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Opportunity for What? Some remarks on current disputes about equality in education

R. M. HARE

In the past few years a great many heads have been broken in many places in disputes about equal rights; and of these disputes that about equality in education has been one of the most violent in some countries. It is my belief that at least some of these heads would not have been broken if some clearer thinking had been going on inside them. Not that everything can be achieved by clear thinking; firmness of purpose and other moral qualities are also required. But if more clarity were introduced into these disputes, some of the violence might be replaced by cooperation, when the disputants discovered that there were principles (perhaps a bit less simple than the slogans on their placards) upon which they could agree. That, at any rate, is the hope with which I, as a philosopher, approach this question.

Nearly all disputes about equality are expressed in the language of *rights*. This is a pity; for out of all the concepts in our moral language that of rights is one of the least clear, and the efforts of philosophers have attained less success here than perhaps they have elsewhere. It would seem that rights have something to do with *justice*; but that too is a very unclear concept. It, in turn, has something to do with what we *ought* to be doing or what it is *right* to do; but the relation is as yet unexplained. I shall spend the first part of this paper examining these concepts and the relations between them; and then in the rest I shall go on to apply what I have said to some practical issues of some importance. If any reader finds the analysis dry or remote, I ask him to be patient. I shall not be able to make it very long or thorough; I have tried elsewhere [1] to give a fuller account of justice, and shall have to limit myself to a summary treatment here.

Rights are the stamping-ground of intuitionists – of those who think that they just know the answers to moral questions, without argument or the use of reason. That, indeed, is why so many heads get broken. For quite a time useful work has been in progress (starting at least with that of Wesley Hohfeld [2]) on the articulation and clarification of different senses of the word ‘rights’, in legal contexts especially. But on the more fundamental question of how we establish what our rights (meaning especially our *moral* rights) are, I know of no solid ground on which to stand. It will help to remind ourselves of some well-known distinctions, and of the way in which the concept of *legal* rights functions (though I shall not be able to be rigorous enough to satisfy the lawyers); there are important analogies between legal and moral rights, but they do not take us all the way. The reason is that, whereas in the legal case there are the courts and the legislature to decide what our rights are, or are to be, and what they say goes, in the case of moral rights there is no similar authority to appeal to (which, again, accounts for some broken heads).

The way it works in the legal case is this. The notion of a right is firmly tied to that of what is or is not lawful. In one of the senses of the noun 'right', I have a right to do something if, and only if, it is not unlawful for me to do it. In another sense I have a right to do something if, and only if, it is unlawful for anybody to prevent my doing it. There is a third and even stronger sense, in which I have a right to do something if, and only if, somebody (perhaps the government) has a legal duty to see to it that I am able to do it, or at least actively to assist me to do it; they would be breaking the law if they did not so assist me. Examples of these three kinds of rights are: (1) the right to get myself elected to Parliament if I can by lawful means (I am not breaking the law by doing this, but neither is a rival candidate breaking it if he frustrates me by being himself successful at the polls); (2) the right to walk along a footpath on which there is a right of way (here, by contrast, anybody who tried to stop me would be breaking the law); (3) the right to schooling, in countries where the government has assumed a legal duty to provide this, and would be breaking its own laws if it did not (here there is not merely a negative duty not to prevent, but a positive duty to bring something about).

These distinctions are important, and perhaps fewer heads would be broken if they were understood; and there are many more complications into which I should have to go, if my purpose were not something different. The problem, however, to which I wish to direct attention is one common to all these senses of 'rights', or kinds of rights. It is this: in the legal case we think that we can get it decided whether a person does or does not have a certain right by going to the courts or the legislature; but what happens when not a legal but a moral right is claimed? For example, suppose that in a certain country there is no *legal* right to universal education – i.e. no law has been made requiring the authorities to provide it – but that some people wish to claim that it *ought* (morally) to be provided, or that it would be *unjust*, though not contrary to the existing law, if it were not. They might very well express this claim by saying that everybody had a *moral right* to schooling. But there would not be, as in the legal case, a clear way of determining whether this right existed; those who said that it did not could not be taken to court, nor could the legislature pass a law establishing this *moral* right, though it could indeed establish, by passing a law, a *legal* right to education.

The failure to distinguish between moral and legal rights is one of the sources of the doctrine of natural law and natural rights, which are a kind of confused slurry of legal and moral rights all mixed up. I shall not now set foot in this quagmire, except to say that, in my view, everything that natural-law theorists wish to say about rights could be said much more clearly if they spoke of moral rights instead of natural rights. The distinction between rights which are claimed on moral grounds and those which are claimed on legal grounds would then be kept clear, as it now often is not, even in the courts.

Although moral rights are not the same as legal rights, there is an analogy between them which can be helpful if we do not press it too far. Just as legal rights have their basis in laws, so moral rights have their basis in moral principles. There is a difficulty about establishing moral principles which is more perplexing than that about establishing laws; but the analogy at least helps us to *locate* the difficulty. If we could settle what are the right moral principles as easily as we can settle what the law is, or what it is to be, then the *rest* of the argument about moral rights would go more swimmingly. So one, at any rate, of the difficulties which face us has been pin-pointed: it is the old problem of how we are to select our moral principles. Into this problem, since I have devoted most of my philosophical writings to it [3], I shall not go in this paper. I think I have an answer to it, but it would take too long to explain. A few hints as we go along will have to suffice.

But even if we had a method for choosing our moral principles, our difficulties would not be at an end; for not *any* moral principles will do for determining people's rights, but

only principles of a certain kind, namely principles of *justice*, which are only one kind of moral principles. And the word 'just' too is ambiguous. There is one sense of it in which justice is more or less coextensive with the whole of morality; the '*justus vir*' of Horace, and his counterpart in the Bible, is simply the man who does what he ought – the righteous or upright man. But, as Aristotle explained, there is also a narrower sense of 'just' in which it means 'fair'. Confusion between the two senses is another cause of broken heads. In the more general sense of 'just' it seems self-evident that we ought to do what is just; and this is indeed so, if the just act *means* the right act, the act that we ought to do. But in the narrower sense it can be the case that we ought not, in some unusual situation, to do what is just. The man who said 'Let justice be done, though the heavens fall' was perhaps confusing the two senses. Sometimes it is impossible to be absolutely fair in this imperfect world, without transgressing some even more important duty. It is unfair to the man with Lassa fever to keep him in quarantine for weeks; it was not his fault that he got it and we are inflicting real and unmerited harm on him to protect the public from greater harm. It may not be fair to parents who have moved house at great expense simply in order to be able to send their children to a good school, to have them bussed away to another school. It may not be fair – that is one of the disputes which concern us – but people claim, and they could be right, that we ought to do it all the same.

The principles of justice, in the sense of fairness, are a kind of moral principle which holds only in general, and admits of exceptions; they are what philosophers call *prima facie* principles. That means that even if someone is right in claiming that children have *in general* a right to equal education, there may be other overriding moral reasons why we ought not to give it them – suppose, for example, that the money which it would cost could be used instead to prevent some other people from starving. The problem reduces then to this: How do we select these *prima facie* principles of justice, and how do we decide when a case has arisen which is so exceptional that we ought to contravene them? These are questions on which, perhaps, some light has been cast by more general philosophical discussions about the selection of moral principles.

It is the great merit of Professor John Rawls and his disciples [4] to have recognised – what was already known but not clearly – that the argument about what it is just or fair to do has to proceed in two stages. There is first the stage at which we select *principles* of justice or fairness; and then the stage at which we apply these principles in order to determine what *particular acts* are just or fair. Rawls's way of selecting the principles of justice relies too much on intuition; though he may have got the formal properties of his procedure right, his excessive use of intuition may have made him think that these formal properties have consequences which they do not have [5]. But the general idea is right, namely that we have to have some method of selecting principles of justice; it makes no sense, in default of them, to ask what individual acts are just.

My own view, for which I argue in my paper on justice already referred to, is that the principles can be chosen on a utilitarian basis. This, indeed, is the only just way, in yet another sense of justice, to choose them. The sense in question here is that called by philosophers *formal justice*. Moral judgments are generally agreed by most philosophers to have a logical property which we call 'universality' or 'universalisability' [6]. This is not the same as the feature of generality which I mentioned just now as possessed by *prima facie* principles. It comes to this, that one cannot without logical inconsistency make different moral judgments about cases which one agrees to be otherwise similar. This is the basis of the Golden Rule (the foundation of morality) and also of the principle of the utilitarians that everybody is to count as one and nobody as more than one. That certainly sounds just. But if we count everybody as one and nobody as more than one,

we have to treat equal benefits or harms to two or more different people as of equal weight in our decision-making. This formal principle does not take us very far; it does not solve all moral problems for us. But at least it serves to establish on firm logical foundations a certain kind of utilitarianism (there are many other kinds, some of them quite wrong). As applied to the choice of principles of justice, and indeed of other *prima facie* moral principles too, this has the consequence of requiring us to choose those principles of justice which have, as philosophers say, the highest acceptance-utility – that is to say, the principles whose general acceptance in a community will confer the greatest benefits, all in all, on the members of the community, at the cost of the least harms. It goes without saying that the acceptance of *some* principles of justice or other is of benefit to a community; a community without *any* principles of justice to determine how its members are to conduct themselves towards one another in respect of the division of goods and other matters governed by such principles is unlikely to be a happy one. I hope to illustrate in the rest of this paper, after this theoretical introduction, with reference to the dispute about equality in education, how the method which I have just sketched helps us in choosing principles of justice, and shall make some specific suggestions.

Notice, first of all, the enormous step which we have taken, if we agree with what I just said, away from what has been a commonly accepted dogma for almost all those who have discussed the problem of educational equality, on both sides of the political fence. They all speak as if education were a benefit to the recipient, and no more. It is in the child's interest to receive an education, and therefore fairness requires that this benefit should be justly distributed between children – which for the egalitarian means that no child ought to receive more of it than any other child. I am going to call this approach to equal rights to education the *cake theory*. Education is, however, not like a cake that has to be divided fairly (i.e., in most people's opinion, equally). If it were, then the sole or chief moral problem would be one of fairness as between the children; and that has often been thought. No doubt there would be subsidiary problems about our duty to avoid various undesirable side-effects if the insistence on equality leads, for example, to frustrations for those children who could have deployed their talents to better effect if some extra attention had been given to them. But these problems will be of quite minor importance compared with the main problem of securing distributive justice.

But education is not quite like a cake that has to be divided fairly between the children. The theoretical considerations which I have just been summarising make this very clear. If they are correct, then the principle of justice which we should select in this area is one which does the best, not just for the children, but for *all in the community* whose welfare is affected by the acceptance of the principle, treating each as one, i.e. fairly. Since many people besides the children themselves are affected, this alters the picture vastly. Education is less like a cake that has to be divided up than it is like ammunition or weapons which have to be shared among soldiers. I ask the forgiveness of pacifists who do not like military examples if I use this analogy, which is the clearest I can think of; if they find it distasteful they can substitute any other kind of supply or equipment. Let us call the alternative theory which I wish to consider the *equipment theory*. It may be that to have ammunition and weapons is in the interest of everybody in a battle, at any rate for self-defence. But obviously nobody is going to argue that therefore we ought in fairness to distribute them equally. For the point of having ammunition is to use it in order to win the battle. And with this in mind we may have reasons for distributing it unequally. We may give more to those who can shoot straight and will not waste it, for example.

While I am speaking of armies, let us think a little about military (or, if pacifists, about

any other kind of vocational) training, which, if denied the name of education in the purest sense, is at least like it in many respects. Does anybody say that everybody in the army has an equal right to training? To basic training perhaps, because they will be unhappy and at a loss and useless without it. But what about specialist forms of training which not everybody can master? Is it unfair if somebody is taught to be an artillery surveyor or even a staff officer when others are not? No doubt when there are two equally well-qualified officers who might go to the Staff College, it is unfair if one can go and the other not. But no one thinks that, because not everybody can go to the Staff College, nobody should. The reason why nobody thinks this is that training at the Staff College has a purpose, namely to produce officers who will fulfil well their duties on the staff and provide from their ranks a supply of good generals who will help to win battles in the future. This is the prime consideration; it takes precedence over questions of equal distribution between the candidates.

When we turn from vocational training to education in general, both the cake theory and the equipment theory turn out to be too one-sided; the truth lies in some kind of combination of them. The considerations about fairness between the children put forward by cake-theorists have, indeed, a great deal of force; but they need to be balanced by an admixture of equipment theory.

With this in mind, let us ask what I say is the main question: What principles of justice as regards the provision of education will have the highest acceptance-utility? In other words, if we were choosing what principles of justice to recommend to a community, and had the good of the people in the community at heart, and were impartial between them, what would we recommend? We can if we wish try to imagine that we are God, the impartially benevolent Creator, choosing principles of justice to impose on his creatures; or, if that is too much of a strain, we can think of ourselves as what we all are, educators – at least of our own children – and ask, What are the principles of justice which, if we bring up our children to hold them and everybody else does the same, will produce the greatest good for their generation as a whole and for their successors?

This means that we have to ask what are the various interests affected, and how the different policies that we might pursue would affect those interests. Our object is that the things we shall actually be doing (and it is difficult in this uncertain world to be sure what we are actually doing, because what we are doing is to bring about certain consequences, some of them long-term, and predictions about these are hard to make) – that the things we shall actually be doing shall be as fair as we can make them between all those interests. What we shall be doing is inculcating the principles in question – i.e. principles of justice or fairness which our children, and other people whom we influence, will accept; and our object will be to choose those principles whose acceptance will serve those interests as fully and as fairly as possible. As we have seen, this is achieved if, treating each of the persons affected as one and nobody as more than one, we give equal weight to the interests of each and then maximize the satisfaction of them in total.

What then are the interests involved? According to the cake theory, the only interests we have to consider are those of the children to be educated. But although those interests are certainly important, it would be an astonishingly gross oversimplification to suppose that they are the sole interests affected, or even, all in all, the dominant ones. One idea which has persuaded people that they are may be mentioned in passing: it has often been thought that there is some kind of pre-established harmony between the interests of children in acquiring education and the interests of the community (i.e. of its members generally) in getting them educated. This would be so if the amount and quality of education which it is most in the interest of the children to have is identical with the amount and quality which it is in the interest of the community that they should have.

This is true only to a certain degree. Up to a point, it will profit the children if they acquire the sort of education which will make them useful members of society. But it is easy to think of attainments which it might be in the interests of the children to acquire, but whose acquisition by them may not do much good to anybody else. Suppose, for example, that a child can become a very bad musician, but one who gets immense satisfaction from his bad performances. Suppose that his instrument is the voice and that he cannot be taught to sing in tune, but is so unmusical that his singing, though excruciating to everybody else, gives him huge pleasure. How much in the way of educational resources is it right to expend on teaching him to sing like this? This sort of problem arises acutely in the case of handicapped children, who can be, at great cost, taught certain minimum attainments which will help them to find a place in society and thus make them happier; but the good that they do to themselves and others by exercising these attainments may be far less than the cost of teaching them. The problem is eased if we remember that even if the handicapped person becomes just barely self-supporting, society is relieved of the burden of supporting him, and that this can be set against the cost of his education. But even so there is a balance to be struck. And we must remember that we are all handicapped in various respects relatively to the really high achievers.

I take it as established, then, that the community has an interest in children's education which is over and above, and may conflict with, the children's own interest in getting educated. This is very important when we come to consider the question of educational equality. It is often debated whether children of talent should be given more of our educational resources, or less, or an equal amount to everybody else. The argument for the last course is simple unthinking egalitarianism, which supposes that equality in distribution of anything one cares to name is always fairest. The argument for giving them less is also an egalitarian one, but more sophisticated: they already have an advantage in being more talented; true equality will therefore be restored if we make it a handicap race and give to the less talented compensating advantages which will enable them to compete on equal terms with the talented. The argument for giving the talented more of our resources is that they will be able to make better use of what they get.

If we are followers of the cake theory and are egalitarians we shall embrace one of the first two answers: the first if we are naive; the second if we are more sophisticated. If the only interests to be considered are those of the children, then the question becomes one of distributive justice simply between *them*; and if we think a little, the second answer has an obvious appeal. But if we are not confirmed cake-theorists, the position is less simple. Let us recur to the analogy with the military academy, and remember that our ordinary academies share with it at least this feature, that their products are expected to contribute better to the needs of their fellow men than they would have if not educated. Does anybody think that when one is training potential generals one should place a handicap on tactical and strategic geniuses, in order that those of mediocre talent may compete with them on equal terms? An army that followed such a policy would make it certain that it would be defeated in future wars.

This, then, is a strong argument for giving to our talented children as much in the way of educational resources as they can use. I shall come in a moment to arguments on the other side. For the benefit of Marxists who claim to be egalitarians, I may perhaps mention that this fostering of talent seems to be one of the cardinal features of educational policy in the Soviet Union and its imitators in Eastern Europe.

At this point voices will be heard murmuring 'élitism', 'meritocracy' and other such bad words. We must certainly discuss these notions, and the best way to discuss them is to raise the issue of equality of opportunity and its relation to plain equality in distribution. These two sorts of equality were once thought to be allies; now it is more common

to find them treated as enemies. They were thought to be allies when the principal obstacle to equality in the distribution of educational opportunities and all other good things in life was hereditary privilege. "Open careers to talents", it was said, "and these inequalities due to hereditary class will disappear." It was the achievement of the anti-meritocrats to point out that this may not be the end of the story. If one opens careers to talents, those with greater talents will get the pickings. A policy of complete equality of opportunity will therefore result in gross inequalities in the distribution of money, power, and all other sought-after things.

It has therefore come to be seen that in order to secure equality in distribution one has to place very severe restrictions on equality of opportunity. If we went to the extreme in this direction, we should afford opportunity in inverse proportion to talent, so that achievement was equalised. Since some cannot achieve much however much they are given in the way of opportunities, this would result in confining the achievement even of the talented to the same low level. Thus, if a complete moron cannot learn to read even if given the undivided attention of a tutor all to himself and the most expensive apparatus, we must not try to teach anybody to read, because that would give them an unfair advantage over the moron. Nobody is such an egalitarian as that; but elements of this kind of thinking appear in the most respectable places. It would seem that a cake-theorist who is also an out-and-out egalitarian is indeed committed to this absurdity.

It is less likely now than formerly that somebody will want to say at this point that I have failed to distinguish between *native* talent and those abilities which are the result of privileged educational and family backgrounds. It used to be said that anything a child could achieve by his own native ability, given the opportunity, he had a right to achieve. It was fair, that is to say, to compensate children who were disadvantaged by poor family backgrounds by giving them a head start over children of equal ability from more favourable backgrounds, even if it could only be done (as is indeed the case) by diverting educational resources away from the latter to the former. But in the case of children with different *native* endowments, such compensation was not called for. But now it has become a commonplace to say that talent itself, whether due to heredity or to early environment, is an unmerited advantage, for the lack of which those who lack it should be compensated.

Up-to-date egalitarian cake-theorists are therefore not likely to save themselves from the absurdity just mentioned by distinguishing between native talent and favourable family backgrounds as sources of unfair advantage. They will have to save themselves, if at all, by abandoning either the cake theory or their egalitarianism. I would recommend them to try, first, abandoning the cake theory and see how far that gets them. I must mention in passing that I have been talking about the distribution of educational resources as such, not about the rewards which are allotted to success in climbing the educational ladder. If it were claimed that an egalitarian could agree with all that I have said about distribution of educational resources, but demand that all should get equal rewards at the end of their education, that would raise a wider social question which is not the subject of this paper. It would have to be discussed in the light of, among other things, the difficulty of getting children to put out effort in learning without any incentive in the form of a reward for the successful. If, on the other hand, it is claimed that the vice of giving more resources to the talented is not the unfair distribution of resources in itself, but the effect it has in producing inequalities in the advantages enjoyed by the children for the rest of their lives, then we have to ask, about the total social effects of the educational arrangements which we adopt, the same questions as now face us in any case as a result of our abandonment of the cake theory.

If we abandon the cake theory, we are allowed to consider, in addition to the advantages

to the children of being educated, the advantages to the community of having them educated. As a change from my military example, let us consider the situation of a developing country. Let us suppose that this country badly needs doctors and engineers. Relatively few children have the ability to become first-rate or even competent doctors and engineers. Will anybody be found to say that in the interests of fairness those children who have this ability should be held back, and the limited resources which could have been used for their higher education devoted instead to educating the others, until all have reached the minimum standard of which all are capable? Shall we not be more likely to say that *for the good of all*, who need doctors and engineers, extra resources should be devoted to medical schools and schools of engineering? This, so far, is just intuition, not argument; but the arguments are to hand and I have already indicated what they are. If we are trying to be fair to all, the all that we are trying to be fair to include not merely the children but all those whose interests the children may be able to serve when they grow up.

This provides an argument for pursuing equality of opportunity in such countries. But the developed countries are no different. All societies need to make the best of the talent available to them. And doctors, engineers and other technicians are not the only products of education that we have to consider. Even more important are the people Plato referred to as 'rulers' – among whom we may, in deference to Marx, include the wielders of economic as well as political power. And that is where meritocracy comes in.

The argument about meritocracy would have been a great deal clearer if more attention had been given to the possible meanings of the word 'merit', or, to be more accurate, to the possible criteria of merit. The 'crat' part of the word 'meritocrat' means one who rules or wields power. We are unlikely, however democratic or egalitarian our politics become, to avoid being ruled, or having power exercised over us, by somebody (the power struggles between so-called egalitarian Maoists in communist China testify to this disagreeable fact). So we can perhaps pass by the 'crat' part of the question; we are going to have 'crats' of some kind, whether we like it or not, and whether they are politicians, bureaucrats, executives, union bosses or whatever. The more pressing part of the question, as Plato saw, was how to get good ones. And, we might add in deference to Popper, how to see to it that they do not get corrupted by power and are restrained even if they are, and can at worst be got rid of without violence.

Education plays a very big part in securing good rulers. No country will be well governed which does not possess a large reservoir of able people educated so as to enable them to make the best of their ability. If to say this is to be an élitist, then that is what I am. But it becomes at this point crucial to explain what one means by 'merit'. Merit is not the same thing as the ability to get to the top by whatever means. A genuinely meritocratic system is one in which the qualities which are desirable in a ruler are sought for in the education of those with a talent for ruling, and in the selection of the actual rulers from among their number. Such a system can be democratic if the method of selection is democratic; but this demands a fairly high quality of education and percipience in the electors.

Moral education is therefore, to say the least, a very important part of education – for otherwise how will they know merit when they see it? It is in danger of being neglected. And we have to decide what qualities constitute merit; and in doing this, moral philosophy may be a help, though that is not the topic of this paper. What I have been doing so far is to produce arguments for equality of opportunity in education, by showing that the opportunities which we are thereby providing are opportunities for children, not simply to advance their own interests, but to fit themselves to serve their fellow men in whatever capacity. That was the point of my title, 'Opportunity for What?'. So far, we have an argument for giving to talented children the opportunities which will enable them to do

this best. And inevitably these will also be opportunities to turn themselves into meritocrats, and thus the resulting distribution of power and advantages will be unequal. So far, therefore, we have a highly inegalitarian argument, based, paradoxically, on the principle that the equal interests of all affected by a policy are to be given equal weight.

But we must not be content with stating just that side of the case. If the arguments for educational equality based on rather general principles or slogans about fairness and ultimately on mere intuitions or prejudices are mostly bad ones, there are perhaps some good ones too. A utilitarian like myself can, in fact, produce some good arguments for a surprisingly high equality of distribution of all goods, in *most actual societies*, though if we try to extend these arguments to extend to unusual or fantastic conditions of society, trouble at once results. All this I have tried to show in the paper about justice referred to earlier; and comparable arguments can be adduced in the area of education.

One very important such argument is concerned with *envy*. The exercise of power by one person over others leads easily to envy and its near kin resentment, whether justified or not. This is mitigated in most societies by various means. It needs to be if they are to survive; and, even if envy does not lead to the collapse of society, it is in itself an evil. The most sinister of these means is the oldest. If those in power can make their subjects not merely *do* what the rulers want but *want* what the rulers want, envy and resentment may be enormously reduced. Whether in the form of traditional authority or of modern methods of propaganda, this expedient is made less effective by the spread of any kind of education that is more than mere indoctrination. It is unlikely, therefore, to be available to the rulers of a well educated society, and its place will have to be taken by more democratic means of reducing envy. The chief of these are, first, the ability of the ruled to select their rulers, to turn them out if they are dissatisfied, and to participate, themselves, in the processes of government to the extent that they can understand the questions at issue. All these have an immediate bearing on education; for they all presuppose that the ruled have some common ground of understanding with the rulers; and this they can only acquire if to some extent they have had a common basic education.

The second means of reducing envy goes a good deal deeper. The common education that I have just mentioned will, if properly organised (and that cannot be taken for granted), induce mutual respect. The British 'public' (i.e. private) schools are often said to be socially divisive, and so are the academically élitist grammar schools which the Labour Party wishes to absorb into a comprehensive egalitarian system. To some extent it is true that they are socially divisive. If some children, whether through their own talent or the wealth of their parents, are educated in different schools from the rest, they may come to think of the rest as less worthy of respect, and social divisions are thus accentuated. This, then, is another good reason for a common and to some extent equal education, though it is no reason for holding back the talented. Mutual respect may even be increased if everybody is known to be going to the place in society for which he is best fitted, and if the rewards which he then receives are proportionate to his services. Nearly everyone has something that he can do well, be it ruling or putting on thatched roofs, and we ought to be able to respect one another for our different attainments. That educational system will most reduce envy which is best at finding out children's peculiar talents and enabling them to exercise these. But we cannot abolish (except by better education of the envious) the kind of envy which, if it is deprived of one object, at once finds another. The important thing is: not to give an exaggerated prestige to certain roles in society at the expense of others (not even to that of ruler). The more people say that they do not envy the Prime Minister (as most sensible people say now) the better.

These, then, are good social reasons for providing equal opportunities for all in a common system of education, which should at the same time provide variety of curricula

to suit different children. They are very much better reasons than those based on abstract principles of distributive justice. They amount to saying that things will go better in society if that is the way we arrange our education – and that is a very strong reason. However, these social reasons for providing equality of educational opportunity *can* be counterbalanced, in certain situations, by other social reasons for not trying to bring it about too fast. When we are talking in these practical terms and not in terms of abstract principles of distributive justice, we have to strike a practical balance. To pursue equality in education at the cost of its overall quality may not be justifiable on utilitarian grounds. Abrupt changes which impair the education of a particular generation of children, and provoke their parents, as they have in some countries, even to violence, are seldom wise (though the State should not always give in to violence, or the result will be more violence). It will depend on the situation. We have, in determining our educational priorities, to try to be fair to everybody, including those who are likely to get their heads broken.

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