

Valentin Stoian

## JUSTICE IN EDUCATION: EVALUATING THE SATZ-ANDERSON RESPONSE

Valentin Stoian  
National Institute for Intelligence  
Studies  
Bucharest, Romania  
valentin.stoian@hotmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*The paper aims to evaluate the reply offered by philosophers of educational justice Elizabeth Anderson and Debra Satz to the challenge posed by Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift. According to the latter two authors, the positional character of education undermines the application of sufficientarian principles to the distribution of educational resources. In the Brighouse-Swift view, a good is positional when its crucial characteristic is how much one possesses of it in relation to others. The two philosophers argue that education has this characteristic. Satz and Anderson reply that sufficientarianism can also survive in education, as the current educational structure should be modified. They maintain that the argument for an adequate minimum can diffuse the positionality objection and that by modifying the social structure to allow for other avenues of social mobility one can put less stress on formal education. The paper rejects the two claims and argues against sufficientarianism in education. Firstly, it puts forward the idea that any minimum is politically debatable and not an adequate reply to the positionality objection. The paper then rejects the second claim by arguing that it requires too much social engineering and that education under conditions of equality fits the purpose of social mobility much better.*

### Introduction

Theorists of equality of educational opportunity have recently been challenged by those supporting the perspective of educational adequacy. Rather than focusing on the interpersonal comparisons required by educational equality, the proponents of educational adequacy suggest that guaranteeing a basic minimum is a worthy enough ideal. Moreover, in order to counter certain criticisms, those who defend educational adequacy suggest a very inclusive minimum. However, proponents of educational equality reject this claim and offer several arguments against adequacy.

### KEYWORDS

- Education
- Justice
- Sufficientarianism

The aim of this article is to evaluate Debra Satz' and Elizabeth Anderson's replies to one argument against adequacy. The argument which triggered fierce criticisms was suggested by equality theorists Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift. The "argument from positionality" maintains that adequacy is not enough for certain types of goods such as education. While guaranteeing a specific minimum might be enough for certain items, such as consumer goods, education is special. Education, along with a few other goods, has a positional character, in the sense that absolute levels are not important. What matters, rather, is one's position relative to others in the total distribution of such a good. Thus, positional goods have a zero-sum character: improving one's position involves worsening the others'. Brighouse and Swift maintain that guaranteeing a minimum, even an inclusive one, for positional goods is not enough.

The article will argue that the replies to the "argument from positionality" are inadequate and do not succeed in defeating it. In order to do so, the article will support the claim that the response of those who favor adequacy relies on two equally hard to defend claims. Firstly, the claims of theorists such as Debra Satz and Elizabeth Anderson rely on extra arguments for what the adequate minimum should be. It is itself not part of the argument for adequacy. Secondly, the article will maintain that implementation of the recommendations which are offered as responses to positionality require much more social transformation than the implementation of educational equality. Anderson's idea of eliminating the positional character of education is far more demanding than simply implementing educational equality.

While other arguments, which will also be reviewed, in favor of educational equality have been brought, I believe that the positional goods claim is one of the most relevant. It points out to a crucial characteristic that education has, and only very few other goods possess. Further, the effects of the positionality of education have been shown in the extreme arms races already present in many countries. The US student debt debate is only one of the most glaring examples of how markets in education can have disastrous results.

The article will begin by presenting the argument from positionality, as outlined by the two main defenders of educational equality: Adam Swift and Harry Brighouse. Further, the responses of Elizabeth Anderson and Debra Satz will be summarized. In the next section, the wider debate will be briefly presented. Finally, the article will evaluate these responses and offer its own arguments in support of Brighouse and Swift.

## **The argument from positionality**

Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift detail their argument from positionality in an article entitled "Equality, Priority, and Positional Goods" (Brighouse and Swift: 2006). Moreover, they briefly come back to it in their latest article entitled "Putting Educational Equality in its Place" (Brighouse and Swift: 2008). The two argue that the reason for which educational adequacy is an improper ideal is that education is a positional good. Unlike usual goods, the two authors argue that positional goods "are goods the absolute value of which, to their possessors, depends on those possessors' place in the distribution of the good—on their relative standing with respect to the

good in question” (Brighthouse and Swift: 2006, 472). In other words, such a good is not absolutely valuable, but its value for one person hinges on how much others have of the same good. The standard example is that of education. In a society in which literacy is scarce, having a primary school degree which teaches literacy offers one advantages over the others. However, in a highly educated society, having a college degree might not mean much when masters’ and PhD degrees are widely available.

Brighthouse and Swift argue that the positional character of education undermines the sufficientarian argument for adequacy. On the adequacy perspective, if a basic minimum is guaranteed, inequalities above this minimum are allowed to emerge out of the private decisions of individuals. For example, parents would be allowed to invest extra resources from their private funds in buying their children extra education. In order to diminish the most unpleasant consequences of such a view, both Debra Satz and Elizabeth Anderson argue for a very inclusive minimum which they tie to citizenship (Satz: 2007) and democratic equality (Anderson: 2007). However, the fact still remains that almost any inequalities above the minimum are permitted.

Therefore, Brighthouse and Swift claim that allowing inequality in effective educational resources has an effect not only on the existence but also on the extent of the inequalities themselves. Because of the positional character of education, by allowing some to have more, the others will actually have less. Those who do not get the extra educational resources invested in them do not simply remain at their previous levels. Rather, their position is diminished. The positional character of education could be best understood through an analogy with an example offered in another philosophical context. When trying to justify prioritarianism, philosopher Derek Parfit offers the following example: several people are trapped on a mountain, some at lower altitudes, and some at higher altitudes. Parfit shows that, if there are several people on a mountain at different altitudes, people at higher altitudes find it harder to breathe. However, they would find it as hard to breathe even if there were no people below (Parfit: 2000, 101). In the case of positional goods, the addition of extra people at a lower altitude would actually make it harder to breathe for those at the higher altitudes.

Brighthouse and Swift also argue that in the case of positional goods, both prioritarians and egalitarians might accept leveling down. Since the value of what one person has is also relative to what other people have, destroying the resources of one above actually improves the situation of the one below. Thus, the prioritarian demand that the needs of the worst off matter the most might be satisfied by improving their situation through levelling down (Brighthouse and Swift: 2006, 474). This is employed as an argument for affirming that positional goods can be distributed equally since equality is similarly exposed to the levelling down objection as other distributive views.

Another justification for equality of education based on its positionality is grounded on fairness. Education is also valuable as a means. Education is useful to obtain jobs, money and privileges in a competitive market economy. The positional good of education is a means to other non-positional goods for which people compete. Because there is a competition for resources, equality even through levelling down might be required on the grounds of fairness: in order to offer fair chances for everyone in the competition for resources, one should make sure that education is equally distributed (Brighthouse and Swift: 2006, 2008).

Brighouse and Swift support a meritocratic understanding of the egalitarian ideal. In other words, they believe that differences in social background that each child brings to the fore should be neutralized, but that educational resources should be distributed according to “talent and effort”. Thus, they claim that revealed work can be used as a screening mechanism to allow the distribution of educational resources and of further access to positions of high responsibility in society (Brighouse and Swift: 2009).

### **The Satz-Anderson response**

Both Debra Satz and Elizabeth Anderson accept the argument from positionality as a challenge to their proposed principle of adequacy. Both rely on two very similar responses, which resemble each other in contours but differ in content. Their first claim is that the adequate minimum should be very inclusive and even sensitive to inequalities. The second is that there has to be some form of social arrangement which might “reduce the positional character of education” (Brighouse and Swift: 2006, p 488).

Elizabeth Anderson presents her version of the adequacy ideal as part of a wider goal of democratic equality. She offers four conditions which an adequate education for the elite will have to satisfy. These conditions allow for the elite to be formed in such a way as to serve the interests of the people over whom they will command. The elite must be aware of the problems which non-elite people face. Moreover, this elite should have a disposition to serve those interests, have technical competence to do so and should interact respectfully with those over whom it commands (Anderson: 2007, p 597). In order for elites to truly serve the interests of other people, they must have first-person knowledge of the problems other people face. Anderson maintains that academic knowledge and formal, even if well-meaning, adherence to the ideal of public service and diversity do not achieve this goal.

Anderson argues that only integrated education has the potential of overcoming the shortcomings of merely formal education. The elite should be drawn from multiple levels of society. Belonging to the elite should not merely be based on academic qualifications which favor the better-off. The integration of the elite is the only way through which its members can have first person knowledge of each other. Anderson’s conception relies to a great extent on the premise that only daily interaction with people from different backgrounds allows one to truly share others’ problems. She identifies segregation and stereotypes as the main evils which block this interaction among people from different social groups and suggests that her standard of adequacy requires segregation to be overcome (Anderson: 2007).

Given the effort that Anderson makes to reject the “argument from positionality”, one could infer that she realizes the threat it poses to her idea. First she claims that, if properly implemented, her standard would block the accrual of the positional good of education to those already better off. Since an elite drawn from the privileged class, on Anderson’s view, a less adequate elite, colleges would have to take pains to make sure that those they admit would belong to all social groups. Therefore, she recommends that the academic knowledge of those that apply to college be only

one part of their qualifications. Rather, a quota system would be implemented. Elite-educating universities would have to make sure that the future elite is adequately integrated. In Anderson's words: "The marginal value to a college admissions committee of additional academic qualifications among the better-off should fall off steeply in head-to-head competition with sufficiently academically prepared students from disadvantaged social backgrounds" (Anderson: 2007, p 616).

Debra Satz relies on similar arguments as Anderson. The adequate minimum which her article proposes is defined slightly differently than Anderson's, but is also very inclusive. She argues that the minimum should be tied to the possibility of becoming an effective citizen in the world as it is shaped today. Satz follows T.H. Marshall in defining citizenship as determined by "the political, civic and economic conditions that are needed to make one a full member in one's society" (Satz: 2007, p 636). Thus, in order to be a full citizen, one should enjoy political rights and freedoms, have rights in civil society such as property and access to justice and be entitled to a minimum threshold of economic welfare (Satz: 2007, pp 637-38)

Thus, Satz entrusts education with realizing these goals. On her view, education should offer competence for exercising political rights. It should provide people with skills which permit them to fulfill their duties, and to fully participate in a society with other skilled individuals. Moreover, citizens should be tolerant and show respect for each other. This can only be achieved by an integrated school system. Finally, citizens' self-respect should not be undermined and these should be able to form relationships with others on a "footing of equality". Therefore, large economic inequalities should be barred. In the last argument, Satz relies on the Rawlsian conception of the "social bases of self-respect", self-respect which is supposed to be hurt by very large material inequalities (Satz: 2007).

Rather than trying to reduce the positional character of education at the level of college admission, Satz chooses an even more demanding way to doing so. She argues that the elite (as opposed to elite-educating school, as in Anderson) should be composed of people from all social categories. Therefore, society should ensure that there are multiple avenues for a person to succeed in reaching the elite positions, even if that person occupies a social role which does not require much education. As an example, Satz references countries in which trade union leaders have become important politicians. She suggests that education should not have such a "gate keeping" role as it does now and that social design should be altered in such a way as to make sure that such avenues are available. Finally, Satz maintains that by providing basic rights such as healthcare and economic security, one would "decrease the steepness of the social hierarchy" and also education's positionality (Satz: 2007, p 645).

### **The wider debate: educational equality, value pluralism and self-respect**

This section outlines further arguments which the Anderson/Satz – Brighouse/Swift debate generated. While not focused explicitly on the argument from positionality, it brings to the fore several other attempts to defend one of the two views with the help of other arguments. As will be seen below, most authors supported the equality view, while far fewer decided to support Anderson and Satz. The first part of the

section will describe the arguments in favor of equality, while the last will focus on a defender of adequacy.

Koski and Reich (2007) provide three arguments against adequacy. The “no-distinction-above the threshold” argument claims shows that the educational adequacy ideal is defective because it allows major inequalities to emerge once the threshold has been reached for each child. Secondly, the “absent prioritarianism” argument finds educational adequacy lacking because it is unable to justify targeting resources to the worst off if this does not improve adequacy. Finally, Koski and Reich support two arguments that find a later development and more adequate defense in the work of Daniel Halliday. The “arms race” argument claims that market competition for positional goods leads to unfair arms races between parents, who struggle to offer more resources to their children. The last argument cited by Koski and Reich (who rely on Satz) is that of dignitarian harm: they claim that inequalities in education offend a young person’s self-respect. In their view, “unequal schooling can lead to stigma, insults to self-worth, and undermine the social bases of self-respect” (Koski and Reich: 2007, 58).

In a later article, Brighouse and Swift (2009) reject the claim for adequacy proposed by Anderson and Satz and defend the meritocratic conception of educational equality. Furthermore, Brighouse and Swift claim that educational equality, understood in its meritocratic form cannot be rejected by the levelling down objection because they, like many other egalitarians are value pluralists (that is they care about equality as only one among many values). Value pluralism also allows Brighouse and Swift to escape, in their view, the accusation that they support an aristocracy of the talented, while attempting to neutralize for the effects of social class (Brighouse and Swift: 2009, 119). Then, Brighouse and Swift show that two other values should be ranked on a par, or even more important than educational equality: prioritizing the worse off and enjoying intimate relationships with one’s family. The first principle, they believe, is necessary because supporting the more advantaged on the hope that they would bring higher benefits for everyone is counterproductive in the current world. Secondly, intimate family relationships are intrinsically valuable. Moreover, Brighouse and Swift also claim that educational equality also supports, similarly to adequacy, school integration. This is based on the idea that the resources spent by the parents of the more advantaged children should also benefit the less advantaged ones (Brighouse and Swift: 2009, 122).

Finally, the new, pluralist, view is compared with educational adequacy and found superior, through two examples, by its proponents. The first argument they employ is the “no-distinction-above-the-threshold” claim. In their example, Brighouse and Swift imagine a society in which educational adequacy is achieved and extra resources are discovered. The prioritarian principle in their conception recommends spending these on the least advantaged children. Alternatively, the adequacy standard would be indifferent between the least advantaged and the most gifted children. The second example is based on the “absent prioritarianism” argument. In a society where educational adequacy is not fulfilled for all children, when extra resources are found, they can be used to improve adequacy in the future, by better educating children meant for elite positions or to improve adequacy at the current time, by focusing on those not meeting the threshold. Brighouse and Swift (2009: p.126) claim that an indifference

between the two is a very strong reason to reject educational adequacy.

Daniel Halliday (2016) also employs the positional character of education to argue for equality over adequacy. He maintains that education is valuable both intrinsically and instrumentally. The intrinsic value of education is given by what he names its developmental function. This involves providing children with goods such as intellectual development, access to literature, citizenship skills, mathematics, etc. The instrumental value of education is caused by its screening function. Halliday correctly identifies this as the cause of the problematic part of educational markets. Schools represent a series of filters which guide children along different paths, leading some to elite positions in society, while others to less important functions. Given that these differences are crucial for whole lifetimes, Halliday argues that educational resources invested in a child can decisively alter his or her future. Moreover, parents tend to engage in “arms races” to provide better education for their children: if left unchecked, educational markets lead to more and more money being poured into children. This “arms race” can be modeled, in Halliday’s view, as a collective action dilemma. While it would be optimal if all cooperated (have state education provided equally to all), defection (spending more money on one’s child) is the most rational decision to make given the lack of communication. Thus, Halliday argues that such an arms race exploits the perceived vulnerability of parents who are pressured into investing as much as possible in their children’s future, even foregoing actually spending time with their children (Halliday: 2016).

The only defense of the adequacy view found in the literature is that provided by Kenneth Howe (2013). He rejects all the previously mentioned arguments through the bold move of including limits to inequality in the adequacy framework. Howe argues that education adequate for democratic citizenship cannot have radically unequal effects. Since radical inequalities undermine the sense of common citizenship, Howe argues they would not be tolerated by the Anderson and Satz conception. Further, Howe launches a counter-attack against the meritocratic conception of equality. He argues, on Rawlsian lines, that no distinction can be drawn between social advantages and natural advantages: the equality view should aim for the equalization of both. Moreover, Howe also challenges the relevance of the distinction between natural talent and developed talent, arguing that they cannot be separated and that none should represent a criterion of deciding between children in the competitions for social advantage (Howe: 2013, p. 458).

### **Adequacy and the minimum**

The first argument that this article will bring relates to the way in which the adequacy theorists try to respond to the egalitarian challenge. Adequacy is challenged because it accepts inequalities above the social minimum to emerge. Moreover, it is insensitive to the size of those inequalities. In order to avoid the most unpleasant implications of their conceptions, those who support adequacy argue for a very inclusive social minimum. Satz and Howe even make this minimum responsive to the size of the inequalities by making it sensitive to the possible undermining effect it might have on the self-respect of people.

However, the argument for a high social minimum is analytically separate from the argument for adequacy. Moreover, the argument for adequacy can very well stand alone, without actually demanding such an inclusive social minimum. There is nothing in the argument for adequacy which recommends a high or a low social minimum. Arguing for adequacy simply means saying “All should have at least X”. There is nothing in this simple statement which gives any precise guideline on whether X should be a high or a low standard.

Neither Satz nor Anderson dedicate the largest part of their articles to arguing for adequacy. What they give most space to in their articles is arguing for the inclusive minimum threshold each of them advocates. Satz links it to citizenship while Anderson links it to democratic equality. Both provide compelling arguments as to why these minimums are normatively desirable. However, taking adequacy as granted and arguing for an inclusive social minimum is not the same as arguing for adequacy. It is merely defending the adequacy one takes for granted and offering a possible interpretation of the social minimum which avoids the negative implications of adequacy taken alone.

Another vulnerability of the argument of adequacy-plus-high-minimum is that compelling arguments can also be offered for a low guaranteed minimum. Let us suppose that a strong argument against either democratic equality or effective citizenship is offered. Another minimum could be proposed. This could be in turn defeated by other arguments. Thus, the minimum might be lowered. However, what is interesting to remark is that the actual claim for adequacy would in no way be challenged by the lowering of the social minimum. One who supports adequacy would not necessarily feel herself obliged to abandon her perspective if the minimum she proposes would be defeated. Rather, because the two arguments are analytically separate, one, in order to be consistent, would have to maintain her argument for adequacy even in the face of the reduction of the minimum.

On the other hand, the meritocratic conception of equality which Brighouse and Swift propose is more attuned to the situation of the worst off group in society. This conception includes a necessary link between the value it prioritizes, equality, and the situation of the worst off. Since it looks to eliminate the impact that social class has on educational achievement, it, by necessity, takes the position of the worse off as that which must be improved. Once one would begin arguing that the position of those who are worse off should not be improved, one would have to abandon egalitarianism altogether.

Educational equality has been challenged on the idea that children cannot be ranked according to effort and talent, while not allowing social class to have any impact on the distribution of resources. This argument comes in two forms: 1. There is no moral reason to separate between social class, on the one hand and talent and effort on the other and 2. One cannot distinguish between social class and revealed talent and effort because the latter is dependent on the former – middle class children are taught to be more disciplined, self-confident and hard working, while working class children do not receive an education attuned to these values at home.

This view represents an argument against the meritocratic conception of equality, but not against educational equality per se. On the contrary, taking this argument to its logical conclusion, one could actually support full educational equality

as opposed to meritocracy. As an ideal, educational adequacy is not even confronted with these problems, as it does not attempt to distinguish between children above the threshold.

Finally, under this heading, one can also reject Howe's idea of "in-built limits to inequality" present in the adequacy view. Howe builds his argument around the claim that the adequacy ideal is adequacy for citizenship. When and if inequalities undermine the equal possibilities of all to participate in the public space and to act as informed citizens, adequacy imposes the curtailing of inequalities. However, this version of adequacy still allows for much larger inequalities than the meritocratic conception. Citizenship rights, even political rights, can be meaningfully exercised even in radically unequal societies and with radically unequal educational establishments. While adequacy proponents might accept this, there is no reason to imagine that the quality of democratic debate and of actual power to influence government by regular citizens would not be much higher in a more egalitarian society where educational resources are also distributed more equally. Power distances matter significantly when the issue of the meaningful exercise of rights arises.

### **Adequacy and reducing positionality**

There is a second reply which the defenders of adequacy make. Satz and Anderson propose social reform in such a way that the positionality of education does not play such an important role in achieving other valuable goods. Anderson suggests an inclusive quota system while Satz supplements it by recommending multiple avenues for social mobility.

However, their proposals involve much more social restructuring than implementing educational equality. While implementing educational equality would focus only on the years children spend in school, reducing positionality, at least in Satz's thought, also demands a change of the non-school social system. Let us imagine the educational system as a tunnel, out of which people come out in a different order. Educational equality would suggest that changes should be made to the tunnel. These changes would have as an effect eliminating the effects that social class has on the order in which people come out of the tunnel. On the other hand, reducing positionality, at least in Satz' version, would require involve that the world outside the tunnel must also be radically changed. No matter the order that people come out from the tunnel, that ordering would not be kept in the world outside.

The first weakness of this argument is that its suggestions would involve investing immense amount of resources in the changes it proposes. For example, incentives would have to be offered to firms, political parties and social organizations to promote people will less formal education. Such policies as tax-breaks that are offered for employing previously unemployed or disabled people would have to be extended on a massive scale. Secondly, not only the very social structure, but also mentalities would have to be changed. The world, as it is today, values merit and hard work. While education might not impart technical knowledge, it is at least a way to "flag" people willing to work hard. This assumption would have to be combated. Satz proposals involve social reform taking place over several generations. Satz argues that Brighthouse

and Swift's suggestions are unrealistic and that educational adequacy is more amenable of implementation (Satz: 2007). However, in her version of education adequacy, there is nothing easily achievable.

Another demerit of this approach is that its effect would probably be a weakening of the value of education in general and the strengthening of more unfair systems of distribution of social roles. One of the assumptions of education theorists is that education is extremely important because it represents the only, or at least the main, system of selection in society. Given that the market economy creates very unequal social roles, one method has to be devised to select people who will fill up the higher social roles. In modern society education mainly fulfills that role. However, Satz's proposal would diminish the importance of education as the main "filter" which assigns people to their social roles. There is, however, a need for a "filter" and education, even if imperfect, at least has the capacity for standardization and interpersonal comparison. Other such "filters" (which Satz does not specify) probably lack this property. For example, Satz mentions trade union leaders becoming politicians. However, chances of being a trade union leader are even more unfairly distributed than talents for academic achievement. One needs charisma and the ability to relate to working class culture. Unlike academic achievement, charisma cannot be cultivated by personal strive but is rather a trait of the personality.

Anderson's suggestion is not as radical as Satz's. She merely proposes that elite-educating universities make sure that they have an integrated student body. However, her arguments are vulnerable to all criticisms which can be leveled against class and race-based quota system. For example, a quota system can be criticized for not being a strong enough incentive for academic achievement. If one person knows that, because of her background, she has higher chances of being admitted, she might not put in as much of an effort as she might have done under a competitive, academic-based admission system. Secondly, a quota system might be unfair to those who do have high academic achievements, no matter how they obtained them. Those with high academic achievements might complain that they are treated unfairly if their efforts are not recognized at the moment of college admissions. Many such complaints have been heard against the affirmative action programs and Anderson's wider quota system is even more vulnerable.

Another argument against a quota system can be made. Quotas can be counter-productive to the very purpose that they seek: class integration. Rather than accepting each other and gaining first-person knowledge from each other, as Anderson suggests, people admitted by quota systems might develop the opposite attitude. Those with less academic qualifications might come to be resented by those who come to see themselves as deserving of university places. An in-group/out-group dynamic might easily emerge when some are not seen as properly belonging to the place in which they find themselves. Rather than fostering integration, Anderson's proposals might lead to even more social distance, even if the groups she wishes to integrate would participate in the same classes and events.

College admission based on merit, if the influence of social class is somehow eliminated, would probably have the effect desired by Anderson. It is much more likely that people come to regard each other as equals if they are seen by the others

as deserving their place. People from disadvantaged social backgrounds might come to be more accepted and respected by their classmates if their admission is seen as a matter of merit. Acceptance, respect and first person interaction would be even higher under a system of educational equality than under Anderson's quota system. Those that face and overcome difficult social circumstances and reach a high degree of achievement are more likely to be seen as equals. Success in the face of hardship is an appreciated value. Being the recipient of an enforced system is not.

One example of the integrative effects of elite schools with admissions based on merit is offered by late historian Tony Judt. He argued that the reduction of material inequalities in post-War Britain was a worthy goal. This allowed those competing for elite universities to do so on an equal basis. However, university admission was based on merit and ability to do well in exams. Judt's university experience and King's College, Oxford, permitted the talented from all social backgrounds to feel, together, as part of an elite. Judt himself argued against instituting an education system in which all have to receive a good public education but the rich are left to themselves. He maintained that this actually has the counterproductive effect of making the rich flee the public system and increasing inequalities (Nagel: 2011).

The idea that implementing the adequacy standard would require large social reforms can be attacked by arguing that attempting to achieve educational equality (at least in its meritocratic form) would also imply an, at least as large, social restructuring. However, this is mistaken for two reasons: firstly, at the level of social ideals, meritocracy is already present in society. Secondly, the reforms necessary to achieve meritocratic equality would affect only the schooling system, while those aiming to implement the Anderson-Satz ideal would concern wider social institutions.

To support the first claim, one can only think of the resistance that the ideal of affirmative action met in society. In the United States, the issue of affirmative action reached the Supreme Court twice, when the *DeFumis v. Odegaard* (1974) and *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) cases led to a debate on this ideal. Alternatively, the ideal of meritocracy is well enshrined and represents a part of children's education. Thus, enforcing the ideal of meritocratic equality merely represents putting social institutions in line with society's avowed ideals, while educational adequacy, at least as imagined by Anderson and Satz, implies bringing in a very different conception altogether.

Secondly, the reforms required to achieve meritocratic educational equality would involve modifications to such institutions as school funding and school organization. Private schools might need to be forbidden and school funding patterns might need to be significantly altered. Once this is achieved, school integration, one of the ideals of the adequacy perspective, would probably come naturally: since no difference in school funding would be visible, there would be no reason for children from different backgrounds to not mix or for parents to avoid mixed neighborhoods. Alternatively, the Anderson-Satz idea of making avenues other than education represent conduits to elite positions is difficult to even imagine in practice. What these avenues would be, remains unclear and difficult to conceive.

## Conclusion

This article has evaluated the response which Debra Satz and Elizabeth Anderson brought against the argument from positionality. It has argued that the reply relies on two main claims. First, the minimum which an adequate education should provide is supposed to be a very inclusive one. This would guard the theory against its unpleasant implications of allowing high educational inequalities. The second claim is that ways have to be found to reduce the positional character of education. The solutions which the two theorists suggest are quota systems in elite-educating universities or social reform to create multiple avenues for social mobility.

The article has argued that the first response is analytically detachable from the simple argument for adequacy. Adequacy by itself does not require an inclusive minimum and strong arguments against such a minimum can be found without abandoning adequacy. Thus, the adequacy perspective is vulnerable to the charge that it is insensitive to the fate of the worst off. The article challenged the second response offered by adequacy theorists by pointing out to its immense and counterproductive implications. Creating different avenues for social mobility might actually be a more unfair way to distributing desirable social roles. Success through some of these avenues might require skills which do not rely on personal merit and effort. Quota systems are counterproductive because rather than fostering integration they might actually reduce it. If university places are not seen as being received on a base of merit, those who receive them could face social ostracism.

## References

- Anderson, E. (2007) "Fair Opportunity in Education: A Democratic Equality Perspective", *Ethics*, 117 (4), pp. 595–622.
- Brighouse, H. and Swift, A. (2006), "Equality, Priority, and Positional Goods", *Ethics*, 116 (3), pp. 471-497.
- Brighouse, H. and Swift, A. (2008) "Putting Educational Equality in Its Place" *Education Finance and Policy*, 3 (4) , pp. 444-466
- Brighouse, H. and Swift, A. (2009), "Educational Equality versus Educational Adequacy: A Critique of Anderson and Satz", *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 26 (2), pp 117-128.
- Halliday, D. (2016) „Private education, positional goods, and the arms race problem”, *Politics, Philosophy and Economics*, 15(2), pp 150-169.
- Howe, K. (2013) "On Equality versus Adequacy: Principles and Normative Frameworks", *Philosophy of Education*, 452-460.
- Koski W.S. and Reich R. (2006) „When adequate isn't: The retreat from equity

in educational law and policy and why it matters”, *Emory Law Journal*, 56(3): pp.545–617

Nagel, T. (2008), *Tony Judt: The Distinctions*, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/feb/10/tony-judt-distinctions/> , accessed 25.03.2011.

Parfit, D. (2000) “Equality or Priority?” in M. Clayton and. Williams (eds.), *The Ideal of Equality* Palgrave: Houndmills–New York, pp 81-125.

Satz, D. (2007) “Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship”, *Ethics* 117 (4), pp. 623–648.