**From Rawlsian Autonomy to Sufficient Opportunity**

*Liam Shields*

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*0. Introduction*

Equality of Opportunity is widely thought of as the ideal most relevant to the design of educational institutions. The intuitive foundation of this ideal is that it is unjust for some to have greater advantages than others in virtue of at least some arbitrary factors, such as race, gender or social class. Since we have reasons to distribute advantageous positions, such as jobs, to the most talented, educational institutions, which develop talent, can help or hinder the realization of equality of opportunity. Therefore, equality of opportunity can offer guidance and assessment of the design of educational institutions.

One plausible and widely discussed interpretation of Equality of Opportunity is John Rawls’s principle of Fair Equality of Opportunity, which states that those with the same level of native talent and ambition should have similar prospects for success in the pursuit of advantageous positions, such as jobs.[[1]](#endnote-1) In this paper, I argue that theories of justice, like Rawls’, that give priority to a capacity for autonomy, are committed to a principle of sufficient opportunity in education. Thus, our primary focus when designing educational institutions should be on sufficiency and not equality, though equality may play a secondary role.[[2]](#endnote-2) I also show that this commitment has at least three benefits. First, it enables defenders of Fair Equality of Opportunity to overcome some powerful objections.[[3]](#endnote-3) Second, it suggests a revised version of the principle of Fair Equality of Opportunity that is more plausible than the original. Third, it has attractive implications for the design of educational institutions.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In Section One, I argue that Rawlsian autonomy requires some measure of self-knowledge, and in particular knowledge of one’s talents. This will usually require the development of those talents to a certain extent, which I term sufficient self-realization. In Section Two, I engage with Richard Arneson’s critique of Fair Equality of Opportunity, which states that Rawls’ justification of the principle, by appeal to self-realization, is perfectionist. I argue that this critique misses its mark because Rawls’ commitment to self-realization can be grounded in one of the two moral powers rather than controversial perfectionist claims about well-being. In Section Three, I argue that the requirement of sufficient self-realization suggests a revised version of Fair Equality of Opportunity that is more plausible than the original. In Section Four, I discuss the practical implications of prioritising sufficient self-realization in educational provision. In Section Five, I conclude that sufficient self-realization should play an important role in guiding and assessing the design of educational institutions.

*1. From Autonomy to Self-Realization*

In many of the most plausible liberal theories of justice, including Rawls’, individual rights and liberties are justified by appeal to individual autonomy.[[4]](#endnote-4) Broadly speaking, individual autonomy is the ideal that one’s life should be lived in accordance with one’s own authentic conviction, free from external manipulation and coercion.[[5]](#endnote-5) In this section I argue that a commitment to autonomy entails a commitment to sufficient self-realization, at least in societies like ours. Though my focus in this paper will be on Rawlsian liberalism, and Rawlsian autonomy, the claims that I make are by no means limited to that strand of liberalism. The argument of this section will apply to any liberal theory of justice that gives a certain kind of autonomy a certain priority.[[6]](#endnote-6) However, I do not wish to defend the priority ordering of principles in Rawls’ theory in this paper. I assume that a satisfactory defence of the priority of Rawlsian autonomy is available.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Rawls’s theory, *Justice as Fairness*, proceeds from the thought that sound principles of justice are those that would be the subject of fair agreement between free and equal moral persons. This agreement is modelled in what Rawls terms the original position. In the original position, persons are free and equal in that they possess two moral powers and an interest in securing the social conditions under which these powers can be developed and exercised. The capacity for a conception of the good, or as I will call it Rawlsian autonomy, is one of the moral powers, a capacity for a sense of justice, which I will not discuss, is the other.[[8]](#endnote-8) In Rawls’s words, the capacity for a conception of the good is,

“the capacity to have, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of the good. Such a conception is an ordered family of final ends and aims which specifies a person’s conception of what is of value in human life or, alternatively, of what is regarded as a fully worthwhile life.”[[9]](#endnote-9)

I will now explain why parties primarily moved to secure the social conditions in which they can develop and exercise this capacity would be moved to secure sufficient self-realization, at least in societies like our own.

The capacity to revise and rationally pursue a conception of the good requires that one is capable of determining what ends are worth pursuing. We may think that one can determine what ends are worth pursuing by reflection alone, without knowledge of our particular personality and our native talents. However, in order to be capable of *rationally* pursuing our conception of the good we must also be able to select appropriate means for the achievement of those ends. To do so, we must be able to make judgements about the concrete roles, of those available, that best instantiate our values.

To see the relevance of self-knowledge for the capacity for a conception of the good consider the following story. If, for me, at least part of what makes a human life worthwhile is promoting the well-being of others I must ask myself whether becoming a priest or a medical research scientist best realizes this commitment. I must also ask myself whether these roles will best realize my conception of the good *when I inhabit them*. It may be true that a medical research scientist, on average, makes a greater contribution to the well-being of others than a priest. As such, without particular knowledge of my talents and dispositions it may be rational for me to choose such a career. However, in reality I may not have the requisite natural talents to become a research scientist. I may have a certain disposition that makes it difficult for *me* to master complex scientific theories or I may not work well in teams, as such scientists must. However, I am a good listener and I am told that I give good advice and consolation. Since I like my own company and draw great strength and joy from reading the Bible I should probably elect to join the priesthood. My own pleasure and enjoyment of the role is also a factor in determining what more concrete goals to pursue. If I am likely to be a frustrated and miserable research scientist but a happy and fulfilled priest then this rationally weighs against my opting to pursue the scientific career. I can revise or more rationally pursue my conception of the good on grounds pertaining to my native talent and dispositions and so, when I am denied knowledge of these grounds, my capacity to revise and rationally pursue my conception of the good is impaired.

In this case, my failure to choose the priesthood, in itself, is not a failure of autonomy, in the Rawlsian sense. Rawlsian autonomy does not require that I choose the most rational plan of action. Rawlsian autonomy only requires the room to exercise and adequately develop the capacity to revise and rationally pursue plans. This capacity is impaired and can be frustrated by a lack of self-knowledge that would enable me to revise and rationally pursue my conception of the good. Therefore, some level of self-knowledge, including knowledge of our innate talents, is required for Rawlsian autonomy and the social conditions for its exercise and development.

It is almost always through the development and exercise of native talents that we become aware of the extent and type of talents we have, as well as the enjoyment of exercising them. Because of this, achievement of self-knowledge will often require that our native talents are developed to a sufficient extent, sufficient for Rawlsian autonomy. Thus, free and equal moral persons, in the original position, would give special protection to opportunities for sufficient self-realization because such opportunities are central to the social conditions required for the development and exercise of one of the moral powers.

However, once we have enough self-realization for Rawlsian autonomy, our reasons to become more and more self-realized are not equally weighty. For example, professional athletes develop their native talent beyond any level that could reasonably be considered sufficient for the purposes of Rawlsian autonomy. They do so having acknowledged, at some lesser level of development, that they have a very significant underlying talent that is worth their while developing to its limit. What this tells us is that at some point along the developmental continuum there is a change in the nature of our reasons, a point beyond which an individual cannot claim for more assistance on the grounds of Rawlsian autonomy.[[10]](#endnote-10) We may have additional reasons to develop talent beyond that level that may be linked to our particular ambitions and preferences, such as those concerning athletics. However, the reasons we have to develop talent beyond that level are of a different sort, with a different weight, and therefore can more easily outweighed by counter-veiling considerations. Moreover, such reasons may not be reasons of justice if they are not acceptable in the original position. We do well to notice this change in our reasons as it specifies a limit to what we can demand of one another as a matter of justice.

We should note that the move from self-knowledge to sufficient self-realization as a demand of justice requires an assumption that self-knowledge is only or best available through the development of talents. There are two ways that the requirement of sufficient self-realization is a *fact sensitive* demand of justice.[[11]](#endnote-11) If we could know the extent and kind of our native talents without their development, perhaps because some technology capable of profiling such talents were available, then we would have less reason to have them developed for Rawlsian autonomy because our ability to plan and revise our conception of the good is linked to self-knowledge rather than the development of talent itself. Also, if we could have access to the pleasure we would derive from exercising these talents without their being developed and exercised, again through some advance in technology, then we would not require sufficient self-realization for the social conditions required for Rawlsian autonomy. It is important to note that sufficient self-realization is contingently linked to Rawlsian Autonomy in these ways. However, since we currently lack these technologies, we require sufficient self-realization as an instrument to that level of self-knowledge that is necessary for the adequate development and exercise of the capacity to revise and rationally pursue our conceptions of the good.[[12]](#endnote-12)

In the following three sections I will draw out the implications that sufficient self-realization has for certain criticisms of Rawls’ justification of Fair Equality of Opportunity; for his the content of that principle; and for practical debates about the design of educational institutions.

*2. Responding to Arneson*

The principle of Fair Equality of Opportunity has been criticised by Richard Arneson.[[13]](#endnote-13) Arneson advances two related objections to Fair Equality of Opportunity.

First, Arneson claims there is an inconsistency between Rawls’ justification of the principle and one aim of his theory, which is to be neutral between conceptions of the good.[[14]](#endnote-14) To support this claim Arneson cites Rawls’s who, in justifying the principle, says that those denied Fair Equality of Opportunity would have a valid complaint because “they would be deprived of one of the main forms of human good.”[[15]](#endnote-15) Second, Arneson argues that if opportunities for self-realization are an especially important part of well-being, as Rawls seems to claim, this can be accommodated within the currency of well-being more generally.[[16]](#endnote-16) As such, there is no need for a separate principle, such as Fair Equality of Opportunity, to regulate the distribution of advantageous positions.

Putting this together, the challenge for Rawlsian defenders of Fair Equality of Opportunity is to show that there is an argument for the special importance of opportunities for self-realization that,

A) Explains the non-derivative importance of self-realization *and*

B) Does not rely upon social evaluations of conceptions of the good

In this section, I argue that adequate responses to A and B can be formulated by drawing on the argument of Section One. In that section I argued that sufficient self-realization, as a means to knowledge of our talents, is intimately linked to Rawlsian autonomy. Knowledge of our talents is relevant to the formation of our ambitions, our level of ambition and our life plans. It is therefore central to making informed decisions about the revision and rational pursuit of our conception of the good. This is illustrated by the following examples.

Clever Dick is a young boy who has a talent for mathematics but is regularly told by his family that he is stupid and will never amount to anything. Singing Sara is a young girl who has an excellent singing voice but is always told to “shut up” by her parents because, in their words, she “sounds like a bag of cats”.

Dick and Sara are denied opportunities know about, and therefore intentionally develop, their native talents. Many would claim that they have been cheated of an important possible source of well-being derived from the skilful exercise of their talents, and any economic rewards attached to positions they may secure in virtue of their talents. However, as Arneson notes, these advantages could be accommodated within a single principle applying to well-being. Nevertheless, Rawlsians can observe a non-derivative injustice in the above examples. What is salient, for the Rawlsian, is that Dick and Sara have been cheated in a further way, which violates their autonomy and status as free and equal. They have been denied knowledge central to the exercise of their capacities to revise and rationally pursue their conceptions of the good. Such knowledge might be a reason to revise either their ends or the means to their ends. This illustrates the way that some of our reasons to promote self-realization do not derive from well-being. Rather, they are grounded in the interests free and equal moral persons share. Some level of self-realization is ultimately grounded in the capacity for a conception of the good, not well-being. Any single distributive principle for well-being may fail to give self-realization the correct priority relative to other justice-salient distribuenda and would fail to capture the way that self-realization can be important for Rawlsian autonomy. This explains the non-derivative importance of self-realization, in response to A).

Recall that part B) of Arneson’s challenge states that Rawls’ justification of Fair Equality of Opportunity, which appeals to self-realization, requires a social evaluation of conceptions of the good. But Rawls’ commitment to the two moral powers, from which a demand for sufficient self-realization is derived, is an attempt to eschew such evaluations. It is important to note that whether a view is neutral or perfectionist does not depend on the policy outcomes, which make it easier or more difficult to pursue some conceptions of the good. Rather, neutrality depends on the nature of the reasons that justify those policies and their acceptability to those in the original position. An adequate response to part B) of Arneson’s challenge must show that there is an argument for self-realization that is acceptable to persons in the original position.[[17]](#endnote-17)

We can imagine parties to the original position reasoning as I have in Section One. They would have reasons to be knowledgeable about their talents and would therefore have reasons to secure the social conditions conducive to the acquisition of such knowledge. These reasons ultimately derive from fundamental reasons to secure the conditions under which he or she can develop and exercise the capacity for a conception of the good. This commitment does not glorify self-realization as a conception of the good any more than the requirement of Rawlsian autonomy glorifies an autonomous way of life. This is because the reasons that justify autonomy’s place in Rawls’ theory are not grounded in a controversial account of human flourishing or value. Rather, they are grounded in a conception of the person as free and equal, a conception no reasonable person can reject. One does not have to accept Kantian or Millian perfectionist autonomy to accept that having knowledge of where one’s talents lie is required for rational planning and revision of a conception of the good. It is perfectly consistent with a neutral stance to say that self-realization is required only to the extent that it is necessary for the exercise of our two moral powers, those we have in virtue of our status as free and equal. Further advances might be supported by reasons of well-being, but those would be perfectionist. This shows that the commitment to self-realization can be given a neutral justification.

Fair Equality of Opportunity, then, can be grounded in a concern with self-realization without being reducible to well-being, avoiding part A), and can do so without sacrificing neutrality, avoiding part B).

*3. Fair Equality of Opportunity and Sufficient Opportunity*

The principle of Fair Equality of Opportunity supplements the Careers Open to Talents View, which requires that advantageous positions, such as jobs, are formally open to all. Fair Equality of Opportunity requires that all have a fair chance to attain these positions.[[18]](#endnote-18) Fair chances obtain when those who are equal along two dimensions, *talent* and *ambition*, are equal along a third dimension, their *prospects for success in the attainment of advantageous positions*.[[19]](#endnote-19) Thus, any inequality in prospects between those in the same comparison class (those with equal talent and ambition) is unjust while inequality among others is not condemned. Different, and differently plausible, specifications of the talent and ambition components of comparison class are available. In this section, I argue that class for comparison should make reference to developed *talents* after sufficient self-realization rather than native *talents*, as this yields a more plausible principle of Fair Equality of Opportunity.

One dimension deemed relevant for egalitarian comparison is “talent”. An important question arises when we consider what talents to focus on and the lengths we should go to in order to reveal these talents to those who have them. The difficulty of specifying talents for the purposes of egalitarian comparison is not simply an epistemic one. If the problem was merely that it is difficult to *know* who has what talents then one could argue that we should use the best proxy. But if it were impossible to have knowledge of the distribution of native talents, this might imply that it was an unsuitable basis for a principle of justice.[[20]](#endnote-20) In our case, the problem is specifying the lengths it is *reasonable* to go in order to discover individuals’ native talent. The problem is raised by considering what our best is, and, indeed, if we should do our best for some or all, or if we should instead secure enough. Thus, the following question is an important one, but one that has been neglected: “How should opportunities for the development of (knowledge of) our native talents be distributed?”

Rawls’s own answer seems to be that all native talents, known and unknown, should count in the determination of one’s class for egalitarian comparison.[[21]](#endnote-21) In explaining the principle Rawls uses the phrase “distribution of native endowments” and it is easy to see why when we consider that he thought that social class of origin should not affect differences in prospects for success.[[22]](#endnote-22) Rawls saw that social class greatly influences opportunities for talent development and levels of developed talent, but class differences cannot influence the distribution of native talent. So Rawls holds that those with the same native talents and ambition should be in the same class for comparison, with respect to success in pursuit of advantageous positions. This specification of talent is the complete talents view.

*Complete Talents*: When determining comparison class for the purposes of Fair Equality of Opportunity we are to count as talent all and only the native talents that individuals have.

However, this specification is vulnerable to the following serious objection. Those with undeveloped native talents are unlikely to have similar levels of ambition to those with the same profile of native talents whose talents are more developed, or at least known to them. Our level of ambition and our particular ambitions, of which our level of ambition is a function, are often talent-sensitive. If I know that I have a good head for figures I am more likely to form the ambition of becoming a banker or an accountant. If I know I have a talent for juggling I am more likely to form the ambition of becoming a juggler. In each case, knowledge of my level of talent is important for forming ambitions. Indeed, it seems odd to think I could rationally and reasonably choose an occupation without some knowledge of my talents and abilities.

Our particular ambitions are often formed in light of knowledge of the extent and type of talents we have. Such knowledge is important if we are to be able to reasonably and rationally plan our lives, as explained in the research scientist and priest case above. For this reason it is implausible to hold that only inequalities in prospects for success between those with the same *native* talent and ambition are unjust. If the Complete Talents specification regulated educational opportunities, talented but less self-aware children would fare much less well than talented and knowledgeable children, and we would not be able to identify this inequality as an injustice. Many people with equal native talents would not be in the same class for comparison because they would have different ambitions and different levels of ambition from one another. Those who are talented and know it are likely to have higher levels of ambition and aspire to particular positions that offer greater advantages than those who, while equal in native talent, are unaware.[[23]](#endnote-23) It is this unfairness in the distribution of self-knowledge that makes these outcomes unjust. The failure to capture these egalitarian intuitions provides grounds to reject the Complete Talents specification.

One could avoid the objection above without rejecting complete talents by instead supplementing Complete Talents with the Complete Ambition specification of ambition.

*Complete Ambition:* When determining comparison class for the purposes of Fair Equality of Opportunity we are to count ambitions as those that the individual would have, or the level of ambition the individual would have, if they had complete knowledge of their talents.

This view avoids the self-awareness objection because it takes something other than our actual, possibly stunted, ambitions as relevant for egalitarian comparison. However, Complete Ambition is objectionable on the grounds that our actual ambitions and level of ambition are more salient to just treatment than hypothetical ambitions. To support this claim consider the following example. If, under full knowledge of her talents, Trudy would, but currently does not, want to undertake a PhD in the humanities, it would be wrong to judge current inequalities between Trudy and someone who has that actual ambition and talent in pursuit of doctoral funding or academic positions as unjust on those grounds. Likewise, if Trudy would only want to be a leader in her field (academic or otherwise) if she had knowledge of her amazing talents, but in fact did not have that knowledge, then inequalities between her and others who do have that level of ambition and the same level of native talent are not currently unjust. Thus, I think we have decisive reason to hold the following view about ambitions.

*Actual Ambition:* When determining comparison class for the purposes of Fair Equality of Opportunity we count as ambitions or level of ambition those the individual actually has.[[24]](#endnote-24)

In place of *Complete Talents* we should hold *Actual Talent* alongside *Actual Ambition.*

*Actual Talent:* When determining comparison class for the purposes of Fair Equality of Opportunity we are to count as talent all and only the talents that the individual has actually developed.

However, this view has terribly counter-intuitive implications if we do not supplement it with a requirement to discover talents to a certain extent. If only those with equal known talents are in the same comparison class then the principle would be unable to condemn massive inequalities where wealthy parents spend more resources than poorer parents on making their children’s talents known. If the discovery of talents is left to parents then the inequalities present in one generation will most likely be repeated in the next and avoiding this was one of Rawls’ motivations in devising such a principle. Indeed, *Actual Talent* plus *Actual Ambition* just is ‘careers open to talents’.

The discussion so far draws our attention to the central but neglected question of “How should opportunities for the development of (knowledge of) our talents be distributed?” Any account of equality of opportunity should ensure that *Actual Talent* meets some standard, not to take something other than *Actual Talent* as determining comparison class membership, as in the original formulation of Fair Equality of Opportunity. Rawls cites an inability to condemn inequality between the similarly (naturally) talented and ambitious as the inadequacy of careers open to talents. But the inadequacy of careers open to talents lies instead in there being no supplementary requirement to develop talent.

How should opportunities for the development of (knowledge of) our talents be distributed? One answer is that we should fully reveal all of the talents of all individuals. Presumably the most attractive way to achieve Fair Equality of Opportunity, as originally specified, would be for all native talents to become known. If this were the case, then ambition would be sensitive to native talent because native talent would be developed talent and, presumably, known. However, it is implausible to think that it is required by justice that educational institutions be designed to discover and develop any native talent anyone has, however obscure or well-hidden. At some point the benefit of uncovering more talents will be outweighed by the costs of devoting resources to discovering talents. For example, imagine the case of Arnold, who, if given adequate training and encouragement would have been an excellent soccer player, especially had his teachers picked up on this at an early age. However, Arnold’s teachers spent more time attempting to cultivate any rugby playing ability he had. If the school had recognized Arnold’s potential for soccer, which was not manifest, and had given him fairly minimal training he could have made informed decisions about developing his talent further. This may not be a case of injustice. If Arnold had adequate scope for the development of many of his native talents then he arguably enjoyed the social conditions conducive to the development and exercise of Rawlsian autonomy, including sufficient self-realization. This particular failure to develop a native talent is not an injustice because Arnold was good at other things and other talents were developed. This is the case even though this failure may have lowered Arnold’s prospects relative to other, similarly talented, people, perhaps because soccer is more economically rewarding than rugby.

A more plausible principle for the fair distribution of opportunities to develop talent is to offer a variety of exercises known to reveal a good spread of talents. Such a principle would require that each individual secured sufficient knowledge of their talents for Rawlsian autonomy, which often requires their development. This would lead us to accept *Actual Ambition* and *Actual Talent,* or careers open to talents, alongside *Sufficient Self-Realization*.

*Sufficient Self-Realization*: We have very weighty reasons to ensure that Actual Talent reflects those talents one has after, at least, sufficient self-realization.[[25]](#endnote-25)

It is convenient that this attractive way of reformulating the principle of Fair Equality of Opportunity is already included within Rawls’ prior commitment to autonomy, which specifies the contours of his first principle, as discussed in Section One.[[26]](#endnote-26) Any plausible principle of justice applying to education must take this adequacy view of the discovery of talents seriously. By failing to make provision for talent development, rival views will either treat those with known talents and those with unknown talents the same, as in the original formulation for Fair Equality of Opportunity, or they will provide no imperative to treat people fairly in the discovery of their talents, as the Complete Talents interpretation does.

There may, of course, be additional reasons of justice to be concerned with inequalities above the threshold, but it is inequality in opportunities for talent development that we should focus on rather than inequalities between those with equal native talent *and* ambition.[[27]](#endnote-27) If children from wealthier backgrounds received far more resources to facilitate talent discovery than children from poor backgrounds we may find this objectionable even when all have secured sufficient self-realization. However, these claims of injustice would have to be made on different grounds than those offered by the requirement of sufficient self-realization. As such, these inequalities may be less urgent than the insufficiencies. Here I have only sought to establish that the principle of sufficient self-realization for Rawlsian autonomy gives us especially weighty reasons to develop talents and can help to solve a problem with the principle of Fair Equality of Opportunity. I have not made the claim, often associated with sufficientarianism, that inequalities above the threshold are not disturbing.[[28]](#endnote-28)

*4. Education and Sufficient Opportunity*

In Rawls’ theory, autonomy has lexical priority over Fair Equality of Opportunity. So, if sufficient self-realization is part of autonomy, as I have argued, Rawlsians should give priority to the development of self-knowledge over equalizing talent development or prospects for success, though equalizing prospects for success after sufficient self-realization is my favoured interpretation of Fair Equality of Opportunity. The requirement of sufficient self-realization gives us reason to favour sufficient opportunity for talent development in education and this has an important link to the idea of comprehensive schooling, the aim of which is to provide children with a variety of educational challenges in various areas, not just traditional academics.[[29]](#endnote-29) A wide-ranging curriculum would be required to uncover the diverse talents that children have and the design of educational institutions should be guided by the idea of uncovering a range of talents. This will most likely require comprehensive schooling for all where children are given significant opportunities to derive enjoyment from certain activities and to cultivate certain skills. This comprehensive schooling will satisfy each person’s claim, ultimately grounded in Rawlsian autonomy, to have knowledge of their talents and interests.

Practically speaking, this requirement of justice does not rule out private education or even tell strongly against, unlike some egalitarian principles, at least if taken on their own. However, where the private education system can be shown to threaten the achievement of sufficient self-realization for those in the state system, when it acts as a drain, the principle does tell against it. *Ceteris paribus*, an appropriate source of remedial funds would be those who send their children to private school. This is because it is sensible to assume that those who attend elite private schools receive more than enough opportunity to secure sufficient self-realization and that many of those at state schools do not. A concrete suggestion would be to tax private schools to pay for this requirement. In the UK we could revoke their charitable status and divert the revenue to programmes in state schools that seek to realize sufficient self-realization.

One may think that taxing private schools or revoking their charitable status is not the best source of revenue. We may think this for reasons of efficiency but we may also think this for reasons of fairness. Those who pay for private schooling of their children are not as well-off as many others. Those very well-off others who do not have children or do not pay for private schooling will be made no worse off under this proposal for funding sufficient self-realization. Since many plausible theories of justice hold that we have stronger reasons to redistribute from the most well-off than from others, we have at least some reason to favour a ‘Very Well-Off Person Tax’ over a ‘Private School Tax’. While I agree with that thought, the principle of sufficient self-realization, on its own, does not enable us to make this distinction. It only helps us to distinguish between those who have enough self-realization and those who do not. Support for a ‘Very Well-Off Person Tax’ must come from a further argument that I have not made. For this reason I restrict myself to the above claim.

We should note, however, that the principle of sufficient self-realization can provide some support for private schooling in some circumstances. This, it may be thought, runs contrary to the egalitarian principles that have been for so long the focus of those concerned with the design of educational institutions. A society permitting private schooling would receive support from a principle of Rawlsian autonomy if it is the best way to secure sufficient self-realization.

Finally, those adults who have been failed by their early education should not be denied opportunities to develop sufficient self-realization later on. As such, merit or qualification should not be used to reject the applications of these mature students from universities or colleges and other roles that seek to develop talent. Since individuals may not secure sufficient self-realization, it is imperative that we make access to educational institutions available throughout all stages in life. We have reasons to secure sufficient self-realization and so we also have reasons to maintain that sufficient self-realization. This can be achieved through improving access to life-long learning schemes.

*5. Conclusion*

In this paper I have defended a role for sufficient self-realization in liberal theories of justice. I began, in Section One, by arguing that Rawls’ commitment to autonomy entails a commitment to sufficient self-realization. In Section Two, I argued that this allows us to defend his principle of Fair Equality of Opportunity against Richard Arneson’s objections. In Section Three, I argued that Fair Equality of Opportunity can be rendered more plausible by appeal to sufficient self-realization and this yields a weighty requirement to secure sufficient opportunity for self-realization. Finally, in Section Four, I considered the implications of this requirement for educational institutions.

To be sure, there is more work to be done in both specifying how much enough is and in specifying a fair distribution of opportunities for talent development beyond sufficiency. Here I have said that a sufficient opportunity should be expected to reveal a good spread of talents and I hope that this provides some guidance where the importance of developing talents clashes with the importance of readying students for future work and providing them with a narrow set of skills and little knowledge of their underlying talents. I have not responded to further problems that have been raised with Fair Equality of Opportunity, and Equality of Opportunity in general, but any full defence of that view will have to proceed in several steps and I hope to have contributed to that process.[[30]](#endnote-30)

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1. Rawls (2001: 42-4). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Equality could, for example, play a secondary role as a lexically inferior demand of justice. Such a demand would enable us to favour equal distributions where everyone has enough or more equal distributions which fared equally with respect to the sufficiency principle. More naturally, however, the secondary role for equality would be the one suggested by Rawls’ Fair Equality of Opportunity principle, which equalizes prospects for success among the equally motivated and talented once sufficiency self-realization is achieved. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Criticisms of Fair Equality of Opportunity can be found in Alexander (1986), Arneson (1999), Chambers (2009) and Mason (2004). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Examples of such theories include Dworkin (2001), Raz (1986) and Rawls (1999). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Christman (1989). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. This includes Andrew Mason’s view, which grounds equality of opportunity in Razian autonomy through respect for agency, see Mason, (2004: 378-379). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. It should be noted that autonomy only has priority over social and economic goods for Rawls under reasonably favourable conditions. For a defence of that priority see, Taylor (2003) and (2004). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. It may be possible to ground sufficient self-realization in both moral powers. I think it more plausible to link knowledge of talents to a capacity for a conception of the good than the capacity for a sense of justice since the former concerns individual life plans and the latter citizenship. In any case, I do not deny that it can be grounded in both, but it is sufficient for my purposes that the principle can be grounded in the capacity for a conception of the good. I thank Nicola Mulkeen for suggesting this point. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Rawls (2001: 18-19). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Shields (2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. For discussion of fact sensitive principles see Cohen (2008:229-273). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. School assessments may form a reliable basis on which to measure depth and kind of talent, but these measures are not as reliable, or as wide-spread, as they must be to satisfy the demand that I have laid out here. Also, the principle I propose recommends not only the development and use of reliable talent profiling technology but also the dissemination of its findings to each person. Moreover, even in a world where we have these technologies we may have other reasons to prefer that sufficient self-realization be satisfied without such technologies. I thank Nicola Mulkeen for suggesting this point. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Arneson (1999) [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid: 89. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Rawls(1999: 73) [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid: 89. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. See Rawls (2005: xlii-xliii, Xliv) [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Rawls (2001: 43). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Rawls (2001: 44). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Some normative implications of epistemic problems are discussed in Chambers (2009: 382-385). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. It is a further question of ‘when’ such comparisons should be made and how regularly. For the original identification and discussion of these problems see Ibid. I believe that on any of the options available to Rawlsians, either a whole lives perspective or an age of reason perspective, the addition of a requirement of sufficient opportunity makes that view more not less plausible for the reasons that I give. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Rawls (2001: 44). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Of course, knowledge of talent may lead us to make greater mistakes and false beliefs in talent can do the same, but these are welfarist considerations for or against the development of talent and so these implications of the welfarist view are not counter-examples to my, non-welfarist, principle. I thank Nicola Mulkeen for suggesting this point. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. We might want to supplement this with some kind of authenticity or autonomy requirement to avoid the prospect of brainwashing but this would be ruled out by the Rawlsian prior commitment to autonomy. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. The “at least” clause is necessary to avoid levelling down. My claim is not that actual talents should be those that an individual has after sufficient self-realization. No more and no less. My claim is, rather, that we have an especially weighty reason to be concerned with achieving sufficient self-realization and taking actual talent as a factor relevant to determining class for comparison. Further talent development may be encouraged, but it must be on different and possibly weaker grounds. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid: 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. At least if we accept something like careers open to talents, which allocates positions meritocratically. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. For examples of Sufficientarian views that deny the importance of supra-threshold benefits see Frankfurt (1987) and Huseby (2010). See Crisp (2003a) and (2003b) for a sufficientarian view that seems to have this structure but remains agnostic on the value of supra-threshold benefits. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Pring and Walford (1996) [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Other objections are discussed in Clayton, M. (2001: 254-257), who also discusses the worry that this sort of defence of Fair Equality of Opportunity would not provide Rawls with grounds to distinguish, as he does, between social and natural sources of inequality. Clayton also anticipates a principle of sufficient opportunity.

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    **About the Author**

    **Liam Shields** is Lecturer in Political Theory and the University of Manchester and Postdoctoral Scholar in Philosophy at Stanford University. His research and teaching interests fall within contemporary political philosophy, particularly distributive justice and sufficientarianism. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)