Shameless luck egalitarians

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Abstract: A recurring concern about luck egalitarianism is that its implementation would make some individuals, in particular those who lack marketable talents, experience shame. This, the objection goes, undermines individuals' self-respect, which, in turn, may also lead to unequal respect between individuals. Loss of (self-)respect is a concern for any egalitarian, including distributive egalitarians, inasmuch as it is non-compensable. This paper responds to this concern by clarifying the relationship between shame and (self-)respect. We argue, first, a luck egalitarian society and ethos would be radically different from the current one and incompatible with shame over lack of talent, and, second, that while shame may still occur in a less than ideal luck egalitarian society, this kind of shame does not undermine egalitarian commitments.

1   Introduction

A recurring concern about luck egalitarianism is that it violates core egalitarian commitments because its implementation would make some individuals, in particular those who lack marketable talents, experience shame. Shame, these critics argue, undermines self-respect, which is, in Rawls's words, 'the most important primary good' (Rawls 1999, 348). What is more, some critics have suggested that unequal self-respect leads to unequal respect. This seems like a powerful objection: it would be embarrassing for an egalitarian to endorse a theory whose main tenets endanger self-respect and/or the respect individuals have for one another. This paper responds to this concern by arguing that these putative connections – between luck egalitarianism and shame, between shame and self-respect, and between self-respect and respect between individuals – do not hold up to scrutiny.[1]

Existing responses to this objection have pursued two strategies. The first is to highlight that, to the extent that attempts to compensate the untalented for their bad luck causes painful feelings such as shame, this can be captured by an appropriate metric of equality that takes into

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[1] Our focus, then, is on a specific strand of the range of objections that relational egalitarians have raised about luck egalitarianism. For responses to the broader range of objections, see, for example, Lippert-Rasmussen (2018).

account individuals' wellbeing (e.g. Knight 2009): such welfare losses would be taken into account in luck egalitarians' assessment of the distribution. As Arneson (2000b, 177) notes, 'self-respect is a constituent of well-being, not something that plausibly outweighs it'.[2] We agree that this response is indeed open to the luck egalitarian (and is often overlooked by the critics). However, it does not respond to the concern that shame, to the extent that it undermines individuals' self-respect, is not just a painful feeling that can be treated as a mere component of well-being.[3] If an individual believes that their moral status is lower than others', this is arguably inconsistent with a commitment to basic equality. Whether or not luck egalitarians must be committed to basic equality *qua* luck egalitarianism is a question we cannot settle here;[4] but we would certainly expect luck egalitarians to share this basic commitment, even if it is not, strictly speaking, required by luck egalitarianism. Second, even if self-respect is a component of well-being, it is plausible that it is a non-compensable one.

A second strategy is to argue that in an ideal luck egalitarian society, people would *know* that lack of talent is not shameful and therefore not *feel* shame, contrary to what is assumed by the critics (Firth 2013). Again, we agree. However, this doesn't respond to two possible rejoinders. First, that an egalitarian ethos would require individuals to be productive, which would become a source of shame for those unable to contribute. We argue that such arguments misidentify what a luck egalitarian ethos would, in fact, require. Second, the critics have been concerned that, even if under *ideal* conditions, luck egalitarianism doesn't lead to shame, it does so under *less than ideal* conditions where individuals have not fully internalised

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[2] Arneson (2000b) responds to some of the same debates that we are discussing in this paper but focuses on the concern that luck egalitarians would have to violate privacy; however, his point about self-respect could equally be developed into a response to the objection we are focusing on in this paper.

[3] For example, Schemmel (2019, 629) notes: 'Self-respect is not merely a mental state which contributes to well-being, as feelings of happiness do. While it does so contribute, it is a disposition, or attitude, which plays a particularly active and organising role. Its task is to orient agents in their actions by assuring them of their own worth, and of their capacity to be the authors of their own actions.'

[4] Schemmel (2011: 126) states that the 'abstract principle of the equal moral worth of persons' is one of three principles distributive egalitarians are committed to. For an argument that grounds luck egalitarians' commitment to responsibility-sensitivity in moral equality, see Stemplowska (2011).

luck egalitarian commitments. We argue that, while shame can occur in a less than ideal luck egalitarian society, this is not inimical to equality.

In making these arguments, the paper not only responds to a significant objection to luck egalitarian theories but also examines to what extent shame and/or lack of self-respect undermine egalitarian commitments: this connection plays a crucial role in the arguments against luck egalitarianism but it is simply assumed and has not been seriously examined or defended. We defend a more nuanced understanding of shame and its relationship to (in)equality, building on the extensive literature on shame.

The paper begins by clarifying the shame-based objection to luck egalitarianism and why existing responses to this line of critique fail to address the core concern it raises (section 2). Because shame is conceptually linked to the values to which individuals and/or societies are committed (section 3), our response to the objection must consider the ethos that governs the society in which luck egalitarian policies are implemented. We identify the core features of a luck egalitarian ethos and argue that, contrary to what some critics have argued, in a society governed by such an ethos, productivity would not be required and therefore hierarchies based on individuals' social contributions would not arise (section 4). We then consider a luck egalitarian society where the ethos is not universally internalised. We point out that the kind of shame that may occur in such a society is 'unfitting' and, as such, does not pose an objection to luck egalitarianism (section 5). Finally, we argue that in a broadly luck egalitarian society shame over lack of talent does not undermine the relevant kind of (self-) respect. The critics' thought that inequalities that might exist in luck egalitarian societies – via shame – will become problematic status hierarchies again assumes current, anti-(luck)egalitarian norms (section 6). We suggest, in conclusion, that a luck egalitarian ethos is uniquely placed to challenge the idea that lack of talent is shameful.

2   The shame objection

Luck egalitarianism is a theory of distributive justice: it seeks to assess the fairness of outcomes. Luck egalitarians defend the view that 'inequalities are just if and only if certain facts about responsibility obtain with respect to those inequalities' (Cohen 2008, 300). A debate between luck egalitarians and relational egalitarians has been ongoing for a while now; according to relational egalitarians, the proper focus of an egalitarian theory of justice is social relations rather than distributions. A number of theorists have responded to the challenges formulated by relational egalitarians, e.g. by arguing that relational goods can be incorporated in the currency of justice (Arneson 2000b, Gheaus 2016, Knight 2009) or that there is no incompatibility between distributive and relational egalitarianism (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018).

Notwithstanding these responses, concerns about luck egalitarianism and its possible inegalitarian implications remain. The opening sentence of Anderson's 1999 article that sparked this debate expresses this worry: 'If much recent academic work defending equality had been secretly penned by conservatives, could the results be any more embarrassing for egalitarians?' (Anderson 1999, 287). The general concern is that luck egalitarians' preoccupation with individual responsibility is ultimately damaging, and if translated into policy, would lead to results that the left has been at pains to avoid, such as leaving the 'imprudent' without a safety net (e.g., Voigt 2007). One, more specific, worry is that in seeking to compensate victims of bad brute luck while leaving intact inequalities that result from option luck,[5] luck egalitarians must pass judgement on people's abilities and choices and thus open the door to shame, stigma and humiliation, especially for untalented individuals. The claim is then that 'insisting on fairness will undermine respect and self-respect' (Wolff 1998, 97-98) via phenomena such as shame and humiliation. The connections between shame, respect and

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[5] The distinction between option luck and brute luck was first articulated by Dworkin (1981). While luck egalitarians differ in how exactly that distinction is drawn, one plausible way to define brute luck is as 'luck that is not within the control of a person and could not be avoided by his or her choice' (Hirose 2014, 186).

self-respect implicit in this objection have not yet been carefully examined; this is what we propose to do here.

In some versions of the objection, the concern about luck egalitarianism is that the state, in pursuing a more equal distribution, treats as inferior those individuals it compensates for their bad luck. Perhaps most notably, Anderson suggests that the compensation luck egalitarians would seek to provide for the victims of brute luck would be 'humiliating' to its recipients. She imagines the explanations luck egalitarians would provide to recipients and the disparaging judgements these convey to the 'stupid and untalented' and the 'ugly and socially awkward' (Anderson 1999, 305). Anderson's primary concern seems to be how the state treats the citizens it compensates: the mere fact of compensation expresses pity and disparaging judgements towards recipients. But, of course, this is not an implication of luck egalitarianism: luck egalitarian compensation would be offered as a matter of fairness, not pity, and it does not rely on insulting evaluations; the compensation is simply for bad brute luck (see, for example, Knight 2009, ch. 4; Barry 2006, Arneson 2000a).

A different and stronger version of the objection does not rely on how the 'untalented' are *treated* but claims that merely having to reveal or even just acknowledge one's lack of talent makes one feel ashamed. This 'shameful revelation' objection has been put forward by Jonathan Wolff, who argues that attempts to achieve a distribution that is fair by luck egalitarian standards might result in individuals being 'required … to do things, or reveal things about themselves, that they find shameful' (Wolff 1998, 109) – in particular, that their unemployment is the result of lack of talent rather than choice. Emily McTernan shares this concern and suggests that feelings of shame can occur even without having to *reveal* one's lack of talent to others, by merely acknowledging it to oneself. According to the 'shameful revelation' objection then, recognising, or having to reveal, certain features in oneself causes feelings of shame. What this objection does not fully spell out, however, is what makes *feelings*

of shame problematic from an egalitarian perspective and whether this is meant to be an internal or external critique of luck egalitarianism.

According to Wolff, this kind of shameful revelation about lack of talent lowers a person's 'respect-standing', i.e. 'the degree of respect others have for [them]' (Wolff 1998, 107), because 'one is required to reveal facts that one finds demeaning or shameful, even humiliating. Surely it is very difficult to retain any sense of oneself as an equal under such circumstances' (Wolff 1998, 114). McTernan offers a version of the objection that makes more explicit how shame undermines egalitarian commitments. She argues that even in an ideal luck egalitarian society, there would be a problematic status hierarchy between those who have productive occupations and those who do not – because they lack the requisite talents or have caring obligations that prevent them from participating in the labour market. This hierarchy would undermine both equal respect among citizens and the grounds of self-respect of those who do not have productive occupations, by causing feelings of shame: the untalented have to assess their level of contribution, admit to themselves that they lack the talent that would allow them to contribute (more) and feel shame as a result. Shame, McTernan argues, involves a loss of self-respect, a sense that one is less worthy than others. People whose self-respect is damaged may in turn behave in ways that convey this perception to others, which threatens equal respect (McTernan 2013, 95-96). Thus, McTernan argues, this kind of society, with its focus on individuals' choices and their productive contributions, ultimately has highly inegalitarian implications.

Shame plays a central role in all these versions of the objection, so we want to home in on shame and examine its connection to equality, which has not been clearly spelt out in the debate. As noted above, if shame is problematic simply because it is a painful emotion, a luck egalitarian theory can take this into account by including the relevant feeling in its metric: it might lower welfare (Knight 2005, 2009; Arneson 2000b) or it might mean a loss of an

important good, such as the ability to appear in public without shame (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, ch. 2). This, however, skirts rather than addresses the critics' concern that shame is linked to self-respect and therefore cannot be simply be treated as a painful emotion. Our response responds directly to this concern. We highlight that all variants of this objection refer to shame, humiliation and/or stigma without unpacking them or drawing on the extensive literature on these phenomena and the differences or relationships, if any, between them. We examine how shame occurs, how it is related to the values endorsed by individuals and/or their societies as well as the conceptual connections between shame and (self-) respect. While the critics assume that any occurrence of shame undermines self-respect, our analysis suggests a more complex relationship between shame and self-respect. This has implications not only for the debate about luck egalitarianism but also for the role of different emotions in egalitarian thought.

Another line of luck egalitarian response would emphasise that in an *ideal* luck egalitarian society, that is one in which *everyone* has internalised luck egalitarian commitments, shame due to lack of talent will not occur because in such a society everyone would believe that, to the extent that talent is a matter of brute luck, lack of talent is not something people should feel ashamed of (Firth 2013). Some proponents of the objection accept that this is a possibility but consider it a matter of 'psychological speculation' that we have 'little, if any, good reason to believe… is true' (Wolff 1998, 115). In any case, the critics insist, an ideal luck egalitarian society is not immediately realisable and in more realistic circumstances, aiming for luck egalitarian fairness will produce shame and thus undermine its egalitarian credentials. The response we offer in this paper therefore explicitly considers a less than fully luck egalitarian society. We argue that, to the extent that shame occurs in such a society, it is not problematic for egalitarians. Again, it is crucial to understand the phenomenon of shame and how it would arise in this kind of society. In the next section, we make some initial clarifications regarding shame, which also explain our focus on it.

3 Shame

Broadly speaking, shame is an 'emotion of self-assessment' (Taylor 1985, 1), a 'painful experience of [one's] traits or behavior as reflecting [one's] own incapacity to meet, even minimally, the demands consubstantial with some of the values to which [one] is attached' (Deonna et al. 2011, 16-17). Shame is distinct from related phenomena such as sham*ing* and humiliation (Deonna et al. 2011, 155-163): individuals can feel shame without being shamed by others, and attempts to shame individuals do not always cause them to feel shame. Shaming and humiliation 'are not emotions. They are rather processes in which a person, or more usually a group of people, tries to elicit shame or felt humiliation in a given individual' (Deonna et al. 2011, 156). While shaming individuals, especially when done by the state, rightly raises red flags for egalitarians, this is not what luck egalitarian institutions would be engaged in when compensating individuals for bad luck. The most challenging objection to luck egalitarianism, then, is not about practices of shaming or humiliation but about feelings of shame that arise in the absence of such practices. Neither critics nor advocates of luck egalitarianism are sufficiently sensitive to these distinctions (e.g. Knight 2005), so the specific objection about feelings of shame has not been answered.

In addition, shame is different from phenomena such as embarrassment and stigma. While embarrassment, like shame, can be painful, it is more superficial and less weighty than shame because the individual qualities that cause embarrassment are less important than those at stake when individuals feel shame (see Berkovski 2014; Deonna et al. 2011, 114ff., Taylor 1985, 69ff. for discussion of the distinction). As opposed to shame, which can be felt in the absence of an actual audience (see below), embarrassment requires a social context (though not necessarily revelation): embarrassment 'presupposes some concern on the part of the agent with the impression he makes on others; somebody who does not care at all about how he might be seen by others will not be subject to embarrassment' (Taylor 1985, 73-74). If the critics'

concern is that others will assess an individual's talent (or lack thereof), the relevant emotion would be embarrassment rather than shame: to the extent that untalented individuals already know that they are untalented, having to reveal this to others should not cause additional shame – though it could cause embarrassment.

Finally, shame is a more persistent, stronger emotion than embarrassment (which, unlike shame, need not even involve a negative self-assessment; see Deonna et al. 2011, 115-177; Nussbaum 204-206), it is less weighty than stigma and *felt* humiliation (as opposed to the *act* of humiliation): 'When feeling humiliated, a subject will experience his or her self as degraded or debased' (Deonna et al. 2011, 196). One may feel shame as a result of being humiliated or stigmatised; being humiliated or stigmatised are processes that seek to elicit certain emotions but they are not emotions themselves. The process of stigmatisation is 'carried out by those who have the power to label and stereotype someone who is deviant with respect to some feature' (Deonna et al. 2011, 230). Humiliating and stigmatising (groups of) people is obviously wrong but there is no reason why, in a broadly luck egalitarian society, these should occur. (They do of course occur in existing, inegalitarian societies but this cannot be an objection to luck egalitarianism.) It is also important to note that while they may be causally connected to shame, in that they often lead to feelings of shame, the diminished self-respect that stigmatisation or humiliation may cause is imputable to these processes rather than to the feeling of shame. As Deonna et al. (2011, 233) conclude, 'shame has been wrongly construed as the culprit of much mischief'. It is often stigmatisation and humiliation that we want to resist and that many theorists of oppression, for instance, are concerned with, rather than the feelings of shame that such processes may also create in their targets. Our focus here therefore is on shame and its connection with self-respect and equal respect, rather than these related concepts.

Another feature of shame that is important for our discussion is its connection to values or norms. To feel shame, one must feel that one is falling short of a certain standard. There are

two views about the location of the relevant standard. On a social account of shame, shame 'arises only in connection with social values and always discloses our submission to other people's standards or our own concern for how we appear in the eyes of others' (Deonna et al. 2011, 17). On this account, feeling shame 'is connected with the thought that eyes are upon one' and thus requires an audience (Taylor 1985, 53): it is the recognition that we fall short of an *audience's* values or standards that causes us to feel shame and it is not necessary that we ourselves endorse the standard in question (Deonna et al. 2011, 25). On the more popular, non-social account, an agent feels shame when she realises that she falls short of a standard or value that she herself endorses, whether that standard is consonant with the society's values or not. Audiences – real or imagined – are not required for shame on this account. We return to this distinction below.

Central to shame, then, are the values and norms to which individuals and/or societies are committed. Luck egalitarians can agree that compensation for brute luck may lead to feelings of shame in the disadvantaged, if provided in the context of currently prevailing norms and values. However, if the critics assume that luck egalitarian principles would be implemented in a society governed by an ethos similar to the current, inegalitarian one, this weakens their objection. We cannot assume that people will continue to view talents the way we currently do once there is consistent redistribution for brute luck. Basic luck egalitarian policies will challenge the link between talent and merit. If the objection is that certain luck egalitarian policies lead to shame, then the rationale for those policies – and its effects on the society's ethos – need to be considered in the objection. A stronger version of the objection would assume a society that is more in line with luck egalitarian commitments.

So our response focuses on shame, rather than neighbouring phenomena, and asks to what extent shame that occurs in a broadly (rather than ideal) luck egalitarian society can be imputed to luck egalitarian commitments and is inimical to egalitarian values at the same time.

In other words, this paper seeks to examine a potential tension at the heart of luck egalitarianism, between its egalitarian component and its fairness or responsibility component. To do that, we need to start with a clear picture of a luck egalitarian society and its prevailing ethos.

4   The (luck) egalitarian ethos

This section specifies what kind of ethos would prevail in a luck egalitarian society. An ethos refers to 'socially widespread preferences and attitudes about the kinds of rewards it is acceptable to insist on, and… a sense about the ways of life that are attractive, exciting, good, and worthy of pursuit'; the ethos involves 'preferences, attitudes and sensibilities' (Cohen 2002, 377) and a 'widely… shared set of beliefs about how people ought to behave' (Carens 2014, 53). The relevant values and principles are internalised by individuals and inform their behaviour (Wolff 1998, 105). But the ethos includes not only beliefs about what one ought to do and what rewards people are owed, but also more general attitudes towards oneself and others, including the untalented. Since these beliefs and attitudes inform feelings of shame, the ethos plays an important part in Wolff's and McTernan's arguments; however, as we argue, neither of them assumes a luck egalitarian ethos.

What would be the content of a luck egalitarian ethos?[6] Such an ethos would be informed by the central commitments of luck egalitarianism. First, the main idea of luck egalitarianism is that inequalities (in the relevant equalisandum, such as welfare) are unfair if

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[6] To be clear, such an ethos would not be *required* by luck egalitarianism, which is concerned with the assessment of the fairness of distributions and does not include prescriptions regarding individuals' attitudes or sense of justice. As Cohen (1997) emphasises, we can have a just distribution (i.e. a distribution that luck egalitarians would consider fair), irrespective of whether or not individuals affirm luck egalitarian principles: a just *distribution* does not require a just *society*. However, we take it that in order to adequately address the concerns about equal respect and shame raised by the critics, we need to consider what kinds of attitudes committed luck egalitarians would have and how these attitudes would shape a luck egalitarian *society*.

they are the result of brute luck. Translated into an ethos, this would mean that (1) brute luck, for committed luck egalitarians, would not be something that grounds entitlements to advantage; and (2) individuals should be committed to achieving an equal distribution, so understood, by reducing unfair inequalities if and when they can do so. For example, if — starting from an equal distribution — manna from heaven falls into someone's lap, that person would regard her advantage as unfair and recognise that she should share the manna equally with everyone else.

Second, a luck egalitarian ethos would involve a very different understanding and evaluation of talent than we currently adopt. While in everyday language 'talents' can refer to a range of different aptitudes or skills, luck egalitarians typically use the term 'talent' in a more technical sense. Talent, or more specifically wealth-talent, as Dworkin calls it, refers to the 'innate capacity to produce goods or services that others will pay to have' (Dworkin 2002, 323). This is indeed the kind of understanding of talent that critics like Wolff have in mind when they worry that collecting information to determine the extent to which someone is responsible for their level of welfare leads to 'shameful revelations'.

Talent thus understood has two features: first, it is innate and thus a matter of brute luck and, second, it is marketable, which is of course contingent on others' preferences. Having such talent would not be valued by luck egalitarians, as Dworkin notes:

> it is deeply implausible that wealth-talents, as such, are virtues, that is, qualities that ought to be admired. What counts as a wealth-talent is contingent in a hundred dimensions (…) Luck is, anyway, by far the most important wealth-talent in the catalogue — being in the right place is often more important than being anything else at all —and though many of us do admire good luck, we know we shouldn't. (Dworkin 2002, 326-7)

This is why lack of wealth-talent would not give rise to shame in a society where everyone has internalised the luck egalitarian ethos (see also Firth 2013).

McTernan considers this but worries that viewing talents in this way would have undesirable consequences for people's self-conceptions:

> Such detachment from one's talents … would be a deeply unattractive element of a society since it demands that people be alienated from their talents: proposing that people should not incorporate their talents into their self-conceptions, as objects of shame or pride, requires them not to identify with their talents. This alienation from one's talents requires a radical shift in how people currently relate to their talents. Not only does such a shift seem impractical (which, admittedly, given Cohen's denial of the relevance of facts to political philosophy, may not worry him), it also appears ad hoc. (McTernan 2013, 106)

McTernan seems to operate here with an understanding of 'talent' that is closer to the common language notion, where it denotes certain qualities of mind or skills that may in fact be attributable not only to innate capacities but also to effort or choice. Luck egalitarians disagree on how precisely to draw this line but typically emphasise that effort and choice are also enmeshed with brute luck factors, such as a person's upbringing and other circumstances beyond their control (e.g. Arneson 1997).

What does that imply for people's self-conceptions and what they can take pride in? First, from a luck egalitarian perspective, people should take pride in their talents only insofar as they are *not* due to brute luck – and, we should add, it is not just luck egalitarians who accept that it is inappropriate to be proud of something you have no control over. But not taking pride in your talents does not mean that you cannot identify with them. People can still see their aptitudes and skills as part of who they are – in fact, many factors that are part of individuals' self-conceptions *are* due to brute luck, e.g. specific experiences that have shaped how they think about themselves. A doctor, for example, might regard her ability to empathise with her patients, to provide good care, her technical skills, etc., as part of her self-conception. She might even value her innate dexterity, without which she could not be a surgeon, and luck egalitarians would be happy for her to do so, as long as she also recognises the role of luck in her acquiring these skills and does not take pride in the portion that is attributable to brute luck. Contrary to McTernan, this strikes us as a desirable way of relating to one's talents. In fact, it is people's *un*willingness to recognise the role of luck on their advantages or status that seems to be a significant obstacle to achieving more equal societies.

A luck egalitarian society can also recognise that certain skills and even innate abilities, for example outstanding musical talent or a good memory, have value. In fact, it is likely that a wider range of skills and abilities would be valued in a luck egalitarian society than is currently the case since their marketability would not be seen as an indication of value. However, this shouldn't translate into any particular evaluation of the persons who have these abilities.

Crucially, brute luck should not yield economic rewards: the compensation individuals receive for particular occupations should not reflect differences in innate ability or other kinds of brute luck.[7] If this is reflected in the wages attached to different occupations rather than achieved via taxation and redistribution, wages no longer act as an indicator of marketable talent.[8] Rather, differences in wages would reflect considerations unrelated to talent: for example, particularly unpleasant work might lead to higher pay, as would longer hours or irregular work schedules, or occupations that require more extensive training or education before individuals can enter jobs. Some of the objections seem to assume that something very similar to the current reward structure would be in place and that redistribution would correct for bad brute luck. This assumption is unwarranted: the reward structure in a luck egalitarian society would be very different from what is currently in place. So it is, we think, a feature not a bug of luck egalitarianism that people's innate abilities would not be a basis for rewards and would thus not be valued in that sense. Contra McTernan, it actually seems *desirable* to us that this is how we view talents, both at a social level and individually: being able to value certain skills and capacities, irrespective of how (or whether) the market rewards them. Dissociating

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[7] People might get higher wages to compensate for the time and effort they put into particular kinds of training: for example, a surgeon might be paid more than a pediatrician if additional training is required to become a surgeon, not because the former requires greater natural ability.

[8] While critics (e.g. Wolff 2010, Anderson 1999) often assume that luck egalitarians are preoccupied with the distribution of material goods, most luck egalitarians assume that the appropriate currency is, or at least includes, wellbeing (e.g. Cohen 1989, Arneson 1990). This means that further redistribution of material goods will be needed to achieve a fair distribution.

the valuation of particular talents from their labour market rewards could bolster individuals against the loss of self-esteem, or even self-respect, that would otherwise (as in the real world!) result from not being able to support oneself through one's labour market contributions.

While a luck egalitarian society would not reward innate talent, McTernan argues that it would reward talents indirectly because the luck egalitarian ethos would value and reward individuals' productivity, i.e. their ability to contribute to the social product. Thus, to the extent that the talented are unable to make such contributions, they would continue to feel shame over their lack of talent. In what follows, we argue that she – and others – conflate different types of egalitarian ethos. McTernan constructs the content of a luck egalitarian ethos based on Cohen's critique of Rawls. Cohen argues that individuals committed to Rawlsian principles of justice would regard those principles as applying not just to the rules governing institutions but also to their individual choices (Cohen 1997; 2008). If broadly accepted, this amounts to an ethos that requires that individuals seek occupations that allow them to use their talents in the most socially productive way (or at least *a* socially productive way), without financial incentives.

McTernan argues that this kind of ethos has inegalitarian implications because a problematic status hierarchy would arise from unequal compliance with the ethos, leading to a loss of self-respect for those who do not work in productive occupations as well as unequal respect between them and those who do have productive jobs. Status hierarchies, she says, do not necessarily lead to unequal self-respect, provided there are multiple hierarchies that are independent of one another and valued roughly equally. But when a hierarchy is unified and dominant, it will lead to unequal (self-)respect: the self-respect of those at the bottom of the hierarchy is affected, 'both because of others' attitudes towards them and their own feeling of failing to contribute' (McTernan 2013, 100).

Two groups would be affected by this: those who care for dependants instead of choosing the most productive occupation relative to their talents and those who lack productive talents. The mechanism is relatively straightforward for carers, who would look after their dependants rather than contribute via participation in the labour market. For the untalented, the mechanism is more complex. In determining which occupation to choose so as to comply with the ethos, individuals must assess their own level of talent. The untalented therefore have to admit to themselves their lack of talent. This leads to feelings of shame, which – here McTernan agrees with Wolff – undermines people's self-respect and their sense of themselves as an equal.

We will return to McTernan's concerns about hierarchies in section 6. For now, we want to focus on her assumption that an egalitarian ethos of the kind that Cohen imagines would require individuals to contribute (as much as possible) to the common good. Contra McTernan, we argue that being productive would not in fact be a requirement of a *luck* egalitarian ethos; if this is true, luck egalitarians are not the proper target of McTernan's argument.

Different kinds of 'egalitarian ethos' have been discussed in the literature; these are 'egalitarian' in different ways and some are not, strictly speaking, egalitarian at all. First, there is what we will call a *Rawlsian ethos*; this is the kind of ethos that Cohen discusses in relation to Rawls's theory. This ethos requires that individuals use their talents to contribute to the common good. Following Quong, this may be better understood as a 'Paretian' rather than a straightforwardly egalitarian ethos (Quong 2010, 328).

Second, G. A. Cohen has described a kind of ethos that arises out of a commitment to what he calls 'community': that 'people care about and, where necessary and possible, care for, one another, and, too, care that they care about one another' (Cohen 2009, 34-35). We might call this a 'socialist' ethos. There are clear parallels here with the requirement to be productive that is part of the Rawlsian ethos but the underlying motivation is different:

'Communal reciprocity is the antimarket principle according to which I serve you not because of what I can get in return by doing so but because you need or want my service, and you, for the same reason, serve me' (Cohen 2009, 39).

Third, there is what we might call a 'relational ethos', which reflects a commitment to the idea that individuals are to be regarded and treated as equals. This seems to be what Wolff has in mind when he describes 'respect' as one part of an egalitarian ethos (the other being distributive fairness), noting that 'an egalitarian should believe that just as I expect or desire others to treat me with respect, I should treat them in a similar fashion, at least until they prove themselves unworthy' (Wolff 1998, 108).

When McTernan speaks about 'Cohen's just society', she seems to imply that Cohen is committed to a Rawlsian ethos: 'members of Cohen's just society', she notes, 'would possess an egalitarian ethos motivating them to work hard and in the most socially productive jobs' (McTernan 2013, 94). Her analysis here relies on Cohen's critique of the Rawlsian difference principle, and McTernan uses these arguments to construct what she calls 'Cohen's vision of the just society' (94). It is not clear, however, whether Cohen really is committed to the idea that productivity is required, or if it is required, whether it is required by an *egalitarian* ethos rather than a different value. A plausible reading of this argument is that Cohen is providing an internal critique of Rawls's approach, that is, he is concerned to argue that in a *Rawlsian* society, people should be committed to a Rawlsian ethos, along the lines we described above. To the extent that productivity is required, it is because of Rawlsian commitments, not luck egalitarian ones.[9]

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[9] Alternatively, if Cohen's critique of Rawls reflects his own commitments on this issue, it is not clear that these are *luck egalitarian* commitments. To the extent that a Cohenite ethos would require members to choose productive occupations, this would most plausibly be seen as arising from his commitment to a socialist ethos, derived from the value of community, rather than a luck egalitarian one. Cohen explicitly describes the community idea as distinct from egalitarian requirements: 'communal reciprocity is not required for equality, but it is nevertheless required for human relationships to take a desirable form' (Cohen 2009, 39).

Irrespective of Cohen's views on the matter, standard accounts of luck egalitarianism suggest that a luck egalitarian ethos would *not* require individuals to choose productive occupations. Beyond the requirement that distributions are equal, the absolute level at which individuals are does not matter from the perspective of equality; luck egalitarianism does not require individuals to seek to increase the total share. Qua luck egalitarian, we would be indifferent between a distribution in which everyone has 10 and one in which everyone has 100; we don't have to worry about the size of the social product, just that it's distributed equally. (Though, of course, we may be worried about the size of the social product for reasons other than equality.) Not being productive, then, is not a violation of the luck egalitarian ethos. McTernan's concern that the productivity requirement would lead to a status hierarchy is therefore not an objection to a luck egalitarian ethos.

In a society governed by a luck egalitarian ethos, those who, for reasons of brute luck, cannot be productive would have no reason (or at least no reason generated by *luck egalitarianism*) to feel shame – not only because being talented is not valued but also because the ethos does not involve a requirement to be productive.[10] McTernan's argument claims that individuals will assess their level of talent when they make a choice about their occupation. But this is not the case if, as we suggested earlier, the rewards attached to occupations do not track talent. Now, it may be the case that there is a certain prestige attached to certain occupations and/or that individuals lack the specific abilities and skills required for certain professions they would like to pursue. But – and this brings us to the final reply to this objection – inasmuch as they feel shame about this, it is not an objection against luck egalitarianism or its ethos. Recall that the general objection we are considering is that luck egalitarianism is

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[10] This also means that a luck egalitarian ethos would be in tension with ethoses that require individuals to be productive, such as the Rawlsian ethos and the socialist ethos discussed in section 4, which creates problems for philosophers like Cohen, who seems to endorse all three of these ethoses. We thank an anonymous reviewer for calling our attention to this issue.

uniquely at fault for making individuals who lack marketable talents feel ashamed and thus lose self-respect by either requiring them to reveal or acknowledge their lack of talent in order to receive compensation or requiring them to be productive. But, as we argued, neither innate wealth-talents nor ability to contribute are valued by luck egalitarians.

However, it may be the case that these luck egalitarian values are not fully operative in society and that implementing the luck egalitarian programme in a society that has not fully achieved this cultural shift, so to speak, is counter-productive by luck egalitarians' own lights. This is the objection we now turn to.

5   Shame in a broadly luck egalitarian society

While some critics seem to accept that shame over lack of talent would not occur in an ideal luck egalitarian society, that is, one in which everyone has internalised luck egalitarian commitments, they might retort that such a society is unrealistic: some, at least, will continue to value marketable talents. In this section, we clarify how shame would occur in such a society and claim that such shame is either inappropriate or, if appropriate, not a concern for luck egalitarians.

Shame is a result of a *global* self-assessment, whereby we realise that we, as persons, fall short of a certain standard or value (Taylor 1985). Now, the value in question can be a moral one (e.g. honesty, integrity, etc.) or a non-moral or 'natural' one (e.g. aesthetic, intellectual) and, accordingly, there is moral and non-moral shame (Deonna et al. 2011, 80, also Rawls 1999, 389-90). Note first that moral shame, though always a painful feeling, is not necessarily problematic. In fact, such shame can be an entirely appropriate response to a moral failing one has identified in oneself.[11] For example, if you discovered racist thoughts in

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[11] Indeed, as Arneson (2006) argues, shame is appropriate when felt in response to appropriate values and can also be used to promote egalitarian values, including an egalitarian ethos.

yourself, it would not be inappropriate to feel shame. Similarly, if manna fell into your lap and you find that your selfishness makes you reluctant to share your gains, it would be appropriate to feel shame. Moral shame about one's failure to comply with an egalitarian ethos is not misplaced at all and perfectly consistent with egalitarian commitments. More broadly, the moral shame associated with recognising that one falls short of the desiderata of the ethos could, in principle, occur with *any* kind of ethos, not just the luck egalitarian one. If, as McTernan claims, such shame would be problematic for egalitarian reasons, it would be problematic for *any* theory of justice that requires individuals to behave in certain ways or to have certain attitudes – this means that it might, in fact, be more problematic for *relational* egalitarians[12] than for *luck* egalitarians.

In any case, because luck egalitarianism does not include a requirement to be productive, any shame the untalented feel about their lack of talent would be of the non-moral kind: insofar as the critics are concerned about the feelings of shame that result *merely* from having to reveal – to oneself or to others – one's lack of talent, the relevant shame would be non-moral.

Let us accept that one should not feel shame about non-moral features. The critics might insist that non-moral shame about lack of talent will still occur even in a broadly luck egalitarian society where, as we said, having marketable talent is not valued. How can this be? Shame, as we noted earlier, accompanies the recognition that one falls short of a particular standard. When someone feels non-moral shame in this scenario, the standard to which this shame responds is wrong and must be revised. However, the shame can still be 'fitting' in the sense that it responds to a standard that is in fact held by oneself or a relevant reference group.

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[12] At least for relational egalitarians who believe that requirements of relational equality apply to individuals rather than institutions.

This contrasts with cases where the shame is 'unfitting' because the agent is mistaken, either about the standards held by others or about which reference group is the relevant one.[13]

If the critics envisage an instance of unfitting shame, it seems inappropriate to criticise the (right) standard (luck egalitarianism) rather than try to help agents identify the relevant standard correctly. But the emotion might be fitting since the luck egalitarian ethos is not universally internalised. As we mentioned in section 2, on the most widely accepted account of shame, an agent feels shame when she realises that she falls short of a standard or value that she herself endorses. Fitting shame over lack of talent could occur in a broadly luck egalitarian society when the agent herself rejects, or has not fully internalised, the prevailing luck egalitarian ethos. But in any society, there might be individuals who simply have incorrect standards; it is not an objection to luck egalitarianism if some individuals continue to have beliefs that are inconsistent with luck egalitarianism.

The critics might respond that these are likely not to be isolated individuals and that even luck egalitarians might feel shame because they know that a minority have not internalised the luck egalitarian standards. This reply assumes/switches to a social account of shame, according to which shame is felt relative to a standard held by a reference group; in this case, the reference group would be the minority. But if the agent takes a minority as the relevant reference group the shame is unfitting.[14] The occurrence of such unfitting shame does not bolster the case against luck egalitarianism, as pointed out above.

Moreover, a luck egalitarian policymaker could take into account how specific policies would affect individuals' wellbeing, and such assessments would include whether they cause this kind of shame. But steering away from policies that make people reveal or acknowledge features that they are inappropriately ashamed of is not necessarily the right thing to do in such

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[13] For an analysis of the 'fittingness' of emotions, see D'Arms and Jacobson (2000).
[14] We thank Alba Montes Sanchez for illuminating comments and discussion about this aspect of shame.

cases because it reinforces rather than challenges the notion that these are features that people *should* be ashamed of. On the contrary, we might want to encourage ostentatiousness about the feature in question in order to signal to the minority that their standard is misconceived. Consider, for example, how the LGBTQ community has responded to homophobic norms by publicly celebrating sexual diversity (at least in societies where there is a degree of acceptance of such diversity).

So we might in fact hope that a fuller internalisation of luck egalitarian values would reduce the occurrence of shame over lack of talent. This suggests that luck egalitarian policies should not be implemented before luck egalitarian commitments are widely accepted – but then the shameful revelation objection is not an objection to luck egalitarianism or its emphasis on personal responsibility but rather to its hasty implementation.

6   Shame, self-respect and equality

The previous sections have focused on the critics' claim that luck egalitarian policies would cause untalented individuals to feel shame about their lack of talent. This section moves on to a different part of the objection: the connection between shame and self-respect. We argue that the critics rely on unwarranted assumptions about this connection and thus this section helps to illuminate connections, relevant to all egalitarians, between shame and (self-) respect.

Shame seems to be important to the critics because it *leads* to unequal (self-) respect. Wolff, as we already mentioned, suggests that the feeling of shame will make it 'difficult to retain any sense of oneself as an equal under the circumstances' (Wolff 1998, 114). The thought here seems to be that feeling shame leads to a loss of self-respect, which in turn undermines people's respect standing. McTernan offers a more detailed account of the connection between shame and equality. She claims that there are two values that egalitarians of all persuasions must take seriously: equal respect among citizens and status self-respect. Status self-respect is

that dimension of self-respect that is grounded on one's status within society, and so upon the respect of others. She further claims that this dimension of self-respect is an aspect of recognition rather than appraisal respect (McTernan 2013, 95). McTernan, like much of the literature on self-respect, relies on Darwall's distinction between recognition and appraisal respect, which is perhaps less clear than it should be. On Darwall's view, recognition respect is the kind of respect owed to all persons equally: 'To say that persons as such are entitled to respect is to say that they are entitled to have other persons take seriously and weigh appropriately the fact that they are persons in deliberating about what to do' (Darwall 1977, 38). This type of respect is a central commitment of any egalitarian view so if the critics can show that the shame felt in a luck egalitarian society leads to unequal recognition respect they would have a strong argument against luck egalitarianism.

The second kind of respect in Darwall's account consists in a 'positive appraisal of a person, or [their] qualities' (Darwall 1977, 39). The objects of this *appraisal* respect are 'persons or features which are held to manifest their excellence as persons or as engaged in some specific pursuit' (38). Appraisal, or evaluative, respect is a matter of degree and unconnected to recognition respect: even when people are unequally deserving of *appraisal* respect, this does not undermine *recognition* respect. Both kinds of respect can be self-regarding, so we can distinguish recognition self-respect (i.e., respect for oneself as a person) from appraisal self-respect. Appraisal self-respect is distinct from self-esteem: both are self-regarding but while appraisal self-respect is concerned only with one's moral, character-related features, self-esteem relates to various features that one considers desirable, including non-moral ones (see Dillon 2019).

These distinctions help us clarify how shame affects a person's self-regarding attitudes. We may think that shame more or less directly undermines *recognition* self-respect. In some of the literature, shame, as a sense of failing to meet a certain standard, is directly linked to a

sense of one's own inferiority (e.g., Bartky 1990). Critics of luck egalitarianism similarly assume that shame must be linked with recognition self-respect. But this is too quick. While moral shame would plausibly undermine appraisal self-respect, non-moral shame is connected with self-esteem rather than appraisal self-respect, let alone recognition self-respect. Moreover, in a luck egalitarian society, where innate talent is not valued, lacking particular skills or abilities that an individual may value herself is likely to lead to disappointment rather than shame: I am disappointed that I have a poor memory since a good memory would serve me well in my chosen profession but I am not ashamed. So the assumption that a negative self-assessment due to lack of talent would undermine recognition self-respect is unwarranted.

Moreover, not all episodes of shame, even moral shame, must involve a grave blow to one's self-respect, especially not one's respect for oneself as a person. As Deonna et al. highlight, 'feeling shame as construed as realising that one ceases to be a person is too dramatic; this may be true of some cases of shame but we should allow for less dramatic forms of this emotion' (Deonna et al. 2011: 92).[15] What the critics of luck egalitarianism describe as responses to luck egalitarian policy seem to be isolated episodes of shame, rather than a persistent emotion since in standard forms of the objection, the shame is provoked by a certain realisation or revelation as a result of receiving compensation or having to reveal one's level of talent. So the assumption seems to be that the agent wouldn't feel ashamed in the absence of such compensation. But recognising one's failure to meet a certain self-relevant, non-moral standard is likely to undermine self-*esteem* but not self-*respect*. The critics help themselves to a strong assumption about the link between shame and self-respect that the literature on those concepts has forcefully called into question.

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[15] The possibility that shame can be episodic and trivial is also explored by Arneson (2006).

We have argued so far that it's not plausible that the non-moral shame that might be provoked by luck egalitarian policies undermines the kind of self-respect that all egalitarians have reason to care about. Returning to McTernan's argument is instructive here. McTernan argues that in a luck egalitarian society where there is a known hierarchy of productivity (which is in effect a hierarchy of talent, McTernan claims), this hierarchy is at risk of turning into a *status* hierarchy, which denies the untalented equal access to the ground of self-respect (McTernan 2013, 104-105). She defines a status hierarchy as one in which 'the hierarchy's roles are valued unequally, such that there is a known status inequality between different roles, and those at the top have greater status and those at the bottom have lesser status' (McTernan 2013, 97). However, she notes, such hierarchies are not necessarily inegalitarian: 'Status hierarchies may not always lead to unequal respect'; they become inegalitarian 'when the hierarchy has unified, dominating importance among members of society' (McTernan 2013, 97).

We do not disagree with McTernan about the dangers of a unified hierarchy. However, the move in her argument from what she calls a status hierarchy to a hierarchy of recognition respect is too quick. If what is valued unequally in the hierarchy McTernan envisages are individuals' *roles* (or the innate features that allow individuals to occupy these roles), rather than individuals themselves, this suggests that this is a hierarchy of esteem, not *appraisal* respect, let alone recognition respect. Inasmuch as different roles are valued differently, this valuation applies to the qualities that enable people to fill those roles, not the persons themselves qua persons. This need not mean according people less respect because they lack certain qualities we value – unless, perhaps, as McTernan assumes, productivity is invested with moral value. Inasmuch as there is a requirement to be productive and talent is required for productivity, the hierarchy of productivity is a hierarchy of respect, but that would be appraisal rather than recognition respect.

But what exactly is the mechanism through which a hierarchy of productivity would become a hierarchy of respect? In McTernan's account this is, again, mediated by shame, since the untalented must acknowledge their place in this hierarchy and thus admit that they lack talent, which in turn provokes shame. Since shame is, McTernan assumes, the opposite of self-respect, this productivity hierarchy may become an inegalitarian status hierarchy:

> in Cohen's society, the untalented would lack the grounds of status self-respect, given the argument above that they have to make shameful revelations in assessing their compliance with the ethos. Indeed, the untalented would lack equal *access* to such grounds of self-respect, given their lack of talent is no fault of their own. (McTernan 2013, 105, emphasis in original)

The assumption here then is that shame effectively transforms a hierarchy of productivity into a hierarchy of (self-)respect. In the remainder of this section we deny that this is the case; on the contrary, shame only occurs when a hierarchy of status is already in place and this would not be the case in a luck egalitarian society.

It is inegalitarian social norms that can illicitly turn the possession of certain non-moral features into a condition for belonging to a (respected) group or even for being a person, and it is awareness of such norms and the sense that they fall short of them that makes people feel ashamed. But any such shame is about being *considered* inferior or revealing that one belongs to a group that is considered inferior, not merely about lacking the features in question: one feels shame when it is revealed, by the possession of some non-moral feature that would otherwise be of little import for one's self-assessment, that one belongs to a group of lower social status. For example, when one feels shame for not wearing a linen shirt in a hot climate, it is not shame over the lack of shirt as such but rather about one's socio-economic status, which one's clothing reveals. It's unlikely that I will feel shame when I realise, say, that a linen shirt would be appropriate in a certain context, if I can afford one, although I may feel slightly embarrassed of my apparel. But when the reason I am not wearing a linen shirt is that I cannot afford one, then the absence of the shirt becomes an indicator of my poverty, and I am (made

to feel) ashamed because being poor is seen as revealing inferior status in (our, very inegalitarian) society. In this scenario, what causes me shame is not that I am failing to wear a linen shirt but rather our inegalitarian norms: I was already ashamed of being poor; the revelation that I do not have a linen shirt is simply what brings this status to the fore.

Similarly, it is not the realisation that one lacks talent that makes one feel shame and lose self-respect but rather the realisation that this puts one in a group that is treated with less respect than others. To us, this illustrates the important role that social hierarchies play in individuals' coming to feel shame about their non-moral features: these non-moral features may not in and of themselves play a role in how individuals think about themselves, but when they become associated with the lower rungs of the social hierarchy, they take on a much greater role in people's self-assessment and can become features that individuals feel ashamed to have. Crucially, then, it is not the feelings of shame that cause these status hierarchies but hierarchies that lead to shame.

Where does this leave the luck egalitarian argument? Even in a society that is broadly (even if not fully) luck egalitarian, talent would not be considered a ground for rewarding people so any hierarchies that remain would not track talent. The objection that luck egalitarian policies induce feelings of shame, which in turn would lead to unequal respect between people, does not hold in this kind of society. If the feeling of shame is created by already existing inequalities and accompanying social hierarchies, not the other way around, shame over lack of talent is unlikely to exist in a society without talent-tracking hierarchies. In a luck egalitarian society, one would feel, at most, disappointment about one's lack of talent, not shame, and inasmuch as the untalented would be ashamed because their endowments don't meet the standards they have for themselves, this may undermine their self-esteem but not egalitarian commitments.

7   Conclusion

We argued in this paper that in a broadly luck egalitarian society feelings of shame, if they occurred at all, would not be of the kind that undermines central egalitarian commitments. A luck egalitarian society would be radically different from our current society – in particular with respect to shared norms and how people think about brute luck disadvantage, including differences in individuals' talents. We have granted that there might still be instances of shame in a broadly luck egalitarian society. First, there might be moral shame associated with falling short of the requirements of the egalitarian ethos. However, this kind of shame, and moral shame more broadly, is not contrary to egalitarian aims as long as it is in response to correct moral standards. Second, there might be non-moral shame if a minority of people are not fully committed to the luck egalitarian ethos. But this kind of shame is unlikely to undermine basic egalitarian commitments, such as equality of recognition respect. In a luck egalitarian society, then, shame (about talents and other kinds of non-moral features) would be a rare occurrence and not undermine equal respect in the absence of non-luck-egalitarian social norms and/or hierarchies. The critics' emphasis on shame then is unwarranted. On the contrary, a concern with shame and its impact on either individuals' well-being and respect suggests that luck egalitarian norms and particularly highlighting the role of brute luck in the possession of certain features should be more widely adopted. The best response, we think, to norms that deny people equal status is not to hide the features that allegedly undermine that status but rather to directly challenge those norms: the untalented have no reason to hide their lack of talent, and we should challenge any norms that suggest that a lack of talent should be a source of shame. Luck egalitarian commitments are uniquely placed to help counter such norms.[16]

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