

Forthcoming in *Dialogue*

Online first version available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0012217315001110>

Luck Egalitarianism, Responsibility, and Political Liberalism

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ABSTRACT: Luck egalitarians argue that distributive justice should be understood in terms of our capacity to be responsible for our choices. Both proponents and critics assume that the theory must rely on a comprehensive conception of responsibility. I respond to luck egalitarianism's critics by developing a political conception of responsibility that remains agnostic on the metaphysics of free choice. I construct this political conception by developing a novel reading of John Rawls' distinction between the political and the comprehensive. A surprising consequence is that many responsibility-based objections to luck egalitarianism turn out to be objections to Rawls' political liberalism as well.

RÉSUMÉ : Selon l'égalitarisme de la fortune, la justice distributive est à comprendre en termes de notre capacité d'être responsables de nos choix. Tant les partisans que les opposants d'un tel égalitarisme présupposent qu'il doit être fondé sur une conception compréhensive de la responsabilité. Je réponds aux opposants en développant une conception politique de la responsabilité qui demeure agnostique devant la métaphysique du libre choix. Pour ce faire, je propose une relecture de la distinction rawlsienne entre le politique et le compréhensif. Une conséquence surprenante est que de nombreuses objections à l'égalitarisme de la fortune s'avèrent être des objections au libéralisme de Rawls.

Luck egalitarians argue that distributive justice should be understood in terms of our capacity to be responsible for our choices. Both proponents and critics of luck egalitarianism assume that the theory must rely on a comprehensive conception of responsibility. Such conceptions make controversial metaphysical claims about free choice. Those claims conflict with the moral, religious, and philosophical doctrines held by many reasonable citizens. Yet any adequate theory of equality must, in principle, be endorsable by all reasonable citizens, that is, it must be articulated in public, political terms that all reasonable citizens *could* endorse. I achieve that end by providing a limited, political conception of responsibility that remains agnostic on the metaphysics of free choice. I construct this political conception out of John Rawls' political conception of the citizen as having a moral power to create, revise, and pursue a conception of the good, and out of the deeply embedded commitment of citizens in democratic states to see each other as capable of being responsible for their choices.

I also respond to pessimism in the literature regarding what a political conception of responsibility can include. On the pessimistic view, a merely political (not metaphysical) conception can only comprise responsibility in the sense of role-based obligations, not the sense of being responsible for the consequences of one's actions.¹ However, the foundation of political liberalism includes certain commitments regarding

¹ Michael Blake and Mathias Risse, "Two Models of Equality and Responsibility," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 38 June (2008), no. 2.

both sorts of responsibility. I develop a more textually faithful and philosophically powerful reading of *Political Liberalism* than the pessimist, and I argue for a rich and inclusive interpretation of Rawls' notion of the political.² A surprising consequence is that many responsibility-based objections to luck egalitarianism turn out to be just as much objections to Rawls' political liberalism. The target range of these arguments goes far beyond disputes over luck egalitarian theories of distributive justice.

1. Equality and Responsibility

Luck egalitarianism is an understanding of equality that attempts to minimize the influence of luck and maximize the influence of choice on each individual's condition. It treats inequalities differently based on their causal origins. Whether a given inequality is just is primarily determined by the relevant agent's degree of responsibility for his condition. This approach to equality is fundamentally concerned with those who are worse off than others through no fault of their own. Paradigm examples of unjust inequalities are disabilities and burdens for which the bearer is not responsible.

Luck egalitarians, including Ronald Dworkin, Gerald Cohen, and Richard Arneson, define equality in terms of choice, luck, and responsibility. Defining equality in a way that is sensitive to responsibility requires some theoretical account of responsibility. The luck egalitarians have (implicitly and explicitly) relied on full, comprehensive theories of responsibility. That is unacceptable because it ignores the fact of reasonable pluralism—we can never reach consensus among free citizens on a full, comprehensive theory of responsibility, and therefore these theories are only endorsable by a subset of citizens.³ Many citizens have comprehensive philosophical, moral, or religious views that contain specific commitments regarding responsibility. Our theory of equality should be independent of such views. A comprehensive luck egalitarian theory is only endorsable by those citizens who affirm a comprehensive conception of responsibility that is consistent with the theory. When dealing with matters of basic justice, such as the general principles that will guide the distribution of benefits and burdens in society, luck egalitarians ought to rely on a limited, political conception of responsibility that all citizens could, in principle, endorse. 'In principle' means that the theory is expressed in public, political terms, and that endorsement of the theory does not require adherence to any particular comprehensive view of responsibility or the good.

Luck egalitarianism was originally inspired by Rawls' idea that whatever is arbitrary from the moral point of view ought neither to influence our choice of principles of justice, nor determine the distribution of benefits and burdens in a society. Despite that, luck egalitarians have not been engaged with Rawls' later political liberalism. It has gone unnoticed that Rawls' later work provides us with the resources to articulate a conception of responsibility that is agnostic on the metaphysics of free will. This new approach recognizes a distinction between political and comprehensive conceptions of responsibility.

Rawls reached his position of political liberalism as a response to reasonable pluralism.⁴ The free exercise of reason will not converge on any particular

² John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

³ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 34.

⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 36.

comprehensive conception of the good. Comprehensive conceptions of the good include Catholicism, utilitarianism, Kantianism, and so on. Since citizens in a free democratic society will never agree on a comprehensive conception of the good, they ought not use comprehensive reasons to settle matters of basic justice and constitutional essentials. Rather, they ought to appeal to a political conception of justice based on values that are important to everyone simply as citizens. Reasons articulated in terms of public, political values have a special modal character such that any reasonable citizen *could* endorse them because they appeal to values that can matter to each individual citizen, regardless of what else matters to them. Such endorsement does not require adherence to any particular comprehensive conception of the good.

The political is characterized by three criteria: applying to the basic structure of society, being presented independently of any comprehensive doctrine, and being elaborated in terms of fundamental political ideas viewed as implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society.⁵ The idea of a political conception of responsibility has been underexplored, and when it has been considered, the conclusions have been too pessimistic about what such a conception could include. We can have a surprisingly rich political conception of responsibility, elaborated from a political conception of the person as free and in possession of a moral power to create, revise, and pursue a conception of the good, and from a set of fundamental beliefs and practices regarding responsibility that are implicit in the public political culture. This political conception resolves the problems with endorsability raised earlier and answers those who think luck egalitarianism requires a libertarian view of responsibility.

2. Luck Egalitarianism, Metaphysics, and Endorsability

Luck egalitarians have generally ignored or rejected Rawls' distinction between the comprehensive and the political. Their theories have developed without any concern for his duty of civility, which obligates us to justify decisions on fundamental political issues in terms of public values and public standards.⁶ However, luck egalitarianism has often been presented as a view that is in fact widely endorsable, because it is based on ideas about responsibility and fairness that enjoy wide support. The idea that persons should generally bear the benefits or burdens of their choices does have widespread agreement, and this has been presented as a virtue of the theory. G.A. Cohen emphasizes this point, and argues that luck egalitarianism reclaims the values of individual choice and responsibility from the anti-egalitarians.⁷

This virtue as found in the literature is focused solely on the fact that the basic ideas behind luck egalitarianism share widespread support in the public culture. No one has argued that this foundation can be elaborated in a way that remains widely endorsable. The best way to do that is to give a responsibility-sensitive theory of equality that appeals to a political, not comprehensive, conception of responsibility. The way luck egalitarianism has developed so far has undermined its own foundation in something that enjoys widespread prior agreement.

Samuel Scheffler's criticism of luck egalitarianism displays a keen awareness of this distinction between the basis of a theory and its elaboration. He objects that any

⁵ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 223.

⁶ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 217.

⁷ G.A. Cohen, "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice," *Ethics* 99 (1989), p. 928.

attempt to elaborate a complete luck egalitarian theory undermines this virtue.⁸ He grants that luck egalitarianism does start from a principle that is deeply embedded and widely shared in the public culture. What shares widespread agreement is a 'principle of responsibility' that persons should be equal in the degree to which they are in control of their lives, and that inequalities borne by parties who are not responsible for their condition are different from inequalities borne by parties who are responsible for their condition.

Scheffler argues that luck egalitarianism only has this ecumenical virtue when its claims about choice and equality remain so unspecified that they are little more than tautologies. There is some obvious link between choice, responsibility, and it being fair that agents bear the costs of their own choices. But the principle itself does not tell us what to do in particular cases or how to distinguish between responsible choices and luck-determined circumstances. A luck egalitarian theory needs to do both of those things. Filling out the theory requires making claims that do not share wide agreement. He concludes that luck egalitarianism's wide basis of prior agreement is illusory. If we keep that virtue, there is nothing to be done with the theory. It is too thin. If we specify the theory to the point where it says something concrete, we lose that advantage.

Scheffler observes that a typical way to fill out a theory and answer these questions is to give a comprehensive theoretical distinction between responsibility and luck, such as Dworkin's distinction between the person and the circumstances surrounding the person, or Gerald Cohen's distinction between choice and that which is not sensitive to choice. Another way to fill out the theory is to understand responsibility in terms of identification with one's actions, tastes, and preferences—seeing these as essential parts of the self. Scheffler objects that any appeal to moral responsibility that draws on voluntary choice or identification is so comprehensive and controversial that it loses the alleged benefit of luck egalitarianism being based on a principle on which there is widespread agreement. If our egalitarian theory appeals to moral responsibility, Scheffler argues that this appeal must rely on claims about free will or identification or something similar, and those claims are much more comprehensive and controversial than the 'principle of responsibility.' According to Scheffler, luck egalitarians need to spell out some controversial conception of moral responsibility all the way down to the metaphysical bases of choice and responsibility.

We do need to provide a conception of responsibility that gives content to the theory, that describes the powers that make us able to be responsible for things, that gives us a way to distinguish cases of luck from cases of responsibility, and that describes paradigm cases of that for which we are to be held responsible. Rawls provides a form of elaboration that can achieve these tasks in a way that remains political and therefore, in principle, endorsable by all citizens. While this goes beyond what has explicit widespread prior agreement, it retains its character as political. The elaboration of the theory can be given in solely political terms, starting with a political conception of the person as free and in possession of a power to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good.

⁸ Samuel Scheffler, "What is Egalitarianism?," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 31 (2003), no. 1. and "Choice, Circumstance, and the Value of Equality," *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 104 Feb. (2005), no. 4.

Both the luck egalitarians and Scheffler have made an error. The luck egalitarians have ignored or rejected the political approach found in Rawls' later work, and have not recognized that we can adapt Rawls' techniques to distinguish comprehensive and political theories of responsibility. Scheffler also ignores that distinction in this context, and he sets the standard far too high for what it is to have a philosophical position that is based on widespread support in the public culture. Luck egalitarianism need not aim for a full theory based only in what has explicit and widespread prior agreement. Rather, luck egalitarians should start from a core ideal that already has widespread support and elaborate a theory in political, non-comprehensive terms. When we elaborate the view in this way, we do not forsake the virtue of providing a theory that remains true to the core ideal on which people are already in general agreement. We elaborate the theory in terms that are still, in principle, endorsable by all citizens.

This strategy also answers a family of metaphysical objections to luck egalitarianism. Scheffler argues that, by appealing to responsibility, luck egalitarianism must give some controversial metaphysical account of choice and responsibility. He concludes that luck egalitarianism needs a libertarian understanding of free will. Libertarian free will is incompatible with causal determinism and requires that an agent has multiple alternative possible actions. A more general form of this objection is that if egalitarian theory can avoid the deeply puzzling metaphysics of free will, it ought to do so, and it can only avoid the metaphysics of free will by not conceiving of equality as highly sensitive to responsibility.

Cohen gives the standard luck egalitarian response to this worry. "[W]e may indeed be up to our necks in the free will problem, but that is just tough luck. It is not a reason for not following the argument where it goes."⁹ I argue instead that a political form of luck egalitarianism can remain agnostic on the comprehensive metaphysical questions raised by responsibility. Thus we can resolve this metaphysical worry without following Scheffler's solution of rejecting luck egalitarianism's appeal to responsibility.

Scheffler argues that:

[t]he plausibility of [luck egalitarianism] will depend on how the relevant notions of choice, control, and moral responsibility are understood. The thesis will seem most plausible if those notions are given a libertarian or incompatibilist interpretation, according to which genuinely voluntary choices belong to a different metaphysical category than do other causal factors. If the distinction between choices and unchosen circumstances is viewed as a fundamental metaphysical distinction, then it may seem capable of bearing the enormous political and economic weight that luck egalitarianism places on it.¹⁰

Scheffler thinks that the luck egalitarian appeal to responsibility only carries weight if choices and circumstances are in radically different *metaphysical categories*, and this is only the case if libertarianism is true. Libertarianism is the view that free human action is not subject to deterministic causal laws. Scheffler thinks that if the only form of responsibility we can have is a compatibilist sort, the force of luck egalitarianism

⁹ Cohen, "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice," p. 934.

¹⁰ Scheffler, "What is Egalitarian?," p. 12.

dissipates. If equality is defined in terms of our free, voluntary choices, then those choices must be fundamentally different from other forms of causation. We must be capable of making choices that are not causally determined by prior events, and we must have genuine alternative courses of action.

This criticism of luck egalitarianism assumes that compatibilists can give, at best, an instrumental account of praise, blame, punishment, reward, and all the other features of responsibility. On that account, practical application of the concept of responsibility is justified solely because this can shape future behaviour. On this line of thought, human actions are only different from other caused events in virtue of being shapeable by the practice of holding people responsible, but that does not entail that we are genuinely responsible for our choices and actions.

J.J.C. Smart held this type of instrumental view.¹¹ He argued that genuine responsibility ascriptions require only that the expression of such judgments can cause good changes in behaviour. Suppose Tommy doesn't do his homework. If this is because he is incapable of doing so, and the material is beyond his ability, then there is no point in expressing any harsh judgment. If he is lazy, there is a point. It can improve his behaviour by causing him to do what it takes to avoid being the subject of such judgments in the future. (Whether this works in a particular case will of course depend on myriad causal factors.) Expressing these judgments can improve behaviour even if Tommy's laziness stems from deterministic factors outside his control and he is therefore not causally responsible for his current laziness. We have a pragmatic justification for using the concept of responsibility and its attendant practices that is consistent with determinism.

Scheffler thinks compatibilists can do no better than the instrumental account of responsibility. Since the instrumental view does not entail that any of our choices are fundamentally different from other caused events, he concludes that compatibilism undermines the importance that luck egalitarianism attaches to the distinction between choice and luck. But compatibilism includes views that choice and responsibility genuinely exist, even if (or only if) determinism is true. Such views do not all take Smart's instrumental line. Harry Frankfurt, for example, is a compatibilist who surely does not.¹² He thinks one has free will, and is responsible for one's choices, when one acts for one's own reasons and one has the will one wants. Compatibilists do not think that they are giving a second rate explanation of the difference between responsibility and luck. A compatibilist can run Scheffler's argument in the opposite direction and conclude that a libertarian conception of freedom and responsibility lacks a clearly definable notion of control that would be sufficient to bear the weight of a luck egalitarian theory. On that view, any indeterministic gap in the explanation of an act undermines responsibility.

Scheffler needs another argument to establish that only a metaphysical distinction between choice and luck can support the theory. He would then need

¹¹ J.J.C. Smart, "Free Will, Praise, and Blame," *Mind*, 70 (1963).

¹² Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy*, 66 (1969), no. 23; Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of the Person," *Journal of Philosophy*, 68 (1971). See also: Angela Smith, "Responsibility and Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life," *Ethics*, 115 (2005).

another argument to conclude that compatibilism is deficient on this point. However, we do not need to appeal to different metaphysical categories. Compatibilism can recognize a genuine moral distinction between choice and lack of choice, freedom and coercion, responsibility and lack of responsibility.

Compatibilist luck egalitarians are free to develop such comprehensive responses to Scheffler. My core response is political. All we need to invoke is a political conception of responsibility, not anything having to do with fundamental metaphysical categories. If we do that, then we can answer both of the worries raised in this section. We can show that a fully elaborated luck egalitarian theory remains highly endorsable, and that it does not get bogged down in controversial metaphysical claims.

3. The Political Distinction

Rawls understands a political conception of justice to be a module that can fit into different reasonable comprehensive doctrines. The set of reasonable comprehensive doctrines can join in an overlapping consensus, from which each member has a commitment to a political conception of justice. A political conception of justice is freestanding in the sense that it is endorsable on the basis of shared, public reasons that appeal to the values that speak to all of us *qua* citizens. These include equality of opportunity, social equality, economic reciprocity, and others.¹³ “The political conception [of justice] can be seen as part of a comprehensive doctrine but it is not a consequence of that doctrine’s nonpolitical values.”¹⁴

Rawls never discussed a political conception of responsibility, but we can build a freestanding conception of responsibility that is not just a consequence of one’s comprehensive view of free will and moral responsibility but rather elaborated solely in terms of fundamental political ideas that constitute the public political culture of a democratic society. The very same foundation that Rawls gives for political liberalism can be used to generate a conception of responsibility that is adequate for luck egalitarian purposes. The way this political conception of responsibility will fit into a comprehensive doctrine is slightly different from Rawls’ description of a political conception of justice. Responsibility poses some peculiar problems for the political/comprehensive distinction. If one has a comprehensive metaphysical view of the foundations of freedom and responsibility, that will provide the fundamental explanation of responsibility. My task is to show how that can be the case while the political conception remains something freestanding and public. I claim that the political conception can remain agnostic on these fundamental metaphysical questions. This means that all citizens can endorse the political conception as true, or at least as reasonable.

Let me present a metaphor. A political conception of responsibility is the trunk of a tree. It is above ground, visible, something we can all hold onto. Comprehensive conceptions of responsibility are individual root structures below the ground. Imagine a complex array of roots, and each path you can trace from a root terminus up through the trunk is a particular comprehensive conception of responsibility. In this metaphor, when we discuss responsibility on the political level we are completely non-committal

¹³ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 224.

¹⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 155.

about the root structure. We acknowledge that different reasonable persons affirm different root structures, and that some hold no beliefs about the root structure at all.

My task is to provide a freestanding conception of responsibility that remains agnostic on the metaphysics underlying responsibility. The freestanding conception is political and thus endorsable by all. Of course, any appeal to responsibility raises metaphysical questions about free will, but those as comprehensive issues that go beyond the fundamental concerns of luck egalitarianism as it applies to the basic structure of society and matters of basic justice. It is not the case that any claim about responsibility that raises further comprehensive questions about responsibility must itself be comprehensive. If the political is closed in that way, then it is impossible to make any political claims about agency, autonomy, objectivity, or responsibility. On the contrary, genuinely political conceptions of responsibility (or any other aspect of justice) can directly raise comprehensive questions. Below I argue that almost all of Rawls' fundamental claims about political liberalism immediately raise comprehensive questions. If one objects that the political must be completely isolated from the comprehensive, political liberalism becomes incoherent.

Consider the following two forms of responsibility. Role-based responsibility has to do with the obligations that attach to different roles or identities. Examples of role-based responsibility include the parent's responsibility to care for the child, the teacher's responsibility to instruct the pupil, and so on. The second form is causal responsibility, which has to do with the way that agents can be accountable for states of affairs that they cause in the right way through their actions or negligence. For example, if I choose to cut down a tree, and it crushes my neighbour's home, I am causally responsible for the state of affairs of his home being crushed. I have a type of ownership over that state of affairs in virtue of the way I am causally responsible for it. These two types of responsibility are basically the same as T.M. Scanlon's notions of substantive and attributive responsibility.¹⁵

Both forms of responsibility are important for determining the fair distribution of benefits and burdens in a society, even though I will argue that the two categories cannot be completely separated. Role-based responsibility has a general or structural importance.¹⁶ It helps us understand the fair terms of social cooperation by telling us what obligations citizens have. As discussed in the next section, citizens have obligations to bear the consequences of their own tastes and preferences. Causal responsibility, on the other hand, plays two different roles. As the luck egalitarians emphasize, it shows us how to determine whether individual variation in a distribution is just or unjust. Other things being equal, inequalities stemming from luck will be treated differently from inequalities stemming from choice. It also shows us something about the fair terms of social cooperation by revealing the capacities and powers of the agent. Those capacities and powers that underlie causal responsibility are fundamental to our conception of the person and to our understanding of what we can reasonably expect of each other.

¹⁵ T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1998), p. 248.

¹⁶ I will generally use my own terms in what follows, but some of the authors I criticize below use Scanlon's terms. Throughout this paper, 'role-based responsibility' is interchangeable with 'substantive responsibility,' and 'causal responsibility' is interchangeable with 'attributive responsibility.'

Causal responsibility is closer to the metaphysical level than role-based responsibility. It deals with how states of affairs can justifiably be attributed to agents because they were brought about in the right way by their choices and actions, or their inaction and culpable negligence. This is the locus of the classical problems of moral responsibility and free will. Role-based responsibility is further from the metaphysical level because it deals with the obligations attached to certain identities or roles or contexts. Those questions have to do primarily with norms of behaviour and social cooperation.

For this reason, Michael Blake and Mathias Risse argue that a political conception of responsibility could only include role-based responsibility, not causal responsibility.¹⁷ Causal responsibility appears to involve controversial metaphysical commitments, while role-based responsibility can be understood as a consequence of persons participating in society as a joint cooperative venture. The former has been understood as comprehensive and metaphysical, the latter as institutional and political. Luck egalitarianism could never be a political view because it relies on causal responsibility. In determining whether an inequality is just, luck egalitarianism looks at whether the bearer of that benefit or burden is causally responsible for his own predicament.

I argue that the political can give us a limited conception of causal responsibility that is a sufficient basis for a responsibility-sensitive theory of equality. Blake and Risse represent the only investigation thus far into political conceptions of responsibility. Their discussion is enlightening, but their conclusions are too pessimistic about the possibilities of political responsibility. We can elaborate a political conception of responsibility from Rawls' political conception of the person as free and in possession of two moral powers, from various beliefs and practices that are deeply embedded in the public culture, and from the importance of reasonable pluralism.

The first moral power of Rawls' political conception of the person is the ability to create, revise, and pursue a comprehensive conception of the good. Rawls also applies this moral power to objects other than our conceptions of the good, such as our tastes, preferences, and desires. Rawls argues that we have obligations to revise all of those things in light of what we can reasonably expect, and he explicitly links that obligation to our first moral power. The first moral power should be understood as a general capacity, not something that only applies to comprehensive doctrines.

Rawls does not see this as just a mechanism that works through us, but as a power that we can freely exert. He argues that the citizen is free for two reasons. First, in a democratic society citizens just see each other as free; this is a deeply embedded belief in the public culture. Second, the freedom of persons is generated by "their moral powers and their having a conception of the good."¹⁸ So this moral power is not merely a process that generates and revises individual comprehensive doctrines. We can *freely* create, revise, and pursue our conceptions of the good. If that is the case, we can be responsible for the products or consequences of how we exert this moral power. We can be responsible for our conception of the good, and for the way we expend primary goods in our pursuit of the good. We can also be responsible for our tastes and

¹⁷ Blake and Risse, "Two Models of Equality and Responsibility."

¹⁸ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 33.

preferences because, even if they did not originate as a product of our free choice, we can revise and take responsibility for them.

This is sufficient for a limited but significant political conception of causal responsibility. If we have a power to form and revise a conception of the good, and we freely exert that power, then we can be responsible for our comprehensive doctrines. We will not universally see these as products of environment or socialization, but at least in some cases as products of genuine agency.

If we only have comprehensive, not political, reasons to believe that we can be causally responsible for our comprehensive doctrines, then the whole foundation of political liberalism disintegrates. Political liberalism is not agnostic on our capacity to be causally responsible. If we could not be responsible for our comprehensive doctrines, what would be the importance of reasonable pluralism? Reasonable pluralism generates a duty of civility that requires us to justify our claims about matters of basic justice in public, political terms that all could endorse. That amounts to a form of respect. We ought not decide fundamental political matters in comprehensive terms that only fellow adherents of our comprehensive doctrine can endorse. Civility derives its importance from the way it expresses respect for the freedom of our fellow citizens, and that freedom brings responsibility into the picture. We respect our fellow citizens as free, rational, self-directed beings who can exert a form of control over their own beliefs and actions. Thus they can be causally responsible for some of their beliefs, ends, preferences, and actions. These are proper objects of praise and blame.

One might object that Rawls is rightly sceptical about our responsibility for our comprehensive doctrines.

It is not for reasons of impartiality and simplicity alone that [the veil of ignorance blocks out knowledge of conceptions of the good]. Our final ends (as limited by notions of the right) depend on our abilities and opportunities, on the numerous contingencies that have shaped our attachments and affections. That we have one conception of the good rather than another is not relevant from a moral standpoint. In acquiring it we are influenced by the same sort of contingencies that lead us to rule out knowledge of our sex and class.¹⁹

That is part of Rawls' specific conception of justice, but it is not part of the general structure of *Political Liberalism*. Rawls in this passage is discussing what ought to be excluded from his hypothetical choice scenario for choosing principles of justice. In the Original Position, people choose principles of justice from behind a veil of ignorance. Rawls thinks he has good reason to exclude knowledge of one's conception of the good, because one's conception of the good can be determined by morally arbitrary contingencies.

However, this is just Rawls' specific way of giving a theory of justice. The Original Position is only one among many public, political methods for choosing principles of justice. Even if conceptions of the good are 'morally arbitrary' from the perspective of his Original Position, political liberalism need not *always* treat them as such. Political liberalism is committed to our capacity to be causally responsible for our conceptions of the good. Without that commitment, Rawls' conception of the person and the moral duty

¹⁹ John Rawls, "From Fairness to Goodness," *Philosophical Review*, 84 October (1975), no. 4, p. 537.

of civility no longer make sense. His conception of the person includes the powers that make us capable of being causally responsible, and the duty of civility expresses a form of respect for our fellow citizens as free and capable of being responsible. Therefore political liberalism leaves space to propose my novel form of luck egalitarianism.

The first moral power of Rawls' political conception of the person should be understood in a very general way. We see each other as able to create, revise, and pursue comprehensive conceptions of the good, but also as able to exert that power over our tastes, our desires, our intentions, and so on. Rawls says that citizens simply see each other as free, and it is equally true that they see each other as being responsible. We see each other as having certain obligations, but also as being causally responsible for at least some of our beliefs, actions, tastes, talents, and preferences. We see each other as appropriate objects of praise, blame, punishment, and reward. All this is inextricably embedded in the public culture of the democratic state, and is a foundational feature of political liberalism.

This is all that a political form of luck egalitarianism needs. It need not take any position on the metaphysics of free will. It can elaborate these fundamental components of responsibility in solely political terms. Recall that the political is characterized by three criteria: applying to the basic structure of society, being presented independently of any comprehensive doctrine, and being elaborated in terms of fundamental political ideas viewed as implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society.²⁰ The building blocks of responsibility, even causal responsibility, are already found in Rawls. They just need to be elaborated in a political rather than metaphysical way. The finished theory will not only comprise beliefs that are already widely agreed upon in the public culture, but the form of elaboration meets Rawls' three criteria for being political, and therefore the elaboration remains endorsable, in principle, by all citizens. Thus even though Rawls' own political conception of justice is not luck egalitarian, his higher-level theory of the political leaves us room to articulate a political version of luck egalitarianism as an alternative to his difference principle.

Of course my strategy still raises comprehensive questions of responsibility and freedom. As philosophers, we want to ask further questions about this moral power, for example, what sort of agency it provides, and how it fits into the causal structure of the world. Those are questions of moral responsibility and metaphysics that go beyond the political. This political conception applies to the basic structure and constitutional essentials only. It is useful for generating principles that show us the general requirements of a fair distribution of benefits and burdens in society, and that help us design institutions that will encourage such a fair distribution. As in Rawls' view, there remains room for philosophical and policy debate based on comprehensive reasoning outside those domains.

Blake and Risse provide the only prior work on the relationship between political liberalism and luck egalitarianism. They conclude that luck egalitarianism is necessarily comprehensive, not political. I will provide a reading of Rawls to support my claim that luck egalitarianism can rely on a political conception of causal responsibility. I will also argue that anyone who thinks my version of luck egalitarianism unavoidably leads to comprehensive metaphysical problems should have precisely the same worry about Rawls' political liberalism. This is not an appeal to Rawls as an authority figure, but a

²⁰ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 223.

clarification of the surprisingly broad commitments that follow from such an objection to my view. If Blake and Risse are correct, then any appeal to causal responsibility must be comprehensive and not political. Since the foundations of political liberalism implicitly invoke causal responsibility, their view makes Rawls' political liberalism incoherent. I reject their analysis by providing a richer view of what can count as political.

4. Causal Responsibility Can Be Political

Blake and Risse argue that Rawls' appeal to responsibility has nothing to do with causal responsibility. Further, they argue that any appeal to causal responsibility is comprehensive, not political. (For our purposes, their terms 'attributive' and 'substantive' are equivalent to my 'causal' and 'role-based'.)

This account of Rawls' social division of responsibility should explain our claim that indirect theorists can make room for substantive responsibility by way of fleshing out the normatively important relationships whose presence they require to license inferences to distributive equality. For Rawls, these relationships are those of jointly participating in a fair system of cooperation, and it is features of that system that allow him to make room for a notion of responsibility. This notion of responsibility does not satisfy the demands on such a notion that arise in moral philosophy, and it does not gain its respectability through being embeddable into an overall plausible account of the free-will problem; it is, in particular, not reducible to notions of responsibility current in that context, such as responsibility drawing on causal involvement and responsibility drawing on voluntary choice. The Rawlsian notion of responsibility cannot play such roles, as much as these moral conceptions are unsuitable to ensure that burdens are distributed in a manner that guarantees the continuation of fair cooperation among free and equal citizens.²¹

These "moral conceptions" of causal responsibility are not unsuitable to ensuring that burdens are distributed in a manner that guarantees the continuation of fair cooperation. On the contrary, we *must* appeal to causal responsibility in order to determine what amounts to fair cooperation and a fair distribution of benefits and burdens. Also, causal responsibility is implicitly invoked by Rawls in his arguments for political liberalism.

Blake and Risse argue that there is a stark difference between the role that responsibility plays in moral philosophy and the role it plays in Rawls' later political work. On their view, the luck egalitarian approach requires a theory of responsibility that does satisfy the demands of moral philosophy because of the reliance on causal responsibility. Rawls' view, on the other hand, deals only with role-based responsibilities that derive from features of society and its institutions. This is a wrong approach to understanding responsibility generally and Rawls specifically.

Blake and Risse argue that Rawls only makes room for responsibility as something purely institutional. It is only "features of that system" of cooperation that make room for a notion of responsibility. This institutional view is correct about role-based responsibility in the later Rawls because our roles as participants in society as a cooperative venture generate certain obligations, such as only making political claims

²¹ Blake and Risse, "Two Models of Equality and Responsibility," p. 185.

on others we think they could reasonably accept, bearing the costs of our own ends and preferences, and so on. However, this is not a complete account of responsibility's place in his theory. Rawls implicitly appeals to causal responsibility as well. Blake and Risse rely too much on features of institutions and ignore relevant features of the persons living within those institutions.

The purely role-based reading of Rawls is far too restrictive. Rawls says:

variations in preferences and tastes are seen as our own responsibility. That we can take responsibility for our ends is part of what free citizens may expect of one another. Taking responsibility for our tastes and preferences, whether or not they have arisen from our actual choices, is a special case of that responsibility. As citizens with realized moral powers, this is something we must learn to deal with.²²

Citizens are obligated to deal with the consequences of their preferences and tastes, and this illuminates an aspect of the fair distribution of benefits and burdens. It is not in general unfair to bear the benefits and burdens of your own preferences and tastes. Thus justice does not require subsidizing expensive tastes, and one ought not make unreasonable claims on others to satisfy those tastes and preferences. Some citizen may need an abundance of white truffles, wagyu beef, and pre-phylloxera wines just to achieve an average level of welfare. For Rawls, this is not a matter of justice, and this person has no special claim to assistance in satisfying these tastes. As part of the fair terms of social cooperation, all citizens are obligated to deal with the consequences of their own tastes and preferences. It would be unreasonable to make demands on fellow citizens to subsidize those tastes and preferences. However, that is not all that is going on here.

According to Blake and Risse's reading, the citizen merely has an obligation to bear the costs of his own preferences and to refrain from making any political claims on fellow citizens to satisfy or subsidize those preferences. That is purely role-based, not causal. As they put it, "individuals will have to take substantive responsibility for their tastes and preferences regardless of whether these tastes and preferences can also be attributed to them and are thus their responsibility also in that sense. ... [Therefore] responsibility as attributability, on this account, does not bear on substantive responsibility."²³

Yet Rawls says only that we have responsibility for our preferences and tastes whether or not they "have arisen" by choice. Blake and Risse read that to mean they are always divorced from choice, that individuals must take substantive (role-based) responsibility for tastes and preferences "regardless of whether [they] can also be attributed to them." They focus on the origin of such tastes and preferences and conclude that "responsibility as attributability, on this account, does not bear on substantive responsibility." By "does not bear," they must mean that attributive (causal) and substantive (role-based) responsibility are completely isolated from each other.

There are two errors here. The first is to think that just because a citizen must "take responsibility" for tastes and preferences that did not arise through choice (and

²² Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 185.

²³ Blake and Risse, "Two Models of Equality and Responsibility," p. 183.

hence they are not causally responsible for the origin of those tastes and preferences), this means that causal responsibility does not bear on role-based responsibility at all in this context. That conclusion does not follow, since one of our obligations could be to make an effort to take causal responsibility for our tastes and preferences, regardless of their origin. We could make this effort by struggling to revise those tastes and preferences. I give textual evidence below that this is Rawls' actual view.

Their second error is thinking of causal responsibility such that if something originated outside of causal responsibility, it forever remains outside. On the contrary, things that arise outside of an agent's control can enter the space of causal responsibility by the agent choosing to endorse them, struggling against them, or successfully revising them. This can be true of preferences, tastes, ends, and talents. If these things are endorsed or revised, then they are no longer defined by their origin outside of choice, but instead as a product of agency. If the agent struggles yet fails to revise them, then (assuming he met a standard of adequate effort) they are no longer seen as his responsibility. That is not because of their origin outside of choice, but rather the way that they are not subject to the current control of his will. We need such a picture of responsibility to explain our agency, since our actions are embedded in a causal chain that can be traced backward in time to forces outside our control. Since the basis of political liberalism appeals to our freedom and agency, it must allow for some limited form of causal responsibility.

These errors threaten the very foundation of political liberalism. That we can take control over things that arose outside of choice is strictly required for our agency. Blake and Risse are right to emphasize that according to Rawls it is our role-based obligation to "take responsibility" for tastes and preferences, to give up the idea that they generate special claims on resources or political obligations on other citizens. This is because we have an obligation to deal with the consequences of our own tastes, preferences, and aims, and an obligation to only make political claims on others that we think they could reasonably accept. It is unreasonable to suppose that others will accept the claim that my tastes and preferences deserve to be subsidized, so I am obligated to "take responsibility" for them. Blake and Risse think none of this involves causal responsibility, and that is where the problem arises.

Our obligation here, according to my reading of the text, can include an obligation to make an effort to take causal responsibility. By that I mean making some effort to reject or revise those preferences or aspects of the self. Such efforts are constitutive of causal responsibility in these domains. Thus role-based responsibility leads directly into causal responsibility.

Blake and Risse want to make a fundamental and impermeable distinction between role-based and causal responsibility. They claim that Rawls "disengages substantive responsibility from responsibility as attributability."²⁴ However, such a separation is impossible to make, and it is also a mistake to ascribe that thesis to Rawls. Some role-based obligations make direct reference to causal responsibility. Blake and Risse try to make the political/comprehensive distinction apply to different types of responsibility, and conclude that the political contains nothing more than role-based responsibility. We must reject that picture for my metaphor of the trunk and its roots. Both role-based and causal responsibility are present in the trunk. The

²⁴ Blake and Risse, "Two Models of Equality and Responsibility," p. 181.

political/comprehensive distinction cuts horizontally and separates different types of explanations, not different types of responsibility.

5. Why Not Restrict the View to Claims?

At this point, one could object that my view takes on problems that it is best to avoid. Why not go along with Blake and Risse and think that what matters is not an obligation to revise your own ends and preferences, but just an obligation to revise the claims that you make on others? If we can satisfy our role-based responsibility to restrict the claims that we make on others, why have any concern with an obligation to revise one's ends and preferences? That just brings in added complexity and makes several unnecessary commitments regarding causal responsibility.

My first answer is that without having a view of the political that includes aspects of causal responsibility, you do not have an adequate foundation for political liberalism. Indeed, political liberalism becomes incoherent. Our conception of ourselves as free and in possession of a moral power to form and revise a conception of the good provides the basis for a political elaboration that will lead us to a theory of causal responsibility. Therefore causal responsibility is already in view. Put another way, if we deny that the political can include causal responsibility, we undermine the foundations of political liberalism. I think Rawls gives a compelling case for political liberalism, though I do not have space to fully defend his arguments here. Once you accept his arguments for political liberalism, causal responsibility is already on the table.

My second answer is that it is simply an illusion to think we can deal solely in role-based responsibility. The two forms of responsibility cannot be completely separated. This is true both in terms of reaching the most philosophically sound view and in terms of giving a textually faithful reading of *Political Liberalism*. There are role-based responsibilities that explicitly invoke causal responsibility, and these are crucial to understanding equality. Therefore any attempt to completely separate these two forms of responsibility must fail.

In Rawls' view, there must be more involved here than a role-based responsibility to refrain from making claims. When Rawls says we must "take responsibility" and "learn to deal with" preferences that do not arise from choice, what does he mean? Is it merely admitting that I ought not make political claims on my fellow citizens to subsidize my preferences? On that reading, taking responsibility is just a form of acquiescence, of refraining from making claims on others. The textual evidence cited below shows that there is more at work than acquiescence because Rawls explicitly links our obligation to take responsibility for our tastes and preferences to our moral power to *form, revise, and pursue* a conception of the good. This implies that our responsibility is to form and revise our tastes and preferences, not merely to refrain from making claims on others to aid the satisfaction of our given desires and preferences.

We do have an obligation to refrain from making unreasonable claims on fellow citizens. This is an aspect of the second moral power cited by Rawls, the ability to propose and abide by fair terms of social cooperation. For example, I do not have a valid claim that my fellow citizens ought to help satisfy my expensive tastes, just because otherwise I will have a below-average level of welfare. My tastes are my responsibility. However, if all that is at play is a form of acquiescence and refraining from making claims, why would Rawls link this issue to our moral power to form, revise,

and pursue a conception of the good? It would have been quite enough to link this to our power to propose and abide by fair terms of social cooperation. That is all you would need to handle this issue in terms of a role-based obligation to refrain from making certain types of claims.

Instead, Rawls explicitly links this issue to the moral power that makes us capable of being causally responsible. We can be causally responsible for that which we freely create, revise, and pursue. Taking responsibility for, and dealing with, problematic or expensive tastes and preferences means struggling to revise them, and this is causal responsibility. Of course those attempts will not always be successful, but sometimes they will be. My role-based responsibility includes an obligation to do my best to take causal responsibility for these preferences. If I take a given preference and successfully revise it, I am causally responsible for that revision, and causally responsible for the preference that exists after the revision.

We find more evidence in Lectures I and V of *Political Liberalism*, where Rawls treats this discussion of responsibility for tastes and preferences as a special case of our responsibility for our aims.²⁵ In Lecture I, Rawls states that “citizens are thought to be capable of adjusting their aims and aspirations in light of what they can reasonably expect to provide for.”²⁶ In Lecture V, he claims that “taking responsibility” for our tastes and preferences is a “special case” of our responsibility for our aims. He clearly links our responsibility for our tastes and preferences to a power we can exert upon them, not merely a power to refrain from making claims on others while our ends and preferences remain constant. He discusses our capacity and obligation to adjust these aspects of the self, not merely to adjust the political claims that we make on fellow citizens. That means we are dealing with the first moral power, not just the second, and the first is a sufficient basis for elaborating a view of causal responsibility.

According to Rawls, citizens are thought to be capable of adjusting their tastes and preferences in light of what they can reasonably expect to provide for. I emphasize that citizens “are thought” to have this capability; it is a political belief that is deeply embedded in the public culture. If I take an unchosen preference and exert my first moral power in a way that revises the preference, I have taken causal responsibility for my preferences. I am responsible for the changing (or abandoning) of the old preference, and for the nature and creation of the new preference. If my efforts meet some standard of adequacy, yet are incapable of revising this preference, then I am not causally responsible for the preference. This is not because the preference originated outside of choice, but because it is now impervious to my choices and efforts, assuming I meet the normative standard of how much effort a citizen is obligated to exert in this context. So the power to which Rawls appeals is deeply tied to causal responsibility.

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls works with a conception of the person that is political, not comprehensive and metaphysical. If our moral powers involve causal responsibility in the way just outlined, and causal responsibility can only be understood in comprehensive metaphysical terms as Scheffler, Blake, and Risse argue, then Rawls failed to keep political liberalism *political*.

However, there is nothing in the political conception of responsibility that requires us to give an explanation of this causal component all the way down to its metaphysical

²⁵ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 34.

²⁶ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 185.

basis. It is deeply embedded in the public culture that citizens see themselves as having the capacities that constitute causal responsibility. Yet there is no complete account of the metaphysics of those capacities embedded in the public culture. We have political commitments that, when analyzed completely, raise metaphysical puzzles. That does not mean those commitments go beyond the political.

My view obviously raises questions about responsibility that lead to deep metaphysical disputes. I agree with Cohen's remark, cited earlier, that we need to follow these arguments as they lead us into metaphysics—but we do that as a comprehensive investigation of moral philosophy and free will, not as a political investigation into the question of what responsibility has to do with distributive justice. If one objects that my view is comprehensive just so long as it raises these comprehensive questions, then Rawls' view looks no different. His claims about our ability to freely create, revise, and pursue a comprehensive conception of the good alone are sufficient to raise comprehensive questions about free will. His remarks on our ability to revise our preferences and desires are perhaps even more problematic, since they are less theoretical and even more directly influenced by upbringing and socialization. They raise deep questions about how we can be free despite our susceptibility to external causal influences. Yet, because Rawls' view requires no specific answer to those comprehensive questions, it remains political. Also, Rawls' political conceptions of autonomy and objectivity lead us to ask comprehensive questions about free will and epistemology. That does not mean Rawls' views there are also comprehensive.

If the political/comprehensive distinction aligned with the distinction between role-based and causal responsibility, then political appeals to responsibility would be purely role-based, and luck egalitarianism could not be a political theory. There are three reasons why the political/comprehensive distinction cannot be aligned with the role-based/causal distinction. First, role-based and causal responsibility are inseparable, especially in the context of political philosophy and egalitarian theory. A role-based obligation may directly involve causal responsibility, such as our obligation to revise our tastes and preferences. Second, it is an implicit part of our public culture that we share a conception of responsibility that includes causal responsibility. This is implicit in the way citizens are thought to have the capability to revise aspects of their own selves, and in the way they are seen as appropriate objects of praise, blame, punishment, and reward. Third, this view is based on a particular reading of Rawls that I have shown to be incorrect. Rawls' political conception of the person as having a moral power to form and revise conceptions of the good, preferences, tastes, and ends provides a basis from which we can elaborate a political conception of causal responsibility. His view that we must "take responsibility" for our own ends, tastes, and preferences invokes causal responsibility. Indeed, since all forms of liberalism emphasize autonomy, it may turn out that the standard attacks on luck egalitarianism amount to attacks on all forms of liberalism.

I conclude that luck egalitarianism is compatible with political liberalism and can be fully articulated in political terms. Two strategies for responding to my arguments are worth mentioning. The first is to accept that various criticisms of luck egalitarianism turn out to be attacks on political liberalism and conclude that we ought to reject political liberalism. The second is to argue that liberalism should rely on some controversial metaphysical views, and these include views about responsibility, and therefore luck

egalitarianism should not be constrained to Rawls' notion of the political. I have explained why I do not pursue these strategies, but they are rivals to my view.

6. Deep Conflicts with Comprehensive Doctrines

One might object that my political conception of responsibility will conflict with several comprehensive doctrines, and thus by Rawls' standards is not a political conception at all. Rawls claims that "[t]he other reason political values normally win out is that severe conflicts with other values are much reduced. This is because when an overlapping consensus supports the political conception, this conception is not viewed as incompatible with basic religious, philosophical, and moral values."²⁷ My view seems incompatible with several comprehensive doctrines that, while perhaps not popular or basic, are not insignificant either. These include the doctrines of Calvinists, those who have scientific reasons for rejecting free will and responsibility, and those who have philosophical reasons for rejecting free will and responsibility. How can my view be political and thus, in principle, endorsable by all citizens, yet directly contradict those apparently reasonable comprehensive doctrines?

These pessimists can take the instrumentalist line about responsibility discussed earlier. They can still have a warranted belief that the practices of praising, blaming, punishing, rewarding, and having people bear the benefits and burdens of their own choices can shape future behaviour. Rawls never demands that for something to be political, it must be acceptable as true by all reasonable citizens. It must be acceptable as true or reasonable. If these pessimists think there is truth in the instrumentalist view, they can affirm the whole political conception of responsibility as reasonable.

Now, there will be those who do not find that view acceptable, perhaps because they think it is duplicitous or manipulative or represents a way of organizing society that is not transparent or honest. These are familiar objections to some forms of utilitarian planning, and one could raise them in this context as well. Indeed, I think the instrumentalist line is not in harmony with the respect for fellow citizens that is so crucial to Rawls' form of political liberalism. This move is too close to what Rawls calls a "modus vivendi," a merely strategic form of agreement that is unstable.²⁸

I therefore offer a second response that is an affirmation of respect for one's fellow citizens. When Rawls discusses the difference between political and comprehensive justification, he says that in full comprehensive justification a citizen accepts a political conception of justice and fills out its justification by embedding it in some way into a comprehensive doctrine as either true or reasonable, depending on what that doctrine allows.²⁹ Now, if a commitment to responsibility is deeply embedded in the public culture of a democracy, and if we see that the foundation of Rawls' political liberalism is all we need to elaborate a political conception of responsibility, then a refusal to affirm any political conception of responsibility looks like an unreasonable, radically revisionist view that amounts to a rejection of political liberalism. The pessimist must also reject Rawls' conception of the person and his view of political liberalism.

What the pessimist ought to do is accept a political conception of responsibility as reasonable, just not as true. This is a form of sensitivity to what others can

²⁷ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 15.

²⁸ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 148.

²⁹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 386.

reasonably endorse, and sensitivity to those beliefs and practices that are deeply embedded in the public culture. This is solely for matters of basic justice and constitutional essentials; the pessimist violates no norms by appealing to his comprehensive view in other matters. My appeal to abiding features of institutions, and beliefs deeply embedded in the public culture, is closely related to P.F. Strawson's resolution of the free will problem.³⁰ Strawson argued that the reactive attitudes (such as resentment and indignation) are not things we can give up, no matter what theoretical beliefs we may have about free will and moral responsibility. Even if we could give them up, he argues that this form of social life is more valuable than any alternative in which interpersonal relationships are not structured by the reactive attitudes. That idea applies here. Rawls' view of political liberalism makes concessions to the ideas and practices implicit in the public culture, and clearly a commitment to responsibility is a deep and abiding part of our public culture. All the pessimist needs to do is make a reasonable political concession to that fact, he need not acknowledge any truth in the political conception of responsibility. That we generally take a reactive, not objective, stance toward each other is something deeply embedded in our public political culture. "Our natural disposition to such attitudes and judgments is naturally secured against arguments suggesting they are in principle unwarranted or unjustified."³¹ Our nature as social beings means that we will continue to see each other as capable of being responsible. But if we were to take the objective stance towards each other, then Rawls' duty of civility would lose its force. The duty of civility no longer could be a form of respect for the *freedom* of our fellow citizens, so why would we not simply decide fundamental political questions on what we think are the strongest comprehensive reasons?

This linking of reactive attitudes and political liberalism also provides an answer to a compelling objection to Strawson: whether it is difficult or impossible to give up a set of practices and attitudes has nothing to do with the fact of the matter.³² It has no bearing on whether we are capable of being genuinely responsible for our actions. My approach can accommodate that objection by encouraging the pessimist to merely affirm a political conception of responsibility as reasonable, not as true. Only on matters of basic justice and constitutional essentials do they need to make any concession to Strawson's point. Outside those domains, their objections can stand.

7. Conclusion

I first applied Rawls' distinction between the political and the comprehensive to conceptions of responsibility. I then argued against the view that the political only includes role-based responsibility. We ought to read Rawls' political conception of the person as having moral powers, and his claims about our obligations to take responsibility for our ends and preferences, as implicitly appealing to causal responsibility. It turns out that many attacks on luck egalitarianism are also attacks upon political liberalism. This rich and inclusive interpretation of the political is a more

³⁰ P.F. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment, and Other Essays*, (New York: Methuen, 1974).

³¹ P.F. Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 41.

³² For example, see M.A.L. Oshana, "Ascriptions of Responsibility," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 34 (1997), no. 1, p. 76.

accurate and powerful reading of *Political Liberalism* than the alternative provided by Blake and Risse. The domain of the political is not isolated from the comprehensive; genuinely political conceptions of responsibility (or objectivity, autonomy, justice) can directly raise comprehensive questions. Finally, I presented a new strategy for articulating a luck egalitarian theory of equality that relies on a merely political conception of responsibility. This strategy allows us to keep the worthwhile aspects of luck egalitarianism while resolving its deep problems with endorsability and scepticism about free will.

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Martha Nussbaum, Dan Brudney, and John Deigh for their feedback and suggestions. I also want to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

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