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Equality, responsibility, and justice as seen from a utilitarian perspective

| Published: September 1991



| Volume 31, pages 141–158, (1991) [Cite this article](#)[Theory and Decision](#)[Aims and scope](#) →[Submit manuscript](#) →[John C. Harsanyi](#)¹ **228** Accesses  **3** Citations [Explore all metrics](#) →

Abstract

A liberal democratic society must find a proper balance between respect for the basic equality of all human beings and respect for individual differences, including respect for individual excellence. Excessively equalitarian attitudes can be a major obstacle in accomplishing this. I first discuss the highly detrimental effects that such attitudes have had on American primary and secondary education. Then I discuss Rawls's suggestion to replace the traditional common-sense conception of justice, which he calls the *system of liberal equality*, with a much more equalitarian conception, which he calls the *system of democratic equality*. I argue that Rawls's conception of justice would be highly detrimental to society because it would needlessly discourage talented people from using their talents for the benefit of society.

In my view, some of Rawls's arguments are based on misconceptions about the nature of free will and of moral responsibility. To clarify these issues, I am proposing a new conception of free will and of moral responsibility, which I call *the bearer's responsibility view*.

Finally, I argue against the high priority that Rawls assigns to justice (or to fairness) over other social values, and against the even higher priority that Kant assigns to morality over other values of human life.

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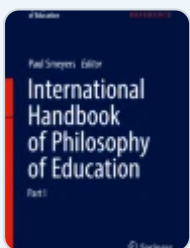
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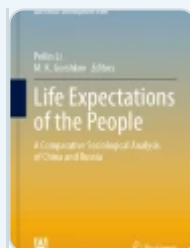
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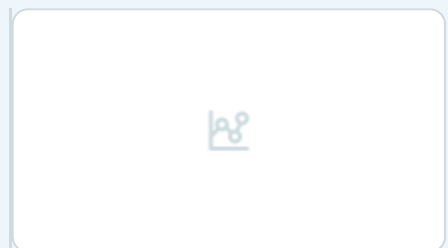
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About this article

Cite this article

Harsanyi, J.C. Equality, responsibility, and justice as seen from a utilitarian perspective. *Theor Decis* **31**, 141–158 (1991). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00132990>

Issue Date

September 1991

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00132990>

Keywords

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