and regions over time. If museums cluster in wealthier areas, or their offerings are for whatever reason inaccessible to disadvantaged groups, they become a factor in maintaining the positional advantages some groups already enjoy.[45]

This suggests that *fair equality of opportunity* could be a useful principle in decisions about museum location, design, and funding. Perhaps citizens deserve relatively equal

access to some of the opportunities museums provide. This isn't necessarily to promote fair access to cultural careers (though this is one reason) but in order to prevent unfair competitions in other areas that relatively exclusive access to museums promotes.

However, concerns about inequality of opportunity can also be captured within a prioritarian view of museums funding. That's because, where an unequal distribution of goods is bad for the worst-off, we don't have to be egalitarians to try and mitigate that inequality.[46] We might even *prefer* a prioritarian view of Openness because we suspect that the competitive advantages of greater museum access are relatively trivial, at least compared with education. Or perhaps we think that a purely egalitarian framing of cultural access would fail to capture the *non-competitive* value of museums attendance,[47] or that it would be *impossible* or *undesirable* to achieve equality of museum access.[48]

Regardless of how persuaded we are by any of these concerns, we still have reasons to prioritise the less advantaged in our spending patterns. By enhancing access for those who have the least, museums infrastructure becomes more supportive of social inclusion. Not only would this seem to capture the fairness-related aspects of arguments for free admissions, but it would also seem to foster fraternal or solidaristic social relationships for all. For all these reasons, I adopt a prioritarian conception of Openness in this article. On this view, cultural access is worth promoting for everyone, but is especially valuable for the worst-off. In highlighting the attractiveness of this view, though, I am not aiming to give a total defence of prioritarianism as a moral theory, or as an approach to all areas of cultural justice. Moreover, my conclusions in respect to museums funding can also be accepted by egalitarians.[49]

3. Arguments for Free Museums in England

The UK's policy of incentivising free admissions to museums indicates a vision for attaining Openness in museums. Its proponents appeal to (1) effects on audience representation, (2) cultural opportunities, and (3) feelings of cultural patrimony, that is, a sense that the materials held in museums belong to them, as their cultural inheritance.

3.1. More Representative Audiences

This argument involves a normative and an empirical claim. The normative claim is that, to promote benefits of education and inclusion for all, resources should be allocated to make museum audiences more representative of a society's demographics.[50] The empirical claim is that free admissions effectively promote this. I want to focus on the empirical claim, as it is often asserted in public debate without evidence. To be more precise, proponents of the national free admissions policy will often refer to the *wrong kind* of evidence for this claim. They will cite statistics showing large audience increases under the free admissions policy, without attending to *which groups* comprise those audiences, and whether the makeup has changed.[51]

It helps to register a few facts about cultural participation in the UK. Research carried out in 2016 says that upper socio-economic groups accounted for about 60% of (free and paid) museum visitors, despite representing 22% of the population. Lower socio-economic groups meanwhile represented about 25% of visitors, despite representing 47% of the population.[52]

Given that this argument forms part of the official justification for the policy, we might expect to find some support for the empirical claim in the UK context.[53] But government-commissioned research suggested that 'charging does not affect the social mix of visitors to museums'[54] and that there is 'very little difference between the proportions of different social grades of visitors to free admission sites and to paid admission sites'.[55] A more recent report found that, in about 60% of cases, museums moving from free to ticketed reported no change in demographics.[56] On the other hand, those moving in the other direction – from ticketed to free – reported positive impacts on audience diversity in about 70% of cases.

Unsurprisingly, then, audience diversity varies between free museums and exhibits. Some museums don't report a change to their demographics once they become free, but others do.[57] For instance, when fees were recently removed at the historic house and garden Oakwell Hall (Yorkshire, England), this had a positive effect on audience diversity, along with increased visitors.[58] Similarly, Cyfarthfa Castle Museum & Art Gallery (Merthyr Tydfil, Wales) reports that abolishing free admission negatively affected diversity of visitors, along with reducing overall visits.[59]

The diverse nature of museums, combined with a lack of comprehensive data, makes it difficult to construct a detailed diagnosis of why free admission sometimes helps in diversifying audiences.[60] However, much of this variation appears to be explained by what *other accessibility initiatives* are in use, and to what degree. Case studies suggest that museums (free and ticketed) attract broader audiences when they hold events or exhibitions related to and engaging with marginalised and minoritised groups, when they engage collaboratively with communities, and market these initiatives over time.[61] Reflecting this, Tristram Hunt (director of the V&A) recently said that:

> [F]ree entry has never been a panacea. Since its introduction, diversifying audiences has shown itself to be far more dependent upon programming and the removal of invisible racial or social barriers than admission prices. Some of Britain's pay-to-enter museums – not least the Black Country Living Museum – have a far more impressive track record in widening access than many free nationals.[62]

In short, the takeaway is not that free admissions *cannot* play a role in promoting audience diversity at some museums and exhibits, but that they don't appear to have shifted the *overall* proportion of attendance between groups, averaged across museums, through the life of this policy.[63]

This finding is broadly consistent with research from Sweden and America. A recent review of free admissions in Sweden found that the main museums benefiting from a similar scheme didn't see an increase in audience representation.[64] A 2015 report into barriers to arts participation across the United States also found that the primary motivations for attendance across underrepresented groups were a desire to support their communities, celebrate cultural heritage, and gain knowledge.[65] The same report found that 'for some – and especially for racial and ethnic minorities – not having anyone to go with and difficulty in getting to the venue are more significant barriers than the price of admission'. The most decisive factors in attracting new audiences in the US include cultural representation in the events and programmes on offer (e.g. whether they reflect and celebrate the cultures of underrepresented groups), their location, awareness that the events are taking place, and having time to go.[66]

To be clear, free admissions do have a significant effect in boosting attendance overall. The question we are focused on here, though, is whether they are an effective strategy for attracting audiences that wouldn't otherwise be attending. The question, moreover, is not whether there is *some* increase in these audiences, but whether the effect of increased attendance is statistically notable. This is important in part because a large portion of visitors to major museums under this scheme are tourists (who accounted for roughly a third of national museums visitors in London, pre-COVID), and repeat visitors from upper-income groups.

The overall finding is that free admissions aren't by themselves an effective way of diversifying audiences. Their success appears to ride on a range of other accessibility measures being pursued. We also have *prima facie* evidence to doubt the effectiveness of a nationwide policy of free admission if the main museums being sponsored require transport that poor people can't afford.

However, another response would be to question whether this argument is a good one. Audience diversity cannot capture all the value of cultural accessibility. A society with greater attendance at museums might be a more culturally literate or educated society, and a focus on *proportional increases* can obscure or disvalue this achievement. And even if we are aiming to increase attendance for disadvantaged groups, or we at least take the attendance gap as an *indicator* of whether a policy is reaching everyone, we should not dismiss the value of increased museum attendance overall.[67] So while this argument is empirically flawed, a broader takeaway is that the value of cultural access should not be *reduced* to audience diversity.

3.2. Increased Opportunity

Instead of relying on an outcomes-based argument, we might appeal to the value of being able to visit museums, irrespective of where we live and our disposable income. We might want to say that individuals benefit from the *opportunity* to engage with the goods museums generally offer. An emphasis on increased access/opportunity is reflected in the official justifications for free admissions in the UK:

> The Government is determined to enable more people of *all ages and backgrounds* to visit museums and learn from the country's treasures. The new funding … will *improve access* to the best of our cultural heritage, and therefore educational *opportunities for all*.[68]

And more recently:

> The UK's brilliant museums and galleries can be proud of the huge range of free exhibitions they put on and the role they play in *increasing access* to arts and culture. We want to see even more museums offering free entry, and to support organisations which are providing great *opportunities* for the public to enjoy. I encourage cultural institutions across the UK to apply for the [tax] refund scheme so they can help make sure *people from all backgrounds get to experience great arts and culture for free*.[69]

But how might free admissions increase opportunities for all? The suggestion is that museums hold resources that individuals benefit from being able to access, for the sake of learning and enjoyment. These benefits are realised through attendance. Making

museums free removes barriers to attendance. By helping to make more museums free across the country, individuals everywhere are in a better position to engage with the goods museums offer.

It is worth noting that while there is no explicit mention of fairness or equality in these quotations, the reasoning has a solidaristic or inclusive tone. The scheme is about promoting opportunities for people of *all ages and backgrounds*. But the suggestion of how free museums would be universally promoting cultural opportunities presupposes a relatively fair or optimal distribution of them. However, given the way this policy is written, it does not *itself* bring new museums into existence, encourage larger museums to partially relocate, demand that they send works on tour, or carry out practices of community outreach and diverse programming and co-curation. In this sense, its aim is to support museums to be free, in relative independence of their geographic positioning and the kinds of curatorial and outreach practices museums are using.[70]

It is now worth pausing on the point about geographic positioning. On its face, the distribution of free museums may seem fair. The list of currently supported institutions[71] indicates a spread of free museums across England. London also has the lowest proportion of museums per capita.[72] But this hides the fact that cultural resources concentrate in cities, and the historic accumulation of resources in London especially.[73] For instance, major support is provided to 15 *specific*, free national museums, nine of which are based solely in London (e.g. the British Museum, the V&A, the National Gallery) where just 16% of the English population resides.[74] On top of national funding, it is consistently found that the majority of private donations go to London-based cultural organisations (e.g. 66% in 2017/18) which also receive more local government support.[75]

Referring more generally to public funding for arts and culture, one report estimated that spending in 2012 'produce[d] a benefit per head of population in [London] of £68.99 compared to £4.58 in the rest of England (6.6% of London levels)'.[76] The same report estimated that 90% of DCMS grants-in-aid into the national museum system went into London in 2013. While things appear to have improved since then, Londoners benefited at least four times more in average spending than English residents outside London through the scheme we are discussing (2017–22).[77]

These observations undermine the assumption that the background distribution of goods that this policy opens access to is *fair*.[78] However, maybe the centralisation of resources has the virtue of being *efficient*? While Londoners are likely to be overrepresented in the English visitors at national museums, those museums still draw visitors from all over England. English transport is geared towards London. While it might cost a lot of money for some to get there, when they arrive, national museums are free. In this respect, a *decentralised* arrangement would be much less convenient. If national museums were more equally distributed, seeing them all would require a lot more travel, and perhaps they would have fewer visitors overall.

But unless an efficiency-based view of centralisation is going to completely do away with concerns of fairness, there would still be a threshold above which the virtues of centralisation were threatened by concerns of fairness. While efficiency might call for *some* museums to be solely based in London, it doesn't justify *most* of them only being there. The justifications offered above – even if not explicitly about equality or prioritising less advantaged groups – emphasise the value of giving cultural opportunities to all.

3.3. Audience Experience

A final view says that free museums provide educational or cultural benefits by allowing audiences to spontaneously engage with their cultural inheritance. Tickets, subscriptions, and private membership obstruct or prevent us from gaining a sense that a national or public museum contains things that belong to the citizenry. They make museum access feel conditional, as opposed to something that is equally open to us, like a public park.[79]

Why should this matter? Because if a museum doesn't *feel* like a shared space, it might not support learning and appreciation of the right kind. We might not see the things around us as part of our shared heritage. Instead, they belong to the museum, its managers, or some other group we are not part of. Cultural critic Charlotte Higgins provides a moving portrayal of this view:

> I remember walking into the National Gallery one day in the mid-1990s. I was in my early 20s, enjoying a new life in London, and was able to duck in, on a whim, through that great portico on Trafalgar Square because the museum had not introduced charges – as so many institutions, including the Natural History and Science museums, had been encouraged to do under Thatcher. Wandering around, pausing to drink in the glorious complexities of Titian's Ariadne and Bacchus, I had a sudden revelation: this masterpiece, this brightly burning cultural beacon, was mine. It, and all the other pictures in this great gallery, belonged to me, and every citizen of Britain. What riches, what a shared inheritance! I still experience that exhilaration every time I enter a national museum – a feeling it is quite impossible to have if you pass through a turnstile, your permission to be there contingent on a financial transaction.[80]

One of the claims being suggested is that museums/cultural policies should try to foster feelings of common ownership or cultural patrimony over national collections. Another is that this goal is advanced by free admissions. Of course, we might question whether feelings of cultural patrimony are supported by free admissions. But it seems plausible that the introduction of charges would negatively affect the kind of experience Higgins describes.

The core point I want to make in response to this kind of argument is, again, about the geographic positioning of England's national museums.[81] The argument implicitly assumes that the national museum system is *already* well positioned to reach all or most British citizens. So long as a national museum is *free*, citizens are likely to feel welcomed, and disposed towards feelings of cultural patrimony once there.

Those who cherish major museums might *themselves* experience a form of cultural patrimony because of their being free to everybody. But what about those who don't ever see a Titian, because they don't or can't visit a museum with this kind of collection? Simply making England's national museums free to access doesn't effectively promote a sense of cultural patrimony for all or most. Many still live far away from national museums, or for other reasons aren't physically able to visit them.[82]

The wider point that Higgins is making is that free admissions can enrich experiences and evoke pride. These are valuable goals of museums. And to be sure, Higgins isn't saying that people magically get a sense of their cultural inheritance simply through the existence of free museums. She is suggesting that free admissions are an effective means of imparting these feelings. I accept that free admissions can help with this, but only insofar as museums are already doing a good job at expanding the ability of all members of a

society to engage with them. This means attending more closely to allocations of resources across regions.

4. How Free Admissions Can Undermine Openness

The above arguments express a certain vision of how to promote cultural accessibility. This vision avows the importance of making cultural goods more accessible to everybody, regardless of how poor or marginalised they are. However, if proponents of a nation-wide free admissions policy genuinely want museums to be more accessible to those who currently enjoy least access to them, they should prioritise a distributive programme that takes effective steps to reduce social, economic, and geographic barriers to access. A general policy of free admissions appears to be a surprisingly bad strategy if other practices – relating to geographic reach of affordable, diverse cultural goods – are not already in effect. In the context of museums spending in England, these efforts not only require more investment, but are constrained by the centralisation of resources in London. This case study therefore serves as an example of how free admissions can undermine a prioritarian commitment of Openness: they (1) are *ineffective* at promoting it by themselves, and (2) may under some conditions be *damaging* to it.

Free admissions are ineffective, for instance, insofar as they leave regions lacking in comparable infrastructure worse off than they would have been if they were allocated the resources that free admissions consume. This criticism works by the *degree to which* free admissions absorb resources that could be allocated to efforts that more directly target less well-off groups (including to projects at the same museum). It therefore targets big museums in more developed regions which are likely to continue attracting large numbers of visitors even when they charge, and which can pursue other accessibility-promoting measures without free admission. Moreover, this criticism doesn't depend on the competitive aspects of the benefits museums promote. It is about a failure to improve in an effective and targeted way the actual cultural opportunities of less advantaged groups. In response, proponents of free admissions might say that they want this kind of 'levelling up' agenda *as well*, and that they don't expect free admissions to do all the work. That seems fair. However, where that extra work is neglected, free admissions can make things worse.

To see this, recall how museums provide benefits with competitive aspects, such as informal education and increased cultural capital. The value of my understanding of culture, arts, and history, and social norms linked with upward mobility, is not just determined by how good it is, but also on how good it is compared to other people's. By removing a barrier to attaining these things, free admissions to major museums confer positional competitive advantages on those closer to them, and thereby make those living further away (especially disadvantaged people) worse off than they otherwise would have been. Once again, this criticism works *by degree*. Not all museums confer advantages on those near to them, or at least not in a way that raises concerns of fairness and equality. This second criticism comes into effect especially in cases where opportunities have accumulated in regions where residents already enjoy other advantages. Even if these effects are subtle at the scale of single individuals and institutions, they can be significant when taken together, and hence this criticism applies especially to cases of centralised cultural infrastructure, like London vis-à-vis England, and accrues over time.[83]

Despite all this, free admissions to major museums in advantaged areas may provide an *appearance* that Openness is being promoted.[84] They seem to act as symbols of increased accessibility[85] and to evoke national pride. Obviously, such symbols and feelings are not generically bad. But when an institution or policy evokes these perceptions and feelings, it becomes more difficult to recognise its flaws. Criticism would seem to involve undermining national achievements and threatening civic bonds. By protecting an overall funding arrangement from criticism, freely accessible institutions help stabilise the status quo. By assigning a *perceived property* of Openness to existing arrangements, free admissions can protect positional advantages of privileged groups.[86]

5. Explaining the Ineffectiveness Criticism

The first criticism I am making is that free admissions can be *ineffective* (in terms of efficiency, and cost-effectiveness) at promoting Openness relative to other options. By prioritising one strategy of opening museum offerings to all (e.g. *affordability*) without also attending to others (e.g. *geographic reach*), we can end up arbitrarily favouring some citizens (e.g. Londoners) over others, and failing to effectively advance the interests of disadvantaged groups elsewhere (e.g. in the north of England). To draw these competing goals into focus:

1. Affordability: the extent to which funding promotes affordable access to cultural goods for all or most citizens, for example, via a national museum system.
2. Geographic reach: the extent to which funding distributes cultural goods across regions so that, for example, all or most individuals enjoy a fair level of geographic access to some of the key parts of a national museum system.

Affordability is a deeply important goal. It is difficult to see how museums could achieve their goals of 'being open to everyone' if their pricing effectively locked out lower-income groups. This is underscored by the fact that, historically, art collections played an overt role in undercutting fraternal social relationships by being the reserve of elites.

However, the goal of making museum offerings *affordable* is not undermined just by their being ticketed, since admissions could also be, for example, £5 for all, or free to residents but paid for tourists, or paid for many residents and all tourists but free to target groups such as schools, students, and pensioners, or in addition, free to access periodically. These are the kinds of arrangements that a prioritarian view of Openness encourages us to explore.

Moreover, without attending to geographic reach, the power of major museums to reach less advantaged social groups is limited. This is for the simple reason that in many countries – and England is no exception – poor and marginalised groups are spread out. Given the current 'geographic shape' of national museums in England, the goal of making them universally free should be assigned less priority than developing institutions and carrying out outreach activities in the north of England. This is one way in which free admissions can draw resources away from poor and marginalised groups.

One of the points I am making, then, is that free admissions at major museums consume/forgo a significant number of resources, and another is that these could be better allocated. To explain this, assume that the public money devoted to maintaining free

admission at England's largest national museums accounts for only 10% of the national museums funding budget. This would mean that the current fiscal debate about free admissions turns on a relatively small sum of ~£45 m per year.[87] This figure would hardly contribute to the goal of building and supporting institutions in, for example, Birmingham, Blackpool, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, and Nottingham, let alone most or all of these places. Perhaps, then, the expected financial gains from ticketing would not be worth the cost of deterring less well-off groups.

However, a figure of £45 m would rival some of the other major sources of national funding currently running towards museums that do not have the official 'national' title. The Arts Council of England had an average spend of £67.5 m (2017–22) on museums, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund £33.6 m (2017–22).[88] In other words, this *would* make a significant contribution to levelling up across regions.

I am assuming that a feasible policy reform in this area would not scrap this portion of national museums funding (e.g. 10%) but re-allocate it (indeed, hopefully expand it). However, the money generated through abolishing or adjusting free admissions at the largest museums would be more than whatever this amount turned out to be. It would also include any revenue to be *gained* through ticketing at a museum (i.e. *forgone revenue*). We cannot know what that figure would be. But at major museums like the British Museum or the Natural History Museum, it would be substantial.[89] To illustrate, in 2022/3, the British Museum reports having 2.5 m overseas visitors.[90] If just half of those overseas visitors paid £15 for initial entry, this would have generated £18.75 m (1.25 m × £15).[91] This hypothetical scheme would have increased its total self-generated income by approximately 41%.[92] Some portion of this, I am arguing, ought to be redistributed.

To be clear, I am not advocating for any specific or universal form of ticketing across major museums. I am just drawing attention to what is possible. Moreover, I am not in favour of charging without redistributive measures and/or efforts aimed at promoting inclusivity and democratisation at museums that charge. The moral force of my argument is that these other measures, such as redistribution, participatory outreach, targeted programming, and free entry for some groups, are (a) compatible with charging, and (b) presumptively more powerful and direct than free admissions, in terms of imparting civic benefits to less advantaged groups. If I am right, then much or all of the desired benefits of 'opening up' museums could be achieved in the absence of a national policy of free admission, without being distributively regressive.[93]

It is worth considering an objection: couldn't some of these resources be allocated towards free museums in the north of England? Am I saying that free admissions are *always* ineffective? The Ineffectiveness Criticism works by the degree to which free admissions absorb resources (*maintenance costs*, and *forgone revenue*) without effectively empowering less advantaged groups, compared with alternatives. This is why it mainly targets major museums, or large, popular museums. It therefore applies especially, if not only, to large institutions in wealthier areas. Hence, concerns about making museums free in Liverpool (or Manchester, Birmingham, etc.) are generally going to be less, since residents of this region on average receive less support, while being on average poorer than those of London. So even if free admissions weren't a major enabler of institutions in less advantaged areas providing benefits to locals, they would still seem more effective than funding free admissions in wealthier areas.[94]

My core claim here is that the effectiveness of an institution (whether in Liverpool or London) in promoting benefits for less advantaged groups is not going to be driven by

its being universally free. Benefits in (a) education, (b) cultural literacy, (c) social inclusion, and (d) fair access to cultural careers relate more importantly to the social, intellectual, and aesthetic qualities of the programmes on offer. If they aren't speaking to marginalised individuals and groups or offering real opportunities to participate in and influence events and programmes, it is difficult to see how their being free is going to be a significantly enabling factor.

6. Explaining the Damaging Criticism

The second criticism I am making is that free admissions aren't just ineffective but can, under certain conditions, make some things worse – not simply relative to how they would have been if those resources were allocated to some other initiative, but worse compared to a world where all other facts were the same, except that the relevant museums *weren't* made universally free.

The extent to which this criticism applies depends on the facts of the case. It depends upon *whether* and *how much* the institution being made free to access (i) confers competitive advantages on its consumers, and (ii) is likely to be accessed by already advantaged groups. To the extent that these conditions apply, free admissions can worsen the position of disadvantaged citizens who are still relatively unlikely to access the benefits in question, even while attracting praise that stabilises the arrangement.

Many readers will want to resist this criticism. They might think that I am making too much of the competitive benefits of museums attendance, or that I am making too little of their *intrinsic* or *civic* benefits. However, they might also press another criticism. I can be read as saying that just by introducing tickets to national museums in England the cultural conditions of less advantaged groups would in some way be improved. But this might sound crazy. How could the situation of citizens in the most disadvantaged areas in England be improved by introducing tickets to London's major museums?[95] Thatcher's policy serves as a useful reference here. It introduced ticketing for national museums, but without redistributing acquired resources. Does my argument provide a justification for it?

Yes and no. Yes, I am committed to saying that Thatcher's policy would in *some* respects have improved the position of less advantaged English citizens over time, relative to a policy of free admissions at all national museums in London. The sense in which it would have done this is by curbing the accumulation of advantages among the advantaged. By imposing slightly higher barriers to access – while maintaining free admissions for 'children and old-age pensioners'[96] – it would have helped limit the role that museum attendance plays in reproducing unfair competition in, for example, education, employment, and social mobility.

However, as I have stressed: my account of Openness *would not* recommend a policy of ticketing at major museums by itself. Although I am committed to saying that this kind of arrangement would in some respects have improved (more precisely, protected) the position of less advantaged groups, Thatcher's policy did not take significant steps to improve actual opportunities for less advantaged individuals. Although it aimed to generate more funding for museums through ticketing, the goal was to re-allocate this to existing national institutions concentrated in London.[97] By not adjusting the positioning

of England's best-funded museums, it preserved a dynamic whereby English museums funding was still rigged in favour of Londoners.

By contrast, my arguments call for *levelling up*. This is because my argument doesn't just acknowledge the competitive benefits of museums but stresses their civic value. The civic value of museums is not promoted, and is probably undermined, if we simply impose charges at major museums without promoting greater accessibility measures within them and/or carryin out major investments across regions. In terms familiar to egalitarian political theorists: the value of arts and cultural funding does not reduce to the value of fair competition.[98] It is not hard to see why. Informal education, cultural literacy, and social inclusion are valuable in helping us to understand ourselves and each other, to develop self-confidence, lead autonomous lives, and partake in politics and civil society. These are things we can value for their own sake, or for the sake of a democratic culture, and not necessarily for competitive advantage. Even if Thatcher's policy protected the *positional value* of some people's cultural skills and abilities, and their cultural capital, it wasn't designed in a way that would actively promote real opportunities and civic benefits for England's less advantaged citizens. So while the policy didn't harm them in the way some critics suggested, it still failed to take levelling up seriously.

Of course, difficult questions arise about how to level up. I don't claim to have the answers. But for argument's sake, we might again consider the case of free admissions to major museums in less advantaged areas. The Ineffectiveness Criticism is less applicable here. What about the Damaging Criticism? Suppose a philanthropist built a major free museum in Manchester but not Birmingham that promoted (a)–(d). Although there would be an inequality, it seems hard to believe they would have done something bad. By contrast, if they invested in excellent school infrastructure in Manchester but not Birmingham, they would be creating inequalities worthy of concern.[99]

My argument can accommodate this intuition. Investments in less advantaged areas can escape the Damaging Criticism since it also works by degree and applies especially to infrastructure centralised in wealthier areas. By contrast, the schools example raises weightier concerns. This owes to the fact that education has more strongly competitive aspects than 'arts and culture' do.

Still, even in less advantaged regions, free admissions have limited power in providing targeted benefits to disadvantaged groups. Free museums can boost attendance, promote opportunities, evoke pride, and become symbols of accessibility. But their power in conferring benefits on disadvantaged groups and reducing unfair inequalities of opportunity seems to derive more from their geographic reach, and practices of outreach and representative programming.

7. Concluding Remarks

This article has considered whether a national policy of free admissions is a good way to improve access to museums in England. At face value, there are good reasons to think it is. Free admissions boost attendance, remove barriers for disadvantaged groups, and can assist in diversifying audiences. They can also signal a commitment to inclusivity which is valuable in its own right.

But as museum practitioners know, free admissions are no panacea. Drawing on resources from political philosophy and attending to spatial inequalities in England, I have

argued that there are sometimes fairness-based reasons to charge, especially at major museums in advantaged areas. Doing so could effectively finance regional redistribution and collaborative engagement with underrepresented communities at museums. In other words, I am arguing that most or all of the desired benefits of making museums across the country more accessible could be achieved without the current policy.

This is based on my understanding of Openness as requiring a commitment to less advantaged groups. But it is also based on the finding that free admissions are not crucial to diversifying audiences, and the fact that a national policy of free admissions absorbs significant resources without in itself driving a correction to spatial inequalities or guaranteeing that other access-promoting efforts are in effect.

My criticisms work by degree and don't apply in all cases. In fact, it is the inability of England's nation-wide policy to account for this variability that makes the policy subject to critique. Naturally, these criticisms are also open to empirical challenge or refinement. Nonetheless, I have argued free admissions are (1) ineffective *to the degree that* they consume/forgo resources that could be allocated towards other activities that are presumptively more direct and cost-effective in targeting less advantaged groups (e.g. redistributive measures across regions; targeted programming; participatory outreach; free admission for target groups). I have also argued that under some conditions they may also be (2) damaging, because and *to the degree that* they protect/compound advantages over time.

Free admissions at smaller museums, and at major museums in less advantaged areas, are less subject to the Ineffectiveness Criticism. Charging in these cases may be a major deterrent for local and target audiences, and not consume significant resources. The two criticisms can also come apart. The Damaging Criticism is only activated when a region enjoys a relative concentration of resources. Hence, the Ineffectiveness Criticism may apply to museums in some contexts without the Damaging Criticism also applying, if they are based in a region which is not very advantaged. It is also fully consistent with my argument that the same general policy could be fair in other contexts, for instance in a country that lacked the centralisation of resources that characterises England.

These criticisms could also be tested in contexts beyond museums, such as education. Enough has already been said about the competitive aspects of education to suggest that the Damaging Criticism could apply to comparable strategies of promoting educational goods – such as free university tuition, or debt-waiving for all social and economic groups. Perhaps the money absorbed by these strategies could more effectively be allocated towards scholarships or targeted debt-waiving for less advantaged citizens.[100] Insofar as free tuition accelerates higher education mainly for advantaged groups, it would also seem to entrench unfair inequalities of opportunity over time, even while attracting praise and being celebrated as an achievement.[101]

More generally, my argument highlights the risks of egalitarian thinking that takes the existence of communal infrastructure as an expression of solidaristic or fraternal social relationships, independently of how they are spatially distributed and who mainly uses them. In political philosophy, some discussions of fraternal relationships and the communal infrastructure that supports them emphasise the intrinsic value of that infrastructure, in expressing those relationships.[102] This implies that communal infrastructure is valuable as a symbol of fraternity or solidarity independent of its effects on wellbeing.[103] However, this can obscure the fact that communal infrastructure is often distributed unfairly. It also risks delaying the important task of identifying the features of that infrastructure that

benefit less advantaged groups and how to design or evaluate them accordingly. In the context of museums, I hope to have made some progress on those questions here.

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NOTES

1 Some museums were established in the mid-18th century and their collections and exhibits reflect this colonial-era history. But major museums opened in the 21st century, like the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, also face criticisms of applying a Eurocentric perspective to non-Western cultures. For related debates, see Appiah, "Whose Culture"; Easton and Gaskell, "Do Subaltern Artifacts"; Lindsay, "Can we Own the Past?"; Matthes, "Repatriation"; Thompson, "Cultural Property"; Thompson, "Ethics of Repatriation." Another ethical debate concerns arts funding itself. See Dworkin, "Can a Liberal State Support Art?"; Brighouse, "Neutrality"; Tahzib, *Perfectionist Theory*; Hume, "Neutrality." For discussion of museums funding specifically, see Stanton-Ife, "Must We Pay."

2 A recent exception is Wolff and de-Shalit, *City of Equals*, who argue that museums should be free or low cost on grounds of relational equality. Lindsay, "Can we Own the Past?", also argues that cultural antiquities have a kind of public existence that demands that nobody is excluded from accessing them. His account would seem to entail that access to museums of cultural antiquities must be free, although he doesn't make that conclusion explicit. Free admissions have been debated by social scientists, e.g. Martin, "Impact"; Cowell, "Measuring"; Rushton, "Should Public."

3 Free admissions can also be explored from the perspective of pricing strategies at specific museums (for recent research in the UK, see DC Research and Durnin Research, "Research into Admissions").

4 Dodd and Sandell, *Building Bridges*, 14; Simon, *Participatory Museum*.

5 Réaume, "Individuals," 5, describes 'a cultured society' as a kind of public good which 'requires the existence of a certain "critical mass" of individuals who create and enjoy rock videos, read and write literature, compose, perform, and listen to music, paint and sculpt, and so forth'. This expression comes from Raz, *Morality of Freedom*, 199–203.

6 I am using this term to refer to museums which can expect to attract relatively huge numbers even while charging, e.g. over a million visits a year.

7 Hunt and DCMS, "Ten Years."

8 (a) The relevant section of UK tax law is Section 33A of the VAT Act 1994. Previously (i.e. before 2001), this code facilitated breaks only for museums that charged admissions. (b) Grants-in-aid vary on a year-to-year basis and serve purposes beyond free admission (see the Appendix for spending 2017–22). The current policy begun in 2001, when culture secretary Chris Smith coordinated an arrangement between the Treasury and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) that encouraged specific museums to adopt free admissions. Since their founding the British Museum (est. 1753), National Gallery (est. 1824), V&A (est. 1852),

and Tate (est. 1897) have at various times provided free admissions. The 2001 policy expanded and cemented this tradition (Cowell, "Measuring"). Ticketing occurs at national museums for special exhibitions.

9 The institutions currently supported by *both* prongs ('national museums') are cited in the Appendix. Despite being a 'UK policy', they are all based in England. There are complications to reading into this – English taxpayers may be contributing to other forms of funding in Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland beyond the DCMS. For that reason, I limit discussion to regional spending differences within England.

10 DC Research and Wavehill, "Public Investment," 19. Not all of this figure is due to museums being free.

11 Cowell, "Measuring," 206. This figure is likely to have increased because the first prong of the scheme now applies to all museums willing to 'go free'.

12 See the Appendix.

13 It is a repeated finding that higher socio-economic groups are overrepresented at museums overall, and that lower socio-economic groups are underrepresented. This appears stable across most free and pay-to-enter museums (DC Research, "Taking Charge," 15; DC Research and Durnin Research, "Research into Admissions," 28; Swedish Agency for Cultural Analysis, "Fri Entré till Museer," 24–26; Martin, "Impact"; Cowell, "Measuring"). My claims are based on England. Looking at Europe, sociologists have hypothesised that as national income inequality goes down, museum attendance goes up (Szlendak and Karwacki, "Do the Swedes"). Analysis from Szlendak and Karwacki on 22 European countries lends support to this idea. At face value, this might suggest that audience diversity is a function of background inequalities. However, Szlendak and Karwacki's findings do not control for the *demographics* of people attending museums in countries with lower inequality. They just suggest that as income inequality goes down, cultural consumption generally goes up, even if it is centralised in well-educated, wealthier groups (see also Swedish Agency for Cultural Analysis, "Fri Entré till Museer"). I thank a reviewer for suggesting this study.

14 I am understanding a 'prioritarian' to mean that the interests of less advantaged groups should have greater weight in our deliberations. By less advantaged groups, I mean those who are less well-off in terms of social welfare, rather than those who are less advantaged simply in terms of their access to cultural goods. Prioritarianism as a moral theory is often cashed out in terms of *diminishing marginal returns*. As Temkin ("Equality," 64) writes: 'there is a diminishing marginal value of well-being, such that the worse off someone is in absolute terms, the greater importance or value is attached to improving their well-being by a given amount'.

15 In 1974, ticketing for national museums was introduced under culture secretary John Eccles and then-education secretary Thatcher, who defended the policy in Parliament (see Hansard, "Museum Charges") and recommenced it when the Conservatives returned to power in 1979 (Cowell, "Measuring," 205–6). The aim was to increase funding by gathering extra revenue, to be allocated back to existing arrangements. I am referring to this as 'Thatcher's policy'. As prime minister (1979–90) Thatcher oversaw other initiatives (see note 97) that I'm not referring to. Thanks to a reviewer for raising this useful example.

16 Geographers and museums scholars have studied UK spatial inequalities (e.g. Ballatore and Candlin, "Geography"). For normative philosophical work on spatial inequality, see Wolff and de-Shalit, *City of Equals*; Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*. On the global distribution of cultural goods and artefacts, see Matthes, "Repatriation."

17 I am understanding cultural goods in an open-ended way, to not predetermine what areas of culture count as worthy of state support. Perhaps for related reasons, philosophers seem to have avoided giving precise definitions for cultural goods (though see Munoz-Dardé, "In the Face of Austerity"). Museums funding is just one means of promoting cultural opportunities; there is no reason to suspect that it is superior to others.

18 For discussion of the challenges of defining 'museum', see Brown and Mairesse, "Definition." For discussion of the difficulties of defining museums in the UK specifically, see Candlin and Larkin, "What is a Museum?" and Candlin *et al.*, "Mapping Museums," 9–11. I thank a reviewer for encouraging me to emphasise these differences.

19 For discussion of British national museums, see Watson and Sawyer, "National Museums." For analysis of national museums across contexts, see Knell *et al.*, *National Museums*.

20 These museums each had over 2.5 m visitors in 2022/3 (DCMS, "DCMS-Sponsored Museums," Table 1).

21 Mendoza, "Mendoza Review."

22 For discussion of the valuable roles that UK museums can serve, see Museums Association, "Museums Change Lives," and "Museums 2020." For discussion of the roles of museums historically, see Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*. For an overview of the value of cultural organisations and practices, see Crossick and Kasznska, "Understanding the Value." I thank a reviewer for useful resources here.

23 My background in liberal political philosophy influences the way I have selected, grouped, and phrased these benefits. My organising framework is 'civic value'. This is to mitigate the risk of selecting values that are arbitrarily partial towards certain ways of life (e.g. those where visual art plays a central role). This approach encourages a focus on individual benefits in the first instance (e.g. education, not 'an educated society'). However, each of the benefits I discuss has a corresponding communal-level effect. I have also adopted terms which are active in debates in ethics/political philosophy (e.g. recognition, understanding, fraternity/solidarity, equality of opportunity), to illustrate and harness these resources. Thanks to a reviewer for comments here.

24 Many museums are committed to an educational role in part. Research into public attitudes in the UK suggests that many people see education as part of their role in society today (BritainThinks, "Public Perceptions"). For an overview of the educational roles of museums, see Hein, *Learning in the Museum*; Hooper-Greenhill, "Education." These goals can also attract criticisms of paternalism (Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*).

25 For research on the positive effect of museums in evoking feelings of awe/wonder, see Luke's study of visitors to the Wallace Collection and Tate Britain in London, "Bloody Hell," and Price *et al.*'s study on a science museum and various art museums in America, "Awe & Memories."

26 Some of the benefits can be understood in cognitive or hermeneutical terms (cf. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*), but they also have an importantly affective dimension, relating to the experience of feeling seen or heard (cf. Raz, "Free Expression"). When our heritage, beliefs, and experiences are represented in museums, this can have an affirmational effect and evoke pride. Research on public attitudes in the UK suggests that through the 'preservation of national heritage', museums provide a source of national pride (BritainThinks, "Public Perceptions," 4). These effects can also be seen in particular communities. For instance, representation of LGBTQ+ communities can support pride among LGBTQ+ communities (see e.g. Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*, for a detailed case study from the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow).

27 Museums can support our *self-understanding* by facilitating encounters with, and influence over, cultural materials that reflect or explore our cultural history, experiences, and beliefs (see e.g. Rounds, "Doing Identity Work"). This role can also be considered at the level of groups, e.g. with respect to how communities interpret and narrate their past (see e.g. Crooke, "Community Biographies"). Museums can also support our *understanding of others* through providing exposure to materials that explore a diversity of histories, experiences, and beliefs. For an influential exploration of how museums can facilitate cross-cultural understanding, see Clifford, "Museums"; for more recent work, see Witcomb, "Towards a Pedagogy." For criticism of these ideas, see Boast, "Neocolonial Collaboration."

28 Hume, "Neutrality"; cf. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.

29 Such spaces appear to play a strong role in the feelings of inclusion, belonging, and attachment in cities (Wolff and de-Shalit, *City of Equals*, 69–70; Knight Foundation and Gallup, "Soul of the Community"). For a recent survey of these effects in UK museums, see Museums Association, "Museums 2020," 8. For a philosophical account of the importance of such spaces in diverse societies, see Young, *Justice*, 240–1. Public spaces can also evoke feelings of social inclusion and attachment in problematic ways (Moreton-Robinson, "I Still Call Australia Home"; Cunningham and Savage, "Secret Garden?").

30 Brighouse and Swift, "Equality," 481 fn. 17. Communal infrastructure also includes things like parks and playgrounds, sporting facilities, libraries, and youth clubs.

31 See Fancourt *et al.*, "What is the Evidence"; Museums Association, "Museums Change Lives," 6.

32 Although museums (and their funders) may not see their value primarily in terms of enabling cultural *careers*, this is still one of their *de facto* valuable functions, since museums need employees and contributors with specialist skills and knowledge to operate, and these jobs are valuable. I thank a reviewer for helpful comments here.

33 Sandell discusses the role of museums in challenging stereotypes and prejudices in *Museums, Prejudice, and the Reframing of Difference*. This role is comparable to that of other cultural forms like music, television, and film (cf. Yuen, *Reel Inequality*). For seminal work on how gendered representation in visual art reproduces barriers to women in the art world, see Nochlin, "Why."

34 For a discussion of equality of cultural opportunity taking consumers and producers into account, see Gingerich, "Remixing Rawls."

35 The shared benefits of a culturally literate society relate to people of different backgrounds gaining an understanding of each other's culture and experiences (Hume, "Neutrality"). Some of these benefits could be realised – perhaps even more efficiently – via a policy that mainly promoted cultural literacy for wealthier citizens. Poorer citizens could benefit from living in a society where wealthier citizens had a better understanding of their experiences, beliefs, and histories, even if they weren't given much state-backed support to develop an understanding of their own experiences etc., or those of wealthier citizens.

36 Smith, "Letter 1."
37 For discussion of positional goods, see Hirsch, *Limits*.
38 For a sceptical view on museums providing educational benefits to school students, see Stopforth and Gayle, "Parental Social Class." Other studies suggest that attendance promotes educational success, but that this effect is either limited to, or stronger for, children from higher socio-economic backgrounds (e.g. Jæger, "Does Cultural Capital"; Nordlander, "Young People's Activities").
39 Hollis, "Education as a positional good"; Brighouse and Swift, "Equality."
40 Kaufman and Gabler, "Cultural Capital."
41 For an overview of recent findings, see e.g. Fancourt and Steptoe, "Art of Life and Death"; Crossick and Kasznska, "Understanding the Value," 106–10. Brighouse and Swift, "Equality," highlight the competitive aspects of health.
42 Bourdieu influentially developed the concept of cultural capital in "Forms of Capital." See Bennett *et al.*, *Culture*, for extensive analysis of cultural capital in modern Britain.
43 While museum professionals aren't always paid much, they are likely to come from wealthier backgrounds. For recent statistics in England, see McAndrew *et al.*, "UK Arts, Culture and Heritage."
44 People with higher levels of cross-cultural literacy won't always have higher social status and vice versa. But my point is just that, due to facts about the institutions through which we might aim to transmit cultural literacy (e.g. universities, schools, museums), cultural literacy policies can support the transmission of cultural capital indirectly, even when they fail to teach cultural literacy.
45 Cunningham and Savage, "Secret Garden?"
46 Brighouse and Swift, "Equality," 482.
47 This isn't necessarily a decisive reason for favouring a prioritarian view, because egalitarianism can also acknowledge the importance of other values and accept some forms of inequality (Brighouse and Swift, ibid.). I thank a reviewer for helpful comments here.
48 For example, Bennett (*Birth of the Museum*, 90–105) discusses the 'insatiable' demands of equality of access.
49 A related question concerns the *urgency* of cultural accessibility initiatives. Would benefits (a)–(d) materialise for citizens, to some reasonable degree, without public funding for arts and museums? This is a difficult contextual question. Fortunately, we can make progress on the ethics of free admissions without a precise answer. Considerations of fairness apply to museum spending regardless of how urgent it is, because it purports to serve the public interest, uses public money, and has rival effects.
50 Social inclusion and education were key policy goals during the originating New Labour period of this policy (DCMS, "Annual Report 2001"). A commitment to inclusion is now asserted through the phrase that museums are for, and should benefit, everyone, 'not just the privileged few' (e.g. Mendoza, "Mendoza Review," 88; DCMS, "Action Plan," 11). For an illustration of this argument in the literature on museums accessibility, see Lin, "Ethics and Challenges," 216.
51 While discussions in museum studies are nuanced (e.g. Lin, "Ethics and Challenges"), I am referring to public debate and government justification on this specific policy. Consider former culture secretary Chris Smith's remarks. He writes that abolishing free admissions 'would exclude a vast proportion of our society. It would reduce visitor numbers drastically' (Smith, "Letter 1"). It is true that it would reduce visits. However, the suggestion that charging would mainly deter less well-off groups is only true if these groups attend free museums to a *greater degree*. This is not indicated by higher numbers of attendance at free museums alone – it requires a demographic analysis between free and charging museums.
52 DC Research, "Taking Charge," 16.
53 DCMS, "Action Plan," 11.
54 DC Research, "Taking Charge," 15. This research was commissioned by the Association of Independent Museums (AIM), with Arts Council England (ACE) and the Museums Archives and Libraries Division (MALD) of the Welsh Government and published in 2023. The review carried out a 'sector-wide survey of museums across the UK'. Museums were asked to assess the effects of free admission on audience diversity. Of the responding museums, 74.8% (229/306) were based in England. They report that 'whilst 68% of museums that do not charge for admissions feel that this has a positive or very positive impact on the mix of visitors, 58% of those that do charge report that charges have no impact on the mix or diversity of visitors' (ibid., 15). They go on: 'There are museums that are the exception to this pattern – achieving a social mix and diversity of visitor that reflects their community, but these are not distinguished by whether they charge for admissions or not' (ibid., 16).
55 Ibid., 15. This statement refers to analysis of industry data collected by AIM Visitor Verdict in 2016.
56 DC Research and Durnin Research, "Research into Admissions," 28.

57 Ibid., 25–28. For similar findings from an earlier point in the life of this policy (2007), see Cowell, "Measuring."
58 DC Research and Durnin Research, "Research into Admissions," 26.
59 Ibid., 29.
60 One reported factor is that free admissions can encourage relationship-building with local communities (DC Research, "Taking Charge").
61 For case studies of targeted programming, see Sandell, "Engaging with Diversity." For case studies of co-curation, see Museums Association, "Museums Change Lives"; Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*. Of course, targeted programming is no panacea either (Ang, "Museums"), and it should resist boxing identities or representing histories and groups as fixed. For detailed qualitative analysis on the drivers for why people of different backgrounds engage with various forms of culture, see Bennett *et al.*, *Culture*.
62 Hunt, "Should UK Museums." DC Research's work on the UK museums sector indicates a general appreciation for this view in the sector ("Taking Charge," 15).
63 This is also reflected in non-government-affiliated research on attendance of art museums in the UK carried out by Bennett *et al.*, *Culture*, 123. Analysing DCMS statistics on museum attendance, the Swedish Agency for Cultural Analysis reach the same conclusion ("Fri Entré till Museer," 26).
64 Swedish Agency for Cultural Analysis, "Fri Entré till Museer," 24–26. National museums supported by a similar scheme in Sweden also saw no changes to audience diversity.
65 NEA, "When Going Gets Tough," 49.
66 Ibid.; Hood, "Staying Away."
67 A reviewer raises a further consideration: repeat visits may have diminishing returns (e.g. in education, enjoyment), so increased visits from disadvantaged groups may be 'worth more'. If that's right, then free admissions may actually *promote* equality of opportunity even when they don't close the attendance gap. Whether this is true depends on how we conceive of equality of opportunity, and on whether the overall distribution of museums is consistent with it. While I'm not denying that some forms of cultural participation have diminishing returns, this consideration wouldn't necessarily recommend free admissions, since considerations of cost-effectiveness (sect. 5), and an unfair concentration of opportunities in advantaged regions (sect. 6), also arise.
68 Then-culture secretary Chris Smith, in LGC, "Budget" (emphases added).
69 Then-culture secretary Lord Parkinson, in Parkinson and DCMS, "Museums and Galleries" (emphases added).
70 Some may prefer an alternative reading of the policy, as holistically integrated with a collection of measures that museums/government bodies are pursuing to promote cultural opportunities. By contrast, I am focusing on this public policy *by itself*, and as it is written in legislation and described by government. This focus is justified because (a) the policy is based in legislation that has attracted its own debate, and (b) because it is possible that it mainly correlates with other measures, rather than drives them. If this is right, then the current VAT legislation could be dropped or rewritten to promote other measures instead or as well. I thank a reviewer and an associate editor for encouraging this clarification.
71 HM Revenue & Customs, "VAT Notice 998."
72 Candlin *et al.*, "Mapping Museums," 48.
73 See Savage, *Social Class*, for a sophisticated analysis of spatial inequality in the UK, which both highlights the concentration of cultural and economic capital in London, and illustrates various inequalities within metropolises across the UK, hence within and beyond London.
74 Data from Mendoza, "Mendoza Review." Seven national museums have outposts in other cities, e.g. the Tate has a major branch in Liverpool, and the Imperial War Museum in Manchester. Royal Armouries and the Science Museums Group are also mostly outside London (see the Appendix).
75 ACE, "Private Investment," 4, 14.
76 Stark *et al.*, "Rebalancing," 8.
77 Appendix, Table A2. The Arts Council of England has been redirecting funding in recent rounds to help correct for their historic London focus, but I'm focused on DCMS.
78 This isn't to say that London's museums serve Londoners fairly. A between-regions focus doesn't discount issues *within* London.
79 Anderson, *Value*, 160, emphasises the civic value of parks.
80 Higgins, "Free Museum Entry." Cultural critic Brown also writes, '[t]he policy … does not have too many detractors – the public does, after all, own the contents' ("National Museums"). In the Swedish context, Rubin says: 'It goes without saying that accessibility must also be valued from a democratic point of view …

free entry has applied to museum collections, which all Swedes own together' ("Fri Entré till Museerna," translated). Similar points were raised by critics of the MET's admissions fees (Mittman, "Open Letter").

81 Another criticism involves questioning whether national collections are a fitting object for feelings of cultural patrimony. Do they represent the heritage of the whole British public? Perhaps not everyone sees their heritage reflected in a Titian. National cultural patrimony also relates to debates about repatriation, but these matters lie beyond my scope. For discussion of representativeness and curation, see e.g. Reilly, *Curatorial Activism*; Smith, *Emotional Heritage*; Procter, *Whole Picture*; Matthes, *Drawing the Line*.

82 For a related discussion about how the spatial arrangements of cities shape an individual's '*genuine* opportunities', see Wolff and de-Shalit, *City of Equals*, 64–65.

83 For analysis of the social, economic, and political dominance of London in the UK, see Savage, *Social Class*, 151–72.

84 Those who benefit the least from a country's major cultural investments might say that arts funding isn't meant for people like them. In suggesting that free admissions obscure unfairness, my focus isn't on *these* individuals. I'm referring to those who characteristically benefit from existing arrangements. For these groups, a policy of free admissions seems liable to disarm critical scrutiny: it not only signals solidarity but supports their quality of life. Alternatively, we might doubt the intentions behind policies that concentrate resources, arguing that they are a form of 'regulatory capture' (cf. Táíwò, *Elite Capture*, 57–60). What I'm suggesting is that many supporters of free museums would sincerely believe them to be an effective use of promoting cultural opportunities for the less advantaged. This kind of hypothesis might be referred to as 'cognitive capture' (cf. Rilinger, "Who Captures Whom?").

85 Wolff and de-Shalit, *City of Equals*, 137.

86 To be clear, this is a hypothesis. However, it isn't an empty one. An 'obscuring effect' helps to explain why London favouritism in museums funding has been historically stable while other areas of arts funding have come in for reform. The effect is evidenced in the opening pages of "The Mendoza Review: An Independent Review of Museums in England": 'It is important to clarify that *this Review does not cover the policy of free admission to the permanent collections of national museums*. We are aware that this is a major intervention in the sector and certainly influences the way it functions, and that many would like to see this policy discussed and challenged. But, because it is a manifesto commitment, it is not a part of this Review. I have come around to the view passionately argued by one national museum director, that we should be proud of this policy … *[W]e should … proclaim to the world that, unlike in many other countries, our great national museums are open to all and free to all*' (Mendoza, "Mendoza Review," 8, emphases added). I thank a reviewer for helpful comments here.

87 As George Strauss asked Thatcher: 'Is it really worthwhile imposing entrance charges to raise this derisory sum?' (Hansard, "Museum Charges," 2–3).

88 Data from DC Research and Wavehill, "Public Investment," 60. See the Appendix, Tables A5 and A6.

89 For comparison: the MET in New York generated $49 m in admissions revenue in the fiscal year 2022/3 (MET, "Annual Report," 20). According to their report, admissions fees accounted for 16% of the museum's total revenue, which was US $307.4 m ($307.4 m x 0.16 ≈ $49.1 m). Its currently advertised charges are: '$30 for adults; $22 for seniors; $17 for students. Free for Members, Patrons, children under 12, and a caregiver accompanying a visitor with a disability' (https://engage.metmuseum.org/admission). I am not saying that the same ticketing scheme is appropriate for the UK's national museums.

90 For data on overseas visitors, see DCMS, "DCMS-Sponsored Museums,", Table 4.

91 For data on self-generated income at national museums, see DCMS, "DCMS-Sponsored Museums," Tables 10, 11, and 12. In 2022/3, the British Museum generated £3.1 m from admissions to non-permanent exhibits, £11.2 m from 'trading', and £31.3 m from fundraising, totalling £45.6 m.

92 18.75 m/45.6 m ≈ 0.41. The large national museums I am alluding to differ in the extent to which they attract tourists, and in their existing levels of self-generated income. For instance, the same hypothetical scheme would have generated less money for the Natural History Museum, producing £12.1 m in new income from ticketing in 2022/3, against an existing self-generated income of £27.92 m. However, this increase would have raised the Natural History Museum's self-generated income by about the same amount: 43%.

93 I thank an associate editor for helping me to parse this point.

94 This suggests greater justification for free museums based in less advantaged areas, e.g. the National Museums Liverpool. Inversely, the *pro tanto* nature of this criticism means that it does not apply evenly to national museums in London, since they vary in their audience size, overall funding arrangements, and therefore how much revenue they consume/forgo through free admission (for instance, compare the *relatively* small Horniman Museum, outside central London, with the massive British Museum).

95 One way of understanding this objection is that I'm encouraging *levelling down*. There are some cases where levelling down is absurd. Views that recommend levelling down in these cases face a 'levelling-down objection'. For instance, if we think that inequality is bad *in itself*, we imply that the elimination of inequality would always be a change for the better. But suppose we wanted to eliminate inequality of vision. One way to do this would be to remove the eyes of the sighted. We may then be committed to saying that a blind world would be in some sense an improvement, despite not appearing to have improved anything for anybody (Parfit, *Equality or Priority?*; cf. Casal, "Why Sufficiency is Not Enough"). These kinds of concerns have often played a role in motivating prioritarianism as a general moral theory. However, as my argument suggests, we don't have to be egalitarians to want to level down in the case of *positional goods*, since an unequal distribution of them can be bad for people.
96 Hansard, "Museum Charges."
97 Some levelling-up investments came about while Thatcher was prime minister – e.g. the development of the National Museums Liverpool in 1986, and the opening of Tate Liverpool in 1988 – but weren't part of the aims/methods of the policy I'm discussing. See n. 15.
98 Cf. Brighouse and Swift, "Equality," 482, on education.
99 Thanks to a reviewer for raising this example.
100 Brighouse and Mullane explore related issues in "What's Wrong." However, if free access to education raises concerns of fairness, then free tutoring sites, free libraries, and Wikipedia would be in trouble. I am grateful to a reviewer for raising some of these examples, which a full application of the criticism would have to account for.
101 Some of these concerns can be mitigated by progressive taxation, but this cannot fully address the accumulation of advantages among advantaged groups, which also needs to be considered.
102 For example, Anderson, *Value*, 158–61.
103 Cf. O'Neill, "What Should Egalitarians Believe?," 143–4.

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Appendix

The below tables provide evidence that DCMS funding overwhelmingly benefits London residents. The main finding is illustrated in Table A2.

Table A1. DCMS museums sponsorship (2017–22)

Location	Average £'000	Percent of total
London	186,096	46.25%
Wholly/partly outside London	216,232	53.74%
Total	402,328	

More resources were allocated on average outside of London over the last five years. However, this fails to account for per-capita spending.

Table A2. Estimated per-capita DCMS spending in London (2017–22)

	Average spend	Average population 2017–22	Average per-capita spend
London	£186,096,000	8,898,837	£20.91
Non-London England	£216,232,000	47,295,035	£4.57
England	£402,328,000	56,193,872	£7.16

Calculations combine English population estimates (Table A3) and DCMS spending data (Table A4). Londoners received over four times ($20.91/4.57 \approx 4.57$) more money, in terms of money allocated to local DCMS-sponsored institutions, compared with other English residents, 2017–22. Although some resources allocated to London institutions may have been reinvested outside London (e.g. if a London institution sponsored events elsewhere), this should not pose a problem as the figure is conservative. It excludes all resources allocated to London institutions that are partly outside of London: the Imperial War Museum, Tate Galleries, and Natural History Museum (for locations, see Table A4).

Table A3. Estimated population sizes (2017–22)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Average
UK	66,040,200	66,436,000	66,796,807	67,081,000	67,026,000	
England	55,619,400	55,977,000	56,286,961	56,550,000	56,536,000	56,193,872
London	8,825,001	8,908,081	8,961,989	9,002,488	8,796,628	8,898,837
England minus London						47,295,035

Population estimates are compiled from ONS, "Population Estimates," mid-2017, mid-2018, mid-2019, mid-2020, and mid-2021. UK population is included as a point of reference. The reason behind average populations is to facilitate quick comparisons of per-capita spending.

Table A4. DCMS-sponsored museums spending £'000 (2017–22)

	Institution	Location	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–1	2021–2	Average 2017–22	% 2017–22
1	British Museum	London	53,573	52,543	75,709	65,420	66,621	62,773	15.60
2	Geffrye Museum Trust Limited (Museum of the Home)	London	1,696	2,096	2,196	1,889	2,106	1,997	0.50
3	Horniman Public Museum and Public Park Trust	London	4,320	3,820	3,970	4,661	4,619	4,278	1.06
4	Imperial War Museum	Partly outside London	25,497	25,739	22,822	31,658	40,061	29,155	7.25
5	National Gallery	London	24,092	24,092	24,675	29,257	30,755	26,574	6.61
6	Royal Museums Greenwich	London	16,020	15,870	16,598	19,834	21,744	18,013	4.48
7	National Museums Liverpool	Wholly outside London	19,761	19,761	22,386	25,176	27,206	22,858	5.68
8	National Portrait Gallery	London	7,134	7,634	8,575	9,263	15,645	9,650	2.40
9	Natural History Museum	Partly outside London	41,815	42455	46,672	60,254	60,667	50,373	12.52
10	Royal Armouries Museum	Mostly outside London	7,788	9,461	7,834	8,430	9,733	8,649	2.15
11	Science Museums Group	Mostly outside London	45,209	47,928	70,542	65,584	70,780	60,009	14.91
12	Sir John Soane's Museum	London	1,012	1,032	1,252	1,381	1,635	1,262	0.31
13	Tate	Partly outside London	38,066	37,566	41,208	51,570	57,531	45,188	11.23
14	Victoria and Albert Museum	London	37,806	40,676	53,098	79,059	78,268	57,781	14.36
15	Wallace Collection	London	3,711	2,731	3,910	4,091	4,393	3,767	0.94
			327,500	333,404	401,447	457,527	491,764	402,328	

Data are from DCMS, "DCMS Annual Report and Accounts," 2017–18, 2018–19, 2019–20, 2020–1, 2021–2. Location is from Mendoza, "Mendoza Review," 28. Figures refer to all grants-in-aid rather than the portion of them given to cover costs owing to free admissions, which is difficult to decipher.

Tables A5 and A6 indicate the monetary significance of DCMS spending (i.e. spending on national museums), as a share of *overall national spending* on museums. This is not intended to be an exhaustive account of funding. It is included to support my claim that money absorbed by free admissions to national museums rivals other sources of funding, for instance, from the National Lottery (£33.648 m across 2017–22) or from the Arts Council of England (£67.476 m across 2017–22).

Table A5. National Lottery Heritage Fund museums funding 2017–22 (£ million)

Category	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–1	2021–2	Average
Relevant Heritage Areas	35.51	34.48	23.53	6.73	19.35	
Where 'museum' is in recipient name	22.99	2.83	14.7	3.99	4.13	
Total	58.5	37.31	38.23	10.72	23.48	33.648

Data are from DC Research and Wavehill, "Public Investment," 60.

Table A6. Arts Council of England museums funding 2017–22 (£ million)

Category	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–1	2021–2	Average
Where museums is a supported 'discipline'	26.58	37.98	38.05	38.12	40.3	
Where 'museum' is in recipient name	1.61	1.29	1.41	1.09	1.74	
Acceptance in Lieu & Cultural Gifts Scheme	17.4	33.63	40	30.68	27.5	
Total	45.59	72.9	79.46	69.89	69.54	67.476

Data are from DC Research and Wavehill, "Public Investment," 60.