AGAINST *COMPETITIVE* EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

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I. Introduction

People opposed to privileges based on race, gender, and class have long demanded equal opportunity. Trying to open society to those usually excluded from positions of high status, reformers have demanded that all be given a chance. The phrase "equal opportunity" has a clear meaning and formulates a sensible demand when understood negatively as opposing unjust restrictions on opportunity. Yet when we probe the idea of equal opportunity to find the social ideal implicit in it, it may not make as much sense. This essay criticizes the ideal of competitive equal opportunity.[1]

The ideal of competitive equal opportunity encompasses two subsidiary notions: (1) the thesis that limitations on positions of high status are justified in some way (perhaps only pragmatically); (2) the ideal that each person should have an equal opportunity to attain these limited positions. I argue that the more important issue is how much opportunity there is and that the limitation on positions of high status and hence on the opportunity to attain these positions seems unjustified; I argue that if the limitation is justified, it is not obvious that equalizing opportunity to attain limited high status positions would be an improvement. In short the key issue is the *quantity* of opportunity and only secondarily whether it is *equal*. Practically speaking, we should be concerned to *expand* opportunity; only in this context does the struggle for equal opportunity make sense.

I attack the ideal of competitive equal opportunity for practical reasons. I suspect that philosophers inclined toward egalitarianism argue for competitive equal opportunity even though they have little sympathy for the implied limitations on high status positions. This seems to me to be a mistake. Once we concede the limitations on positions of high status, equal opportunity becomes either unattainable or undesirable (or both). Limitations on high status positions will lead either to training children for low or middling status or training them for

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high status while they end up with lower status. The first alternative is the more likely outcome (and the one we are familiar with), but the second seems scarcely better. I argue for an egalitarian ideal of equal opportunity: only when each individual is allowed and encouraged to develop all of her talents and then exercise them throughout her life will each person have an equal opportunity for a full and flourishing humanity. This development of talents implies a society that allows all to attain high status. Only in a society such as this, where each has a full and unrestricted opportunity to make of her life what she will, does it make sense to esteem people based on what they make of their lives.

II. Some Definitions, Observations, and Assumptions

One's social position is one's specific role, or lack of a role, in producing and reproducing the social life of a group, roughly an occupation (such as physician, laborer, housewife) or lack of one (such as being unemployed or on welfare). In technologically simpler gatherer-hunter societies positions are usually limited to a few roles that men and women may play in the productive, religious, and social life of the group (hunter, healer, storyteller).

Prestige (or social esteem) is attached to different positions in different degrees. A position with much prestige attached to it we will call a high status position. In our society physician and professor are high status positions. (These are generalizations; there is usually not complete consensus on the prestige attached to a position.) Positions involving manual labor, cleaning up, and caring for children are low status positions, as are being unemployed and on welfare. Individuals who are in those positions will then have the corresponding prestige in virtue of their position. The prestige attached to a position is not dependent on the social necessity of the tasks associated with the position: some low status positions such as caring for children or cleaning up involve clearly necessary social tasks while high status positions such as professor may be of questionable social importance.

People can receive social esteem for reasons other than their occupying high status positions. In performing a social role (usually attached to a position, but some roles are quite general, being attached to a status as a citizen, for example) one may perform it better or worse. One can take pride, and be esteemed by others, for being a good mother, even if the position "mother" is not a high status position. We will reserve the term "prestige" for esteem attached to social positions and will use "esteem" for esteem based on performance of one's role.[2]

Some positions require more complex training and skills while

others can be performed adequately by almost any adult. In addition, some involve application of skills in challenging and intellectually engaging activity while others are repetitive and routine. The activities involved in some positions are carried out in clean, safe, and comfortable surroundings while those involved in others are carried out in dirty, noxious, dangerous environments. Generally the more prestigious positions are more complex and intrinsically enjoyable while the less prestigious positions are more unpleasant, boring, and dangerous. But this connection is not absolute: some positions of middling or low status—for example, electrician, auto mechanic, and mother—may involve challenging and intellectually engaging activity as much as more prestigious positions.

Some societies limit positions of high status while others do not. Morton Fried has defined a society as egalitarian when it has as many positions of high status (in each age-sex grade) as there are people capable of filling them.[3] Thus, for example, a forager band may have many men (of appropriate age) filling the position of hunter, and many women who are healers or storytellers. While there may be someone who is a freeloader and has low status, there need not be anyone in that position. In contrast, in contemporary urban civilizations not everyone can attain the few high status positions. Most people have positions of moderate or low status. Societies with limited positions of high and moderate status we will call hierarchical. So the distribution of positions that a society allows may be egalitarian or it may be hierarchical.[4]

Egalitarian societies have equal opportunity in the sense that the society sets no limit to those (of the appropriate age-sex group) who may attain high status. Among the Kung San of the Northwest Kalahari Desert not every mature male may be skilled at hunting, but each has an equal opportunity to attain the social esteem that accrues to hunters that contribute meat to the group's food supply. Moreover, the Kung, who are fiercely egalitarian, devise social mechanisms to insure that natural abilities set no severe limits to the attainment of social esteem. For example, credit for a kill goes to the maker of the arrow that first struck the animal. Sharing arrows, hunters may carry none of their own arrows in their quivers. And successful hunters will hang back from the hunt to give others a chance to bring meat into the camp.[5]

In such egalitarian societies each person has an equal opportunity to be esteemed for contributing to the group. Because social organization puts no limits on the number who may attain high status, access to social esteem is put under the control of each individual. Thus egalitarian forms of social control are more humane and respectful of individual autonomy than hierarchical social organization, which requires that

some be subject to social contempt.

Finally, we need some assumptions to link our discussion of prestige and esteem to motivation. I state my assumptions here rather dogmatically, but I have developed them elsewhere, and they are well embedded in the literature in social psychology and sociology. First, I assume that people desire to think well of themselves, to maintain a positive self-conception. Second, we are social creatures, so that self-esteem depends on development of a social identity in a human group. These two assumptions are confirmed in minimal group experiments where subjects will elevate the status of a group with which they are identified (and hence presumably their own status) even when such elevation is contrary to material self-interest.[6] Third, social identities are normative. That is, we define what it means to be a decent person or, more specifically, a good mother or a good teacher, in terms of norms: a decent person helps others in need; a mother should nurture her children; a teacher should not lose patience with students. Admittedly, the meanings of these social identities (and the validity of these norms) are contested. Nevertheless, when people agree on them, they are the basis for self-esteem and for esteem for and from relevant others.[7]

In addition, self-esteem depends in part on social esteem derived from the prestige of the positions we hold: so that if I am a maid and maids are held in contempt, then my self-esteem is (to that extent) under assault. In contrast, if I am a priest and priests are highly esteemed, then my self-esteem is enhanced. Thus, other things being equal, people aspire to positions of high status if they feel that these positions are attainable for them.[8] And, as the previous paragraph proposes, people will try to fulfill the role associated with their position so as to live up to their own normative expectations and those of others.

III. The Ideal of Competitive Equal Opportunity

Now we can state what the ideal of competitive equal opportunity is, when equal opportunity is understood as a positive ideal and not just an absence of legal barriers to opportunity. Competitive equal opportunity assumes limited positions of high status, that is, a hierarchical society. There are two ways that hierarchical societies may manage the intergenerational transmission of high status positions. On one hand, parents may pass on to their children access to high status positions. In that case, privilege is relatively entrenched. Children from low status families have little chance to attain high status.[9] Alternatively, there may be more social mobility and greater opportunity for the children of low status families to rise and for the children of high status families to fall.[10]

The ideal of competitive equal opportunity is the ideal that all children, regardless of the high or low status of the family in which they are raised, should have an equal opportunity to compete for limited positions of high status.

Thus to justify competitive equal opportunity we must justify both limiting positions of high status (hierarchical society) and ensuring equal access for the children of each generation to positions of high status in the next generation. Both issues—limited positions of high status and equal access intergenerationally to those positions—have been extensively discussed in sociology, in political science and public policy, and in philosophy. I will not attempt to review this extensive literature. I will, however, argue that neither hierarchical society nor equal access intergenerationally has been adequately justified.

IV. The Functional Theory of Stratification

The functional theory of stratification is the central sociological argument for limited positions of high status. While there is no consensus that it is true, it is often taken for granted in philosophical discussions of opportunity, perhaps because of the influence of John Rawls.[11] The functional theory of stratification holds that while simple societies may be able to flourish without limiting positions of high status, a complex division of labor must attach high status (and other social rewards) to a few positions. In a complex division of labor there are inevitably some especially important positions requiring specialized talents and skills belonging to only a relatively few people. Society must induce talented people to undergo the required training and then to exercise their talents. This requires higher rewards, particularly prestige, for these important and demanding positions.

It is important to understand how the functional theory of stratification is meant to justify limited positions of high status. The issue of unequal rewards attached to positions is essentially the same as the issue of limited positions of high status, assuming that prestige is a central reward. If rewards, especially prestige, attached to positions are unequal, then those holding positions with more prestige hold the positions of high status while others hold equally necessary positions of moderate or low status. If high status positions were not limited, then the rewards attached to positions would not necessarily be unequal.

The functional theory of stratification uses an explanation of observed social inequality as a justification of social inequality. The implied argument is this: the benefits of civilization and complex divisions of labor, benefits that to one degree or another are received by all, are the

result of unequal rewards attached to positions. So the explanation of why we have unequal rewards is simultaneously an argument that it is good that we do. In this section I will argue that the functional theory of stratification does not explain observed social inequality.

The theory is puzzling. *Why* must there be greater rewards? One answer, suggested by Kingsley Davis, is that it is to compensate for the cost of extensive training (for example, the expense of medical school).[12] But this explains one social artifact in terms of another social artifact (expensive schooling) that is just as much in need of explanation as the first.

Another possible explanation is the pain of training (studying is unpleasant). There are two difficulties here. First, there is no evidence that training is more unpleasant than other social alternatives. Second, this explanation precludes an appealing argument: during training people discover that they find self-realization in the activities of the positions for which they are training, thus assuring that people in those positions are suited to them.[13]

Perhaps limited positions of high status are necessary because the activities involved in some positions are intrinsically more unpleasant to almost everyone. In order to induce people to fill these more unpleasant positions, society must attach greater rewards to them.[14] But if the observations in Section 2 are correct, the activities of high status positions tend to be more pleasant, not less, than those of low status positions.

The two most common arguments trace the necessity of higher rewards for some positions to the claims that high status positions are more important and that high status positions require developed skills. But there is simply no clear sense in which high status positions are more important.[15] In fact, garbage collection and sewer maintenance seem more important to general health than physicians' services.

The strongest argument for the functional theory of stratification is that high status positions require extensive training or apprenticeship and hence people qualified for such positions are scarce while those qualified for low status positions are not. Even this argument, however, is not very persuasive. First, it is not clear how the extensive training required for high status positions is supposed to explain why they are rewarded differently from other positions. Second, and relatedly, extensive formal training or apprenticeship is an artifact that itself needs explaining. Consider the position of physician in comparison with that of a mother. We have extensive *formal* training and apprenticeship for physicians but not for mothers. Yet it is not obvious that the training itself is more extensive: girls are socialized and trained throughout childhood and adolescence for this role and for requisite skills. The development of

formal training and high status for physicians in the United States was a social accomplishment of the past one hundred and fifty years. It was part of a social process (including state licensing of physicians) that limited those eligible for this status. Before then anyone could call himself a physician after a brief apprenticeship.[16]

None of these doubts about the functional theory of stratification diminish the importance for social control of greater and lesser esteem for individuals in the performance of their duties. We esteem those who perform their tasks well and are contemptuous of bumblers. These are egalitarian forms of social control: society sets no limit to the number who can be esteemed for their contribution to the social group; the number is limited only by the number who do their work well.

Let me add a sociological speculation, alternative to the functional theory of stratification: societies tend to train people for positions in numbers that approximate the available positions. (Stories of Ph.D.s driving cabs are remarkable precisely because they violate this general rule.) This might be true because training many for positions that only a few could fill would cause many to be discontented with their positions in life. This would tend to destabilize the society.[17] In addition, much of the resources expended in training would be wasted. It is a consequence of this speculation that a society which includes a few positions involving complex, intellectually and socially challenging tasks and many involving boring and repetitive tasks and many others (being unemployed) that require only idleness will tend to "train" its young accordingly, starting at an early age. Thus, to enhance social control, such a society will discourage the development of intelligence and creativity in many of its young.[18] If we are concerned to develop the intellectual and creative potential of all children, this line of reasoning suggests that we must address the limits on the number of positions that will require intelligence and creativity and, if these are associated with high status, limits on the number of positions of high status.

The argument thus far has assumed that scarce talents are acquired through training. But there is another interpretation of the functional theory of stratification. It could be argued that it is necessary to have some positions with greater rewards because only in this way can those with scarce *innate* talents be induced to exercise their talents, an inducement that benefits all. As before, it is puzzling why this inducement should be necessary. Egalitarian forager societies manage to do without it. Here, however, I will develop another criticism. As an interpretation of the functional theory of stratification, the argument postulates that societies with complex divisions of labor are meritocracies with elites that are innately superior to the rest.

Are contemporary societies meritocracies? It has been argued that

(1) the relevant scarce talents are measured by current psychological instruments, particularly IQ tests; that
(2) IQ is largely biologically inherited ability; therefore, that
(3) social class differences in IQ are biologically inherited; and, therefore, that
(4) the higher social classes are innately more talented than the lower social classes.[19]

I will argue briefly that this meritocratic conclusion is groundless.

On the first point, I suggest that the curious reader obtain a copy of an IQ test and analyze some test items. The tests characteristically look for virtues of conventional morality (patriotism, obedience) and for literary reading vocabulary.[20] While high IQ scores are, to a certain extent, correlated with high income and prestige and, more strongly, with school grades, it is not clear how these tests in fact gauge any talents relevant to justifying the functional theory of stratification.

The issue of genetic influence on IQ has been widely discussed.[21] During the late 1960s and early 1970s the hereditarians relied heavily on the studies of separated identical twins by Cyril Burt, later discovered to be fraudulent. Other studies of separated identical twins were seriously flawed. (For example, the twins were not really very separated, being raised close together by mother and grandmother; in general, the environments were not very different. Note that studies of "separated" identical twins study only "separated" twins that know they belong to an identical twin pair, not the usual idea of separately adopted children. Generally, the degree of difference between environments must be quantifiable if there is to be any hope of estimating genetic and environmental contributions to IQ variance.) More recently, more twin studies and adoption studies have been done in Minnesota, Texas, and Colorado. The hereditarians continue to grind out the correlations between biologically related people. Critics continue to raise methodological problems, pointing out other possible explanations of the correlations between the IQs of biologically related individuals besides genetic control of intelligence. There are reasons to suppose that such studies on human subjects are unlikely to enable us to tease out genetic and environmental contributions to IQ. For those skeptical of hereditarianism, the content of IQ test questions makes it implausible that mastery of such items of culture is likely to be much influenced by genes.[22]

Perhaps most important, even if there were some genetic component to IQ variance in the adoptive families studied, that result would not

support any conclusion that class differences in IQ were influenced by genetic factors. There is direct evidence from cross-class adoptions (of children from poor families into rich families) that class differences are not genetically influenced.[23]

The Social Darwinist view that competitive capitalist society was a hereditary meritocracy arose in the second half of the nineteenth century and was the foundation of the early twentieth century educational testing and eugenics movements in the United States. The eugenicists (including Lewis Terman at Stanford) devised tests of "intelligence" that reflected their belief that, in the society around them, the innately more capable ruled over their inferiors.[24] Because the tests measure absorption of class culture, they were moderately useful as predictors. More important, they helped to rationalize and defend inequalities. With the ascent to power of a eugenics-oriented political movement in Germany and with the rise of egalitarian radicalism in the United States, hereditarian thought in the United States receded in the period around World War II. But with the persistent unemployment and poverty of the past twenty-five years, the view that the United States is a hereditary meritocracy has returned.

The functional theory of stratification offers a possible justification of limited positions of high status: that these limitations are necessary to generate the observed benefits of a complex division of labor. I have argued in this section that the justification fails because the explanation of social inequality fails.[25]

V. The Ideal of a Meritocracy

We might, however, try to justify social inequality as a prospective ideal, independent of arguments that depend on explaining observed social inequality. We might argue, that is, that limited positions of high status would be part of a future better society: by equalizing opportunity for all, and filling limited high status positions by a fair competition, we could discover and develop those with the greatest innate talent, thus benefiting all.

The ideal implies the assumption that there are important differences in innate abilities relevant to social tasks. Of course, there are some innate differences that are relevant: color blind people should not be painters or electricians. But obvious cases such as these do not justify the ideal of a meritocracy based on innate ability. For this ideal to make sense we would have to suppose that there is a wide range of innate abilities and a matching range of ideal positions such that we can be slotted into the jobs we can perform best, leading to big gains in cooperative

efficiency. If differences in innate abilities had some such widespread importance, then we *might* have an argument for a meritocracy based on innate abilities.

But I see no reason to think that there are such widespread relevant differences. Put briefly, most people can learn to do most jobs. Cross-class adoptions provide some evidence of the absence of biological differences relevant to the cultural tasks tested for on IQ tests. Moreover, our knowledge of the physiology of the brain does not support speculation about innate differences in intelligence. This means that biological differences relevant to social tasks are most likely the obvious ones: limitations imposed by color-blindness, physical size, injury, and other clearly identifiable biological characteristics.

If this is true, then the ideal society would be one which develops the ability and contribution of each person, limited only by what that person can do and is motivated to do. But this describes an egalitarian society with unlimited positions of high status. In an egalitarian society the ideal of equal opportunity makes good sense because what each person makes of her life is up to that individual.

VI. Would Competitive Equal Opportunity Be Better?

I have suggested that there is no reason to think that there are vast differences among us in any innate talents that may be relevant to our prospective social tasks and that developing the talents of all children may require a society with unlimited positions requiring exercise of complex intelligence and creativity. These suggestions further suggest a society with unlimited positions of high status. But suppose society does limit positions of high status and positions requiring exercise of complex intelligence, with most of us unemployed or occupying positions requiring relatively routine labor. Would it be better to equalize opportunity to reach all social positions?

Most discussions of equal opportunity emphasize equalizing the chance to attain high status positions. This discussion will emphasize a corollary of that equality: equalizing the risk of ending up with the worst outcomes. Now this risk is largely confined to dispossessed rural people and urban minorities, in the United States particularly black people.

I believe that equal opportunity is not a significant improvement over unequal opportunity. Assuming that high and moderate status positions are limited and that the distribution of good and bad outcomes (and how good or bad they are) is not affected, equalizing opportunity can only affect who ends up with these good or bad outcomes. But it is not very important who ends up unemployed or in mind numbing labor

subject to arbitrary treatment or humiliation from supervisors. These outcomes are bad for whomever experiences them. The significant change would be one that would enable more people to realize their potential for meaningful, challenging, creative social labor. Equalizing opportunity, by itself, does not do that. It only affects people's prospects for realizing the best, and worst, outcomes.

Moreover, there are disadvantages to equal opportunity in a society with many bad outcomes. Residential segregation of the most disadvantaged, particularly black people living in public housing projects and other very poor urban neighborhoods, and the resulting segregation of schooling for children, tend to shield some others from the risk of the worst outcomes, particularly sustained unemployment and underemployment. True equality of opportunity would expose all children equally to the risk of these outcomes. While the current social isolation of the very poor breeds widespread despair and alienation, equal opportunities would carry risks of its own. Anxiety for the prospects of one's children would be universal. Parents would be unable to protect their children from the worst outcomes. (If parents could protect their children—if the more advantaged parents could pass to their children skills, information, and social ties that would aid them in escaping the worst outcomes—opportunity would not be equal.) Those who realized the worst outcomes would have only themselves to blame.[26]

Another negative effect of equalized opportunities would be training people for positions that they will not have and creating expectations that will not be realized. Presumably competitive equal opportunities would at least involve primary schooling which developed the intellectual skills of all youngsters. Assuming roughly equal native abilities, this would mean that many children from an early age would be trained to develop complex talents. Yet many of them would end up in routine labor or underemployed or unemployed. As equal opportunity (and the roughly equal development of skills) is sustained for a longer period in the life course of an individual, more developed skills would go unutilized and more expectations would be frustrated. If this scenario is plausible, there may be serious disadvantages to equalizing opportunity for limited desirable positions.

VII. Conclusion

The purpose of this argument is not to disparage equal opportunity. Rather I wish to stress that competitive equal opportunity, the most likely interpretation of the phrase "equal opportunity" in a society that limits positions of high status, may involve costs of its own that make it

doubtful whether equalizing competitive opportunity would be an improvement. Moreover, there are practical considerations that make the ideal of competitive equal opportunity unlikely to be practically realized: the opportunity of some to attain high status can only be enhanced by increasing the risk to others of falling into lower status. And those whose risk of falling would be increased would have greater political leverage to protect themselves than the dispossessed have to enhance their prospects. So the ideal of equal opportunity, as a desirable and realizable goal, seems to require a more comprehensive sort of equality, where everyone's potentials can be developed and used. This would require us to replace a hierarchical society with an egalitarian one.[27]

Notes

[1]This ideal is defended, among other places, in John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971): Rawls allows economic differences that work to the advantage of the least well off but insists on equal opportunity to attain more advantaged positions; S. J. D. Green, "Competitive Equality of Opportunity: A Defense," *Ethics* 100 (1989): 5-22; Lawrence A. Blum, "Opportunity and Equality of Opportunity," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 2 (1988): 1-18. Blum endorses equality of competitive opportunity: "Though equality of competitive opportunity does not exist and can never fully exist, it is nevertheless a worthy social goal." Tasks of making competitive opportunity more equal in various ways "are important tasks, even if they cannot achieve complete equality of (competitive) opportunity" (pp. 12, 13). In the pages that follow these remarks Blum questions, but does not reject, hierarchy and the meritocratic ideal.

[2]This characterization of the distinction between prestige and esteem follows that of Kingsley Davis, *Human Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 93-94; see also Dennis Wrong, "The Functional Theory of Stratification: Some Neglected Considerations," *American Sociological Review* 24 (1959): 772-782 reprinted in Lewis A. Coser and Bernard Rosenberg (editors), *Sociological Theory: a Book of Readings* fourth edition (New York: Macmillan, 1976); and Davis, "Reply," [to Melvin M. Tumin's "Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis"] *American Sociological Review* 18 (1953): 394-397. My definition of "position" is also close to the standard one in sociology; see Davis, *Human Society*, pp. 89-91.

[3]See Morton Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society: An Essay in Political Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 33; Fried uses "prestige" where I use "high status."

[4]Fried distinguishes two sorts of non-egalitarian social organizations: ranked societies, with limited positions of high status, and stratified societies, where limited high status positions are associated with privileged access to the means of life. My term "hierarchical societies" not only ignores the possibility of ranked society; it refers to a particular sort of stratified society: one where there are relatively complex and differentiated prestige rankings. In contrast to Davis and Fried, I emphasize prestige to the exclusion of other social goods. I do this because wealth is prized largely because prestige is attached to it. Thus I tend to be rather reductionist. Not much hinges on this reductionism because prestige and other social goods are so closely associated.

[5]On Kung social organization see, for example, Richard Lee, *The !Kunq San: Men, Women, and Work in a Foraging Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[6]On the dependence of self-esteem on group identity and group status see Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Chapters 12-15. The theory is nicely summarized in Henri Tajfel and John Turner, "An Integretative Theory of Intergroup Conflict" in William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (editors), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/ Cole, 1979). The minimal group experiments on which the theory is based are also nicely presented in Roger Brown, *Social Psychology: The Second Edition* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

[7]These ideas are developed in two (as yet) unpublished manuscripts, "How Morality Works and Why It Fails: On Political Philosophy and Moral Consensus" and "Can We Overcome Racial Division: On Group Identity and Self-Interest."

[8]See, for example, Ralph H. Turner, *The Social Context of Ambition* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1964), especially chapter 3; this study is summarized in Daniel W. Rossides, *Social Stratification: The American Class System in Comparative Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), p. 108.

[9]But even in caste societies there is some social mobility. See Wrong, pp. 327-328 in Coser and Rosenberg and Joseph A. Schumpeter, "Social Classes" in *Imperialism and Social Classes* (New York: Meridian, 1955).

[10]For data on social mobility in the United States see, for example, Charles E. Hurst, *Social Inequality: Forms. Causes. and Consequences* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1992), pp. 264-270 and the references therein. Generally there is considerable mobility around the middle occupational statuses, but little motion into or out of the very bottom and very top.

[11]The classic statement of the functional theory is Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore, "Some Principles of Stratification," *American Sociological Review* 10 (1945): 242-249, a theory developed further by Davis in *Human Society*. For a review of the literature through 1959 see Wrong. For some later discussion, see the essays collected in Celia S. Heller, *Structured Social Inequality* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), especially pp. 488-513. A recent review is in Hurst, pp. 204-210. Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* seems to presuppose the functional theory of stratification. See *Theory*, Section 13; the suggestion is that some inequalities may be necessary to induce the talented to exercise their talents to the benefit of the least advantaged.

[12]Davis, *Human Society*, p. 369.

[13]Green makes this argument.

[14]Davis, *Human Society*, p. 367.

[15]This point is made by George A. Huaco, "A Logical Analysis of the Davis-Moore theory of Stratification," *American Sociological Review* 28 (1963): 801-804.

[16]For an account of the elevation of the physician's status and its relation to formal training, see Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), especially chapter 3.

[17]This is suggested, among other places, in Seymour Martin Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), p. 262.

[18]See Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976) for the theory of how schools shape young people for corresponding positions that will be available to them as adults. This is further documented in Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities* (New York: Crown, 1991). Jay MacLeod's *Ain't No Makin' It* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1987) is an urban ethnography of teenagers in a housing project, showing how school experiences converge with social and family life

to lower expectations. It also corrects the mechanistic view suggested by Bowles and Gintis, showing how young people struggling for social recognition and support nevertheless end up in the lower strata of society.

[19]See Richard Herrnstein, *IQ in the Meritocracy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971). Since this paper was written Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve* (New York: Free Press, 1994) appeared and has been favorably reviewed in, among other places, the *The New York Times Book Review.* The argument of *The Bell Curve* is essentially the same as that of *IQ in the Meritocracy*. The appearance of this book and the favorable publicity for it have already spawned a series of critiques. See, for example, Charles Lane, "The Tainted Sources of 'The Bell Curve'" in *The New York Review of Books*, December 1, 1994, and Adolph Reed, Jr., "Looking Backward" in *The Nation*, November 28, 1994.

[20]For brief analyses of some of the content of the tests see R. C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, and Leon J. Kamin, *Not in Our Genes* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), chapter 5, and Brian Evans and Bernard Waites, *IQ and Mental Testing* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981), chapter 4. IQ test items that test something other than absorption of a particular culture, for example, repeating a series of numbers recited by the tester, show the lowest correlation with overall IQ. See David Wechsler, *The Measurement and Appraisal of Adult Intelligence* fourth edition (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1958), p. 98, Table 17.

[21]See the articles in N. J. Block and Gerald Dworkin (editors), *The IQ Controversy* (New York: Pantheon, 1976) and Leon J. Kamin, *The Science And Politics of IQ* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974).

[22]A recent defense of the hereditarian position, including a review of the more recent twin studies, can be found in Nathan Brody, *Intelligence* second edition (San Diego: Academic Press, 1992), chapter 5. Brody is unresponsive to deep methodological problems raised by David Layzer in "Science or Superstition? A Physical Scientist Looks at the IQ Controversy" in Block and Dworkin and Arthur Fine "Causes of Variability: Disentangling Nature and Nurture" in Peter French, Theodore Uehling, Jr., and Howard Wettstein (editors), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy: The philosophy of the Human Sciences*, Volume XV (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). Fine is not specifically concerned with the IQ controversy, but the methodological issues he raises have analogs for the IQ controversy. And he is writing about some of the more recent twin studies. An example of the sort of problem that arises is this: in tests of the influences of medicines, the best studies are "double blind," with neither the physician nor the patient knowing who has received the tested medicine and who the placebo. Obviously no comparable condition is generally attainable to remove the effect of parents' awareness that their children are biologically related or adopted.

[23]See Michael Schiff and Richard Lewontin, *Education and Class* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

[24]Some of the history is found in Kamin, *Science and Politics of IQ*. A popular and useful account is Allan Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

[25]How would we explain the emergence of limited positions of high status? What we need here is a natural history of the emergence of stratification. Just as adaptationism is a distortion of natural history arising from the assumption that all traits contribute to survival and reproduction, so functionalism is the corresponding distortion in sociology arising from the assumption that all social structures pervasive in a society are necessary for the functioning of that society. Let me develop briefly such a speculative natural history. The inequalities of stateless ranked societies (see footnote 4) may work to the advantage of the least well off: by according prestige to those who accumulate wealth, they encourage some to work harder and produce a food surplus;

thus these societies support larger populations provided that wealth is redistributed to the least well off in case of need (which, in stateless ranked societies, it is). However, stratified societies that arise with the formation of the state create inequalities of reward that seem to work to the disadvantage of the least well off. Such societies often display evidence of extreme wealth differences and nutritional deprivation of the least well off. Of course, the state makes it possible to maintain inequalities that work to the disadvantage of those who are relatively unarmed and unorganized. Some evidence for this speculation can be found in Jonathan Haas, *The Evolution of the Prehistoric State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

[26]The harms of the social myth of equal opportunity have been discussed in Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Random House, 1973), cited in Blum. Lipset and Bendix distinguish between harmful consequences of social mobility and consequences of a belief that one's position is an outcome of a system in which each had an equal chance. Among the harmful consequences of mobility itself they mention "severe feelings of insecurity and *anomie* among people who find that upward mobility leads to social rejection" (p. 264). Here they are only concerned with harmful consequences of upward mobility. But in a stable society of equal opportunity, upward mobility would be matched by downward. My argument emphasizes the harms of spreading the risk of downward mobility.

[27]This paper has benefited from criticism of an earlier draft by a reviewer for *The Journal of Social Philosophy*.