My Choice, Our Choice

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ABSTRACT: Luck-egalitarianism is often formulated as the view that it is in itself bad for some to be worse off than others through no fault or choice of their own. This formulation is surprisingly ambiguous. When these ambiguities are sorted out it can be seen that choice and responsibility plays a different role in egalitarian justice than it is normally assumed. Specifically, there are cases where each member of a group is worse off through no choice or fault of his own and yet this is not bad from a luck-egalitarian point of view because the group is worse off through the choices or faults of its members. Moreover, there are cases where each member of a group is worse off through his own choice or fault and yet this is bad partly because the group is worse off regardless of the choices or faults of its members.

1. Introduction[1]

Luck-egalitarianism is often formulated as the view that 'it is [in itself] bad – unjust and unfair – for some to be worse off than others [through no fault or choice of their own]' (Temkin 1993: 13; Parfit 1998: 3). This formulation is surprisingly ambiguous in surprisingly important ways.[2] When these

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[2] Examples of relevantly similar formulations of the basic egalitarian principle are: (i) Roemer's formulation of 'the general form of the egalitarian ethic' found in Dworkin, Arneson, and Cohen, i.e. 'society should indemnify people against poor outcomes that are the consequences of causes that are beyond their control, but not against outcomes that are the consequences of causes that are within their control' (Roemer 1993: 147), (ii) Cohen's claim that 'the

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ambiguities, relating to the difference between what is a matter of choice or fault for each individual and what is a matter of choice or fault for a group to which this individual belongs, are sorted out it can be seen that choice and responsibility play different and less prominent roles in egalitarian justice than it is normally assumed. Specifically, there are cases where each member of a group is worse off through no choice or fault of his own and yet this is not bad from a luck-egalitarian point of view because the group is worse off through the choices or faults of its members. Moreover, there are cases where each member of a group is worse off through his own choice or fault and yet this is bad partly because the group is worse off regardless of the choices or faults of its members. These are the core critical points of this article.[3] In Section Two, I present and exemplify the differences between the various readings of the standard egalitarian formula. The aim of this section is simply to provide a conceptual map, not to evaluate the different principles located on that map. This task is taken up in Section Three where I suggest a revised version of the standard egalitarian formula that accommodates cases involving the above-mentioned asymmetries between choice or fault at the individual level and at the group level. Finally, I consider and reject an alternative response involving a multi-level account of the badness of inequality, according to which inequalities between groups may be bad even if there are no regrettable inequalities between individuals, and vice versa.

2. Ambiguities in the luck-egalitarian formula

fundamental distinction for an egalitarian is between choice and luck in the shaping of people's fate' (Cohen 1989: 907), and (iii) Arneson's egalitarian norm that 'distributive justice does not recommend any intervention by society to correct inequalities that arise through the voluntary choice or fault of those who end up with less, so long as it is proper to hold the individuals responsible for the voluntary choice or faulty behaviour that give rise to the inequalities' (Arneson: 1990: 176). These formulations, too, are ambiguous in the way I expound below.
[3] Since the ambiguity I address arises due to the 'through no choice or fault of their own bit', a similar ambiguity arises in the case of non-egalitarian views, e.g. prioritarianism, that accommodates the concern for choice and responsibility through a similar qualification, e.g. a clause saying that improving people's situation has less value to the extent that they are at a low level of well-being through a choice or fault of their own.

Let 'Wx' mean that x is worse off (than z) and 'W[x and y]' that the group consisting of x and y is worse off. This may obtain even if either x or y is better off provided this is more than offset by the extent to which the other person is worse off such that the average member of the group is worse off relative to the average member of relevant other groups. '¬C(W$_x$,x)' means that it is not the case that x is worse off through his own choice or fault[4] and '¬C(W$_{[x \text{ and } y]}$,[x and y])' that it is not the case that the group consisting of x and y is worse off through the choice or fault of its members. (I will say much more about how it might be the case that x is worse off but not through his own fault or choice, y is worse off but not through his own fault or choice, and yet they, considered as a group, are worse off through their own fault or choice, and vice versa, shortly.) 'B(Wx)' means that it is (morally) bad that x is worse off and 'B(W[x and y])' that it is bad that the group consisting of x and y is worse off. We can then represent six different readings of the standard luck-egalitarian formula applied to situations involving two worse off persons as follows:[5]

(1) For all individuals, x, and all individuals, y, B(Wx) and B(Wy) if, and only if, Wx and ¬C(W$_x$,x) and Wy and ¬C(W$_y$, y).

(2) For all individuals, x, and all individuals, y, B(W[x and y]) if, and only if, Wx and ¬C(W$_x$,x) and Wy and ¬C(W$_y$, y).

(3) For all individuals, x, and all individuals, y, B(W[x and y]) if, and only if, W[x and y] and ¬C(W$_{[x \text{ and } y]}$,[x and y]).

(4) For all individuals, x, and all individuals, y, B(Wx) and B(Wy) if, and only if, Wx and Wy and ¬C(W$_{[x \text{ and } y]}$,[x and y]).

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[4] This might be true, because x is worse off but not through his own fault or choice or because x is not worse off at all. Of course, to state that it is not the case that x is worse off through his own fault or choice when one knows that x is not worse off at all is to express one's knowledge in a very misleading way.

[5] It is easy to see how the distinctions I draw below apply, mutatis mutandis, to situations involving more than two worse off persons.

(5) For all individuals, x, and all individuals, y, $B(W[x \text{ and } y])$ if, and only if, Wx and Wy and $\neg C(W_{[x \text{ and } y]}, [x \text{ and } y])$.

(6) For all individuals, x, and all individuals, y, $B(W[x \text{ and } y])$ if, and only if, $W[x \text{ and } y]$ and $\neg C(W_x, x)$ and $\neg C(W_{y,} y)$.[6]

Note that (2), (3), (5) and (6) are collectivistic views in that they locate the badness of inequality in groups of individuals being worse off, while (1) and (4) are individualistic views in that they locate the badness of inequality in how each worse off individual fares. The collectivistic readings of the formula, while possible, are not plausible as readings of the standard luck-egalitarian formula, at least as championed by the leading luck-egalitarians, and I shall be focusing on the two individualistic readings until Section 4.

Note also that (5) entails (3) and (2) entails (6), but not the other way round. This is so because while it follows from the fact that x is worse off and that y is worse off that the group consisting of x and y is worse off, the reverse entailment does not hold. This is also the reason why there are no sentences with the same right-hand sides of the bi-conditionals as (3) or (6), but with left-hand sides that state that it is bad that x is worse off and bad that y is worse off.

To illustrate how these positions differ consider a community consisting of three persons, Adam, Betty, and Charles. For some reason or other, whatever Charles does, he will end up with 100 units of the relevant equalisandum, which for present purposes can be left unspecified. Adam and Betty, however, face a prisoners' dilemma. If they both cooperate in growing crops, they will both end up with 100. If they both tend their own crops failing to assist each other, they will

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[6] Strictly speaking, 'it is [in itself] bad – unjust and unfair – for some to be worse off than others [through no fault or choice of their own]' does not entail that it is not bad – neither unjust, nor unfair – for some to be worse off than others through a fault or choice of their own. However, I believe that the luck-egalitarian formula is normally meant and understood to entail this. If one thought that it is bad for some to be worse off even when he is worse off through his own fault or choice, then one would bring across one's view much more effectively simply by saying that 'it is [in itself] bad – unjust and unfair – for some to be worse off than others'. Hence, I have formulated (1)-(6) in terms of bi-conditionals.

both end up with 95. If they act differently, the one who cooperates will get 90, and the one who only tends his own crops will get 110. They have no way of knowing if the other person cooperates prior to harvest. Suppose they both tend their own crops. As a result, Adam and Betty have 95, while Charles has 100. Is this inequality bad?

The answer to this question depends on when people are worse off through their own choice or fault.[7] Choice and fault require separate accounts. In what follows, I assume that a person is worse off through a choice of his own if, and only if, (i) he would not have been worse off had he chosen to act differently, and (ii) he believed that had he chosen to act differently the likelihood of his ending up worse off would have been sufficiently smaller.[8] A group is worse off through a choice of its own if, and only if, (i) this group would have been better off, i.e. on average its members would have been better off, had a sufficient number of its members acted differently, and (ii) a sufficient number of its members believed that had a sufficient number of the members of the group acted differently the likelihood of their – they themselves or the group as such – ending up worse off would have been sufficiently smaller.[9]

'Being worse off through a fault of one's own' is trickier, since there are at least three different interpretations of the relevant notion of 'fault'. On the prudential interpretation, a person is

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[7] Some egalitarians (Vallentyne 2002) would say that the answer to this question depends on what the prospects of Adam, Betty, and Charles were ex ante. Thus, if all had equally good prospects ex ante, then there is nothing bad about the resulting unequal outcome. I disregard this view here, since it clearly does not consider it in itself bad that some people are worse off through no fault or choice of their own as long as people have equally good prospects ex ante.

[8] First, in the present sentence, I can leave it an open question whether 'worse off' should be read in an intrapersonal or in an interpersonal sense. Second, I shall disregard here and in what follows questions about strength of the will. A person who suffers from genetically induced weakness of the will may end up worse off through his own choice and yet this may not reduce the badness of his ending up worse off. Third, by 'sufficiently' I mean to accommodate cases where an agent believes that he faces a choice between an option which with a tiny possibility will not leave him worse off, but which is also very likely to leave him much worse off, and another option which is certain to leave him worse off, but only slightly worse off. Fourth, one can be worse off through one's own choice even though one is not worse off to the degree to which this is the case through one's own choice, e.g. I go by bike, rather than by car, believing that due to the rain I will be slightly worse off than the others who go by car and end up, quite unpredictably, with being hit by a car. For present purposes, I only need to address the issue of when one is worse off through one's own choice.

[9] Admittedly, the notion of group choice employed here is a rather undemanding one. Disregarding the belief-requirement, a group choice in my sense simply is the mereological sum of the acts of all members. A more demanding definition of group choice would require, say, that all members of the group coordinate their individual actions and are all committed to shared aims (Bratman 1999: 93; Gilbert 1989; Searle: 1990). Unlike me, some might think that it is this more demanding notion of group choice – let us call it 'collective group choice' as opposed to my weaker notion of 'mere aggregate group choice' – that matters in the present context. I address this issue below.

worse off through a fault of his own if, and only if, he is worse off because his conduct is blameworthy from a prudential point of view. On the equality-based interpretation, a person is worse off through a fault of his own if, and only if, he is worse off because his conduct is blameworthy from a prudential point of view provided that the agent did not conduct himself imprudently in order to reduce the badness of inequality. For instance, it is bad from the point of view of equality if someone ends up worse off as a result of his making himself worse off in order to raise all other persons who are presently worse off through no fault or choice of their own to the level of the better off.[10] Finally, on the morality-based interpretation, a person is worse off through a fault of his own if, and only if, he is worse off because his conduct is blameworthy from a prudential point of view provided that the agent did not conduct himself imprudently in order to do what was morally desirable for him to do (or what he believed was morally desirable for him to do) (possibly for reasons that are not equality-based, but instead, say, autonomy-, perfection- or welfare-based).[11] On this view, someone who voluntarily sacrifices a significant part of his income (or his own limbs) to save the lives of 50 people who, even if left to die, will have lived lives much better than all others, is not worse off through his own fault, since he is worse off because he chose to do, what was morally required (or supererogatory) for non-equality-based reasons.[12] To each of these notions of individual fault corresponds a notion of collective fault. So, for instance, on the prudential interpretation, a group is worse off through a fault of its own if, and only if, had some or

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[10] Suppose someone acts in a way that is blameworthy from a prudential point of view thereby raising all presently worse off persons to the level of the better off, but not in order to do so. Because of the subjective nature of the view proposed here, the agent is at fault, on the equality-based interpretation, nevertheless.

[11] For a discussion of these issues, see Eyal (2005).

[12] Exactly because in these cases the reasons why it is morally obligatory (or morally desirable, albeit not morally obligatory) to act in such a way that one becomes worse off need not be equality-based, it may be questioned whether these reasons can be reflected in a formulation of what is bad from the point of view of equality. For present purposes, I can ignore this question, since even if it amounts to a valid objection this would not imply that there is no distinction between (1)-(6). Presumably, some egalitarians find it intuitively implausible to say that there is no egalitarian reason to compensate a man who sacrifices a substantial part of his income or his own limbs (thereby knowingly causing himself to be worse off) in order to save 50 people even if these people are much better off than all others, e.g. (Temkin 2003: 144). (But then suppose that doing what is morally required will make the situation worse from the point of view of equality.) Temkin denies that there is anything bad about someone being worse off as a result of a supererogatory action (Temkin quoted in Eyal 2005: 18).

all of its members acted differently it would have been better off (considered as a group) and it was sufficiently easy for the members to act in this way. Since I do not employ any of the collective notions of fault in what follows, I shall not state the analogous equality- and morality-based notions of fault.

With these clarifications in mind, we can now see that according to (1) it is bad that Adam is worse off than Charles and bad that Betty is worse off than Charles. Neither Adam nor Betty is worse off through a fault or choice of his or her own. Adam is not worse off because he chose not to cooperate. Indeed, had he instead chosen to cooperate, he would have been even worse off. Nor is it the case that Adam is worse off through his own fault. Prudentially speaking, he had reason to believe that cooperating would make him worse off whatever Betty did. So prudentially speaking, he made no fault. Consider the equality-based and the morality-based interpretations. Let us assume for a moment that it was a fault on either view not to cooperate. (I return to this issue later.) Even so, Adam did not end up worse off *through* this fault. Had he not been at fault, given Betty's choice not to cooperate, he would have been even worse off, so it is more correct – although still incorrect in a strict sense, since he would have ended up worse off whatever he did – to say that he is worse off *in spite of*, rather than through, his fault. This brings out a difference between (1) and (4). According to (4) it is neither bad that Adam, nor that Betty, is worse off, since their being worse off is a result of how they chose to act. Had they both acted differently, they would have ended up as well off as Charles.

If we turn to the collectivistic views, on (2) and (6) the fact that the group consisting of Adam and Betty is worse off is bad. On both views, what matters is that neither is worse off through his own fault or choice. Here (3) and (5) differ for on both these views the fact that the group consisting of Adam and Betty is worse off is not bad. On both these views, what matters is that they are worse off as a result of how their members chose to act. Had both members

cooperated, they would have ended up just as well off as Charles. So unlike each of its members, all the members of the group cannot say together that had they cooperated, they would have been even worse off. What is true of each member of the group is not true of the group as such.

We could also have the opposite situation, that is, one in which it is true of each member of a group that he is worse off through his own choice or fault, but not true of the group that it is worse off through the choice or fault of its members. Suppose again that for some reason, whatever Doris does, she will end up with 100 units of the relevant equalisandum. Eric and Fred each has the option to appropriate a treasure washed ashore and accordingly end up with 100 as well. Only one of them can appropriate it, however, but it is true of each of them that if he makes an effort to acquire the benefit he will get it provided the other does not. Suppose that both of them fail to make a minimal effort to acquire the benefit. As a result Eric and Fred end up with 90 and Doris ends up with 100. Is this inequality bad?

According to (1), it is not. It is true of both Eric and Fred that he is worse off through his own choice not to make a minimal effort. However, according to the other individualistic view, i.e. (4), this inequality is bad. For Eric and Fred do not end up worse off as a result of choice or fault of their own. Whatever they had done, they would still, considered as a group, have ended up worse off than Doris. Hence, they are not worse off because of what they chose to do or because of a fault of theirs (although, of course, the extent to which they are worse off is partly a result of what they chose to do).

If we turn to the collectivistic views, on (2) and (6) the fact that the group consisting of Eric and Fred is worse off is not bad. On both views, what matters is that each is worse off through his own fault or choice. It is true of each that had he appropriated the treasure, he would not have been worse off. Again, (3) and (5) evaluate the situation differently. On these views the fact that the group consisting of Adam and Betty is worse off is bad. For on both views, what matters is

that they considered as a group are not worse off as a result of how they chose to act. Had either of them appropriated the treasure, they would still have ended up worse off considered as a group. So what is true of the group – that it is worse off though no fault or choice of its own – is untrue of each member of the group.[13]

3. The favoured specification of the luck-egalitarian formula

So far I have distinguished between six readings of the standard luck-egalitarian formula and shown these to have different implications. I believe the differences between the readings are important, because in most cases the costs and benefits of the choices each of us makes depends crucially on choices we make together with others. Hence, quite often when people face disadvantageous options the disadvantageousness of these options comes about partly through how these people act together, but not separately. For instance, it may be true of people, who are untalented in the Rawlsian sense, i.e. people whose skills – however talented they may be in any ordinary sense of the word – do not command high levels of reward on the job market, that through their own choices of consumption they contribute to bringing about their being untalented (and others, e.g. Dworkin's movie-star and Nozick's Wilt Chamberlain, being extremely talented), and, accordingly, that they are worse off partly through what they, considered as a group, choose to do.[14] My point in this paragraph is not to argue that justice or, more specifically, luck-egalitarian justice does not demand compensation for untalented people. Indeed, for all I have said here I may agree with Samuel Scheffler's suggestion that to invoke considerations about responsibility in the way I have just done constitutes a 'familiar form of right-wing moralism' that in an unjustified way neglects 'the often

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[13] The distinctions drawn in this section parallels some of those drawn by G. A. Cohen in relation to (un)freedom in Cohen (1988: 255-285).

[14] I explore this argument in Lippert-Rasmussen (forthcoming).

complex reality of people's circumstances' (Scheffler 2005: 14).[15] My point here is simply that the

distinction between the different readings of the luck-egalitarian formula is important, because the

differences between what the formula implies on these readings are important. Accordingly, it is

important to determine which of the different readings that, perhaps in some modified form, is the

most plausible one. This is the question to which I now turn.

As already mentioned, many egalitarians will want to reject the collectivistic readings

of the egalitarian formula. On their view, the concern for equality is a concern for 'how different

individuals fare relative to one another', not a concern for how groups fare relative to one another

(Temkin 1993: 92). A concern for the equality between groups will, in their view, often and in

implausible ways involve a lack of concern for inequality within groups and inequality across sub-

groups from different groups. So, by way of illustration, if we have a non-derivative concern that

men and women are equally well off, to witness, a concern that does not derive from our concern

that all individuals are equally well off, then we must consider it in one respect good if the worst off

men are made even worse off to benefit the best off women if this would make men and women

equal even if the worst off men are much worse off than everyone else and the best off women are

few but much better off than everyone else.

While I return to the collectivistic reading in Section Four, I find it reasonable, in the

light of the paragraph above, to concentrate first on the individualistic readings of the egalitarian

formula, i.e. (1) and (4). I want to show that, for reasons partly brought out in my examples in

Section Two, the luck-egalitarian formula so construed must be revised: (i) an individual may be

worse off through no fault or choice of his own and yet it need not be bad, from the point of view of

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[15] Scheffler's right-wing moralist appeals to 'ideas of desert and *individual* [my emphasis] responsibility' (2005: 14), while what I appeal to here might better be seen as ideas of collective choice. Still, this hardly makes a difference which is relevant to the present point. Note also that Scheffler's suggestion that the pertinent kind of moralism mistakes people's complicated circumstances suggests that the problem with this kind of moralism is not that it appeals to responsibility-involving choice as such, but that it misunderstands what reflects responsibility-involving choice and what reflects circumstance. This, I believe, is in some tension with Scheffler's overall aim in the quoted article, which is to rebut the luck-egalitarian emphasis on exactly this distinction.

equality, that he is worse off and (ii) an individual may be worse off, belong to a group that, considered as such, is worse off through no fault or choice of its own and yet it need not be bad, from the point of view of equality, that he is worse off. To see how the first claim is true consider my example of Adam, Betty, and Charles. I believe that this example, or perhaps an elaborated version of this example, refutes the view that it is always bad from the point of view of inequality if an individual is worse off through no fault or choice of his own. Suppose that Adam and Betty both know what they should do to end up at 100. Suppose, moreover, that the expected value of choosing to act in a way that might possibly result in an equal outcome is only slightly smaller than the expected value of choosing to act in the way that is best from a prudential point of view, e.g. because the differences in payoff are much smaller than in my original example, or suppose that both Adam and Betty falsely believe that it is certain that the other person will cooperate. Suppose, finally, that it is in no way difficult to cooperate. It is just that neither of them will cooperate to bring about an equal outcome when doing so does not serve his or her own interest. By both taking this unreasonable stance, they together end up worse off. But it is also true of each of them that had he or she cooperated, they would have been even worse off. Hence, it is true of neither of them, that he or she is worse off though his or her own choice not to cooperate in bringing about an equal outcome.

Surely, if they were to argue, in advance of their choice about whether to cooperate, that they should be compensated should they both decide to be uncooperative, those who should, if relevant, compensate them could reasonably reject their demand on the ground that while it is not up to each of them to bring about that they both cooperate, it is up to them together to bring that about. Moreover, if post factum we can either provide Adam and Betty with a benefit of 5 or provide the same benefit to Al and Beatrice who are also at 95 and who, unlike Adam and Betty, could not affect their own situation, I submit that giving the benefit to Al and Beatrice would be

better from the point of view of equality. They would have an (additional) egalitarian complaint if the benefit were given to Adam and Betty. This shows that the badness of the inequality between Adam and Betty, on the one hand, and Charles, on the other, is mitigated at least (if not eliminated) because it is an inequality that arose through their own choices (independently of whether they each made a decision about how to act on their own or they together made a collective decision about how to act). Hence, (1) is false.

One confusing thought that should be set aside here is that Adam and Betty should be compensated, relative to Al and Beatrice, for facing a disadvantageous choice situation. Whether sound or not, this is different from saying that they should be compensated for each ending up worse off through no choice of his or her own. This can be seen if we imagine that neither Adam, nor Betty, is risk-adverse. In that case, a choice situation similar to theirs may actually be preferable to Al's and Beatrice's, i.e. if there is some significant probability that exactly one of them will cooperate and that the person, who unlike the other, does not cooperate will get much more than 100. Yet, if they both end up with 95, i.e. neither cooperates, it is still true of each of them that he or she ends up worse through no choice of his or her own.

By way of further support for my intuitive judgment about Adam and Betty, note that we do not normally refrain from ascribing substantive responsibility to agents for a certain outcome, simply because the agents who brought about that outcome all had to act in a certain way to bring about that outcome about. So suppose that if Adam and Betty both abstain from closing a switch, Charles will suffer a very mild pain. If one closes the switch and the other does not, Charles will be electrocuted. If both close the switch, Charles will suffer extreme and traumatising pain. Neither has any particular reason to believe that the other will close his or her switch. Surely, if they both close their switch, we will not refrain from attributing responsibility to them for Charles's extreme pain, although each of them correctly can say that had he or she not closed the switch the result would

have been even worse. If this is so, it is not clear why luck-egalitarians, who appeal to commonsense notions of choice and responsibility, should not similarly attribute responsibility to Adam and Betty in my original version of the example for ending up worse off and deny them compensation on that ground.

To see how it might be the case that an individual is worse off, belong to a group that, considered as such, is worse off through no fault or choice of its own and yet it need not be bad, from the point of view of equality, that he is worse off, consider my example involving Doris, Eric, and Fred. Suppose that Eric and Fred both abstain from appropriating the treasure out of sheer laziness. I submit that from the point of view of egalitarian justice, the resulting inequalities between Eric and Doris and between Fred and Doris are not bad – whatever the truth is about the badness of the inequality between, on the one hand, the group consisting of Eric and Fred and, on the other hand, Doris – on the assumption that if a person is worse off through sheer laziness, then this person is worse off through a choice or fault of his own. Hence, (4) is false.

Since the first counterexample works because the right-hands side of the bi-conditional in (1) does not contain (4)'s condition concerning collective fault or choice, i.e. '$\neg C(W_{[x \text{ and } y]}, [x \text{ and } y])$', and the second counterexample works because (4) does not contain (1)'s clauses concerning individual fault or choice, i.e. '$\neg C(W_x, x)$' and '$\neg C(W_y, y)$', we might accommodate these two counterexamples, while keeping our egalitarian focus on how each worse off individual fares, by strengthening (1) and (4):

> (7) For all individuals, x, and all individuals, y, $B(Wx)$ and $B(Wy)$ if, and only if, Wx and $\neg C(W_x, x)$ and Wy and $\neg C(W_y, y)$ and $\neg C(W_{[x \text{ and } y]}, [x \text{ and } y])$.

This formula gives intuitively plausible responses to my two counterexamples. Because of '$\neg C(W_{[x \text{ and } y]},[x \text{ and } y])$' it implies that it need not be bad from the point of equality that Adam is worse off or bad that Betty is worse off – despite each being worse off through no fault or choice of his or her own. Also, because of '$\neg C(W_x, x)$' and '$\neg C(W_y, y)$' it implies that it need not be bad that Eric is worse off, nor that Fred is worse off – despite the fact that they constitute a group that is worse off through no fault or choice of its own.

The revised formula may well stand in need of further tinkering. Some might argue that only in cases involving collective group choice that leads its members to end up worse off it is not bad that some particular member of this group are worse off through no fault or choice of their own. This particular objection, I think, can be answered.[16] I find it hard to see why we should care less about inequality involving a group of people who are preoccupied with fairness and separately decide to abstain from gaining a benefit that only some members of the group can enjoy than we should care about inequality involving a group of people who by way of collective group choice decide to abstain from gaining a benefit that only some members of the group can enjoy. However, there are other objections to (7) that I am less comfortable about dismissing. Specifically, it might be argued that (7) condemns too few inequalities as being in themselves bad. First, consider a prisoners' dilemma-like situation in which an individual actually cooperates, but to no avail, or was willing to cooperate provided that enough others signalled the same intent, but refrained from so doing because not enough signalled intent to cooperate, ends up worse off. It might plausibly be argued that this individual is worse off in a way that is bad from the point of view of equality.[17]

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[16] Interestingly, G. A. Cohen in his critique of incentives-based arguments for inequality denies that talented people demanding inequality-inducing incentives in return for being optimally productive are not responsible for their collectively produced result on the ground that they do not constitute an 'organized group' (Cohen 1991: 294).

[17] In cases involving cooperation between large numbers of individuals it will almost always be the case that each individual has no influence on whether an agreement to cooperate is reached and, thus, no influence on whether he himself ends up worse off.

Second, (7) in its present form fails to accommodate cases where it is unreasonably difficult or costly for people to act in such a way that the relevant individuals do not end up worse off, e.g. as when an equal outcome is only brought about by a few out of millions of possible combinations of actions by a large number of people and it is very difficult for each of these people to know what the other persons will be doing.

Finally, (7) arguably fails to accommodate cases where, in a spirit of equality, people choose to act in such a way that they end up worse off. Suppose that Eric and Fred both abstain from appropriating the treasure, not because of laziness, but because each finds it unfair to the other person to do so, say, because of how they understand luck-egalitarianism (or because of how they understand the requirements of their special relationship). They would prefer to share the treasure equally were this possible, but, given that it is not possible, both prefer not to be the one who gains an unfair advantage over the other. I submit that from the point of view of egalitarian justice, the resulting inequality between Eric and Doris and between Fred and Doris is bad despite the fact that each of the former two persons is worse off through a choice or fault of his own.

If we accept all three objections we might end up with a somewhat complicated formula:

(8) For all individuals, x, and all individuals, y, B(Wx) and B(Wy) if, and only if:

(i)   Wx and ($\neg$C(W$_x$,x) or if C(W$_x$,x), then x acted out of egalitarian solidarity)[18],

(ii)   and Wy and ($\neg$C(W$_{y,}$ y) or if C(W$_{y,}$ y), then y acted out of egalitarian solidarity),

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[18] I ignore here the other praiseworthy motivations possibly rendering choice-induced inequality bad, which I mentioned in Section Two. By 'egalitarian solidarity' I mean solidarity with people whom the agent reasonably believes to be worse off than others because they, so he believes, are worse off than others. Hence, I would allow that if x falsely believes that y is worse off than z and for that reason refrains from acquiring some benefit that y could not then enjoy, then it is bad that x is worse off than z even though he is worse off through his own choice.

(iii)   and $\neg C(W_{[x \text{ and } y]},[x \text{ and } y])$ or (if $C(W_{[x \text{ and } y]},[x \text{ and } y])$, then at least one of the

followings three claims were true: (a) x and y tried, but failed, to cooperate, (b)

x and y were suitably disposed to cooperate to bring an outcome in which none

of them was worse off, or (c) it was unreasonably costly or difficult for x and y

to act in such a way that $\neg Wx$ and $\neg Wy$).

Not all may be persuaded that these revisions are all necessary. But whether or not we settle for (7), (8) or something in between, it follows that responsibility plays a different role in egalitarian theory than has so far been assumed by luck-egalitarians, since there are cases in which it is not bad that someone is worse off through no fault or choice of his own and cases in which it is bad that someone is worse off through his own fault or choice. The revisions incorporated in (8) merely reduce and do not empty the set of such cases. While my argument has shown responsibility to play a different role in luck-egalitarian theory from that it is normally assumed to play, it has not relegated responsibility to utter irrelevance. First, both (7) and (8) imply that collective responsibility for being worse off matters. Second, arguably some of the revisions incorporated in (8) reflect a concern for responsibility. For instance, the fact that it matters whether one signalled intent to cooperate may suggest that responsibility matters to the badness of a resulting inequality, only the relevant object of responsibility – whether one has signalled intent to cooperate – is slightly different from that suggested by the standard luck-egalitarian formula – whether one is responsible for being worse off.

While I think the first point simply must be conceded, the second point deserves some further thought. If what renders it not bad that someone is worse off is that this person did not signal intent to cooperate even if this is causally irrelevant to his being worse off, then this raises the question of why exactly responsibility for this fact rather than responsibility for some of the

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countless other facts that are causally irrelevant for this person's being worse off is relevant to the badness from an egalitarian point of view of his being worse off. Normally, we would not accept the inference from someone's being responsible for any old fact, e.g. his allowing himself to cultivate a taste for football rather than an equally expensive taste for badminton, other than his being worse off to its not being bad that he is worse off.

One plausible explanation here is that responsibility for signalling intent to cooperate matters, not because it matters in itself, but because it matters as a reliable indicator of something else that matters in itself, namely one's moral deservingness. So the thought here might be that it is not the case that each individual of a group of people who failed to cooperate deserve to be better off – for this to have been the case, they would have had to have made a serious attempt at cooperating. This is why we ought to benefit Al and Beatrice rather than Adam and Betty despite the fact that it is true of each of these four persons that they are worse off through no fault or choice of their own. On the plausible assumption (Arneson 1999: 230-231) that how well off someone deserves to be depends no less on that part of his conduct which is causally irrelevant to how well off he is than on that part of his conduct which is so relevant, this explains why responsibility for something that is causally irrelevant for one's being worse off may nevertheless affect the badness of inequality.

Unfortunately, this explanation fails. First, suppose that we know that Adam and Betty are overall much more deserving than Al and Beatrice. Hence, we know that their being responsible for not signalling intent to cooperate – supposing for a moment that such signalling is possible and believed to be possibly consequential – does not alter our overall picture of the comparative deservingness of Adam and Betty, on the one hand, and Al and Beatrice, on the other. I submit that even in this case there is a strong egalitarian reason to benefit Adam and Betty rather than Al and Beatrice. If so, responsibility matters not simply as a reliable indicator of deservingness, although,

of course, it may also matter as such. Second, arguably there are cases not involving moral deservingness where we may want to reward on the basis of responsibility. Supposing that no moral issues arises in relation to Robinson Crusoe being lazy or diligent, egalitarians may see greater reason to benefit a worse off, diligent Robinson Crusoe than a worse off, lazy Robinson Crusoe. For these reasons, I conclude that while responsibility plays a different and less prominent role in the revised luck-egalitarian formula than in the standard formulation, the present line of argument does not show that it plays no role at all.

4. A sophisticated group-based account

Let me conclude this paper by briefly suggesting a sophisticated multi-level response to the two counterexamples offered above. The response is inspired by an analogous move concerning moral wrongness in situations such as one in which exactly five out of ten needs to act in a certain way in order to avoid a disastrous result and no one acts in this way. Such cases clearly seem to involve wrongdoing yet it is not clear who acts wrongly. Some have argued that in such cases each person acts morally right, since given how the others acted it would have been no use to act otherwise (Jackson 1987; Tännsjö 1989). This, however, does not mean that no moral wrongdoing took place. The group of people who could have prevented the disastrous result, but failed to do so, acted morally wrong. So there is no wrongdoing at an individual level, but wrongdoing at a collective level. An analogous view regarding the badness of inequality would say that in my first example in Section Two it is bad that Adam is worse off and bad that Betty is worse off, but not bad that the group consisting of Adam and Betty is worse off. Neither Adam, nor Betty, is worse off through a fault or choice of their own, but Adam and Betty are worse off as a result of how they chose to act. In the second example, the proposed view would imply that while it is bad that the group consisting of Eric and Fred is worse off, it is not bad that each of them is worse off, since each of them is

worse off through a choice or fault of their own. More generally, on the proposed view there are no entailments between judgements about the badness of inequality at a group level and judgments about the badness of inequality at an individual level. Slightly more formally (and ignoring the complications motivating the move from (7) to (8)), the view I entertain here is a conjunction of (1) and (3):

(9) For all individuals, x, and all individuals, y, (i) $B(Wx)$ and $B(Wy)$ if, and only if, Wx and $\neg C(W_x,x)$ and Wy and $\neg C(W_y, y)$ and (ii) $B(W[x$ and $y])$ if, and only if, $W[x$ and $y]$ and $\neg C(W_{[x \text{ and } y]},[x$ and $y])$.

While initially attractive, I believe that the suggested multi-level account is inferior to the revised formula that I offered above. Presumably, if egalitarians should care about inequalities at individual levels as well as at group levels, then situations may arise in which there is a trade-off between reducing inequality at either level.[19] So, in my second example, multi-level egalitarians will want to eliminate the undesirable inequality that exists at a group level. Hence, on the multi-level theory it would, implausibly, be in one way better from the point of view of equality to transfer resources to those people who out of laziness failed to acquire the benefit that only one of them could acquire.[20] Also, in my first example, multi-level egalitarians are committed – again implausibly – to holding that it would be in one way better to benefit those who are worse off through no individual choice or fault of their own but worse off through their collective choice not to cooperate.

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[19] In some cases this might be avoided if there are pure collective benefits and harms, i.e. benefits and harms that make a group better or worse off but whose presence or absence does not affect how well off those individuals of which the group consists are. I take the view that there are no pure collective goods and, hence, that egalitarians cannot defend the possibility of the simultaneous elimination of luck at an individual as well as at a collective level by appeal to them.
[20] Admittedly, one could care about inequality at the group level only as a tie breaker.

Unlike the proposed multi-level theory, (7) and (8) tie the badness of inequality at the individual level and the group level together. Choices at either level may affect the badness of inequality at the other level. This I take to be more intuitive. By way of further support for this claim consider a case where Geoff is worse off (than average) through no fault or choice of his own and responsible for Ingrid's being worse off (than average) and Ingrid is worse off through no fault or choice of her own and responsible for Geoff's being worse off. They both act independently of one another, have no way of communicating, and both knowingly let an option to raise the other person to the level of the average person pass by out of sheer laziness. Hence, while they are responsible for their being worse off, considered as a group, each of them is not responsible for his or her being worse off. If luck-egalitarians would deny compensation in an otherwise comparable case where each of them let an option to raise him- or herself to the level of the better off pass by out of sheer laziness, then it strikes me as odd to recommend compensation for Geoff and Ingrid on the ground that each of them is not responsible for him- or herself being worse off when *they* are worse off due *their* laziness. In the former case, luck-egalitarians think that it is unreasonable to expect others to bear the costs of the worse off people's laziness. If they think it is not unreasonable in the latter case, it must be because they think that it is not unreasonable to expect people to make themselves better off, but unreasonable to expect them make others better off thereby making them as well off as others. But why should egalitarians consider it unreasonable to expect people to act on motivations other than that of benefiting themselves?

To the extent that we agree about the absence of a luck-egalitarian case for compensating Geoff and Ingrid this speaks against (9), which wrongly recommends that each of them receive compensation while the group consisting of Geoff and Ingrid does not. It speaks in favour of (7) and (8), which rightly, in my view, recommends that there is no egalitarian case for

compensation. This is so because '$\neg C(W_{[x \text{ and } y]},[x \text{ and } y])$' is false for the special reason that '$\neg C(W_y, x)$' and '$\neg C(W_x, y)$' are both false.

In the light of the sort of cases considered where being worse off through one's own individual choice or fault, being worse off through some other individual's choice or fault, or being worse off through the choice or fault of a group of which one is a member are pried apart, I conclude that considerations about responsibility must play a different and less prominent role in egalitarian theory than is normally assumed. Jerry Cohen writes in his very influential study of the currency of egalitarian justice that the purpose of egalitarianism 'is to eliminate involuntary disadvantage, by which I (stipulatively) mean disadvantage for the sufferer cannot be held responsible since it does not appropriately reflect choices that he has made or is making or would make' (Cohen 1989: 916). I have argued that some such disadvantages are of no concern from an egalitarian point of view and that some disadvantages for which the sufferer can be held responsible since it reflects choices he made are nevertheless something that is bad from the point of view of equality.[21] Moreover, in some cases where choice, fault, or responsibility plays a role, they play a different role from that assumed by luck-egalitarians. The object of choice, fault, or responsibility is not always and not merely the fact that the individual is worse off, but sometimes the fact that the individual does not want to gain unfair advantages or the fact that the individual has tried to cooperate to bring about an equal distribution. Hence to some extent, choice, fault, and responsibility may matter, not because they matter in themselves, but because they matter as reliable indicators of something else, e.g. moral deservingness. As I have pointed out, none of this implies that it does not matter at all from an egalitarian point of view whether an individual is worse through his own fault or choice.

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[21] 'Appropriately' can cover a lot of things and, of course, it might be said that when someone chooses not to render himself equally well off out of solidarity with others the disadvantage he suffers does not appropriately reflect his choice. Since Cohen does not discuss the sort of cases I discuss here, nothing in his article suggests that this is how he intends the qualification to be understood, but should anyone insist on this reading I am happy to regard my second criticism as a specification of Cohen's formulation rather than as a criticism of the narrower reading of it.

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