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Fair Opportunity in Education: A Democratic Equality Perspective*

Elizabeth Anderson

Recent work on justice in the distribution of educational opportunities has focused on two phenomena. The first is the shift in the United States from an “equality” to an “adequacy” standard of fair educational opportunity. Instead of making the state provide equal educational inputs to rich and poor children, advocates for the disadvantaged, courts, and policy makers have been trying to make the state educate all students to at least an adequate threshold of achievement.¹ The second is the fact that education is not just an intrinsic good for the individual but an important instrumental good with positional features. It opens up access to the most rewarding careers and leadership positions in society in virtue of endowing individuals with relatively superior qualifications. Because such high payoffs are attached to an individual’s relative academic achievement in the competition for rewarding careers, one person’s gain in educational achievement is another’s loss of socioeconomic prospects. This consideration has led many egalitarians to reject adequacy standards for educational opportunity and insist that the state—and even parents—should constrain their educational investments in children according to an equality standard. Only so, it is argued, can individuals have genuinely fair opportunities, and only so can the state avoid unjustly injuring the already disadvantaged by effectively closing

* I thank Harry Brighouse, Josh Cohen, Lawrence Blum, Sally Haslanger, Rob Reich, Debra Satz, Adam Swift, Philippe Van Parijs, and participants in the March 2006 Massachusetts Institute of Technology conference, “Equality and Education,” for helpful comments.

1. For a history of this development, see Michael Rebell, “Educational Adequacy, Democracy, and the Courts,” in *Achieving High Educational Standards for All*, ed. Timothy Ready, Christopher Edley Jr., and Catherine Snow, National Research Council Conference Proceeding (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2002), 218–68.

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them off from realistic prospects for rewarding careers and leadership positions.²

I believe that we need to reframe this discussion by shifting our focus from the good education is supposed to do for the individuals who have it to the good the more educated are supposed to do for everyone else. Let us call “elites” those who occupy positions of responsibility and leadership in society: managers, consultants, professionals, politicians, policy makers.³ In a democratic society, elites must be so constituted that they will effectively serve all sectors of society, not just themselves. They must perform in their offices so that the inequalities in power, autonomy, responsibility, and reward they enjoy in virtue of their position redound to the benefit of all, including the least advantaged. This requires that elites be so constituted as to be systematically responsive to the interests and concerns of people from all walks of life.

This democratic conception of the responsibilities of an elite should shape our conception of the qualifications it must have. The qualifications of a democratic elite are those features that enable and dispose it to carry out the responsibilities a democratic society assigns to it—responsiveness to and effective service of the interests of people from all sectors of society. Responsiveness requires (i) awareness of the interests and problems of people from all sectors and (ii) a disposition to serve those interests. Effective service of those interests requires (iii) technical knowledge of how to advance these interests and (iv) competence in respectful interaction with people from all sectors. Respectful interaction is both constitutive of effective service in democratic societies and essential to eliciting information about the interests of clients, customers, and constituents and to engaging their cooperation in effecting solutions to their problems. An educational system suitable for a democratic society must cultivate all four qualifications in its elite and must select individuals for elite education with a view to how effectively an elite so composed will manifest these qualifications as a group.

Once we take seriously this democratic requirement of systematic responsiveness to all, we shall find that it has demanding egalitarian implications both for the composition of an elite and for how it should be educated. I shall argue that for an elite to possess all four qualifi-

2. Adam Swift, *How Not to Be a Hypocrite: School Choice for the Morally Perplexed Parent* (London: Routledge, 2003); Rob Reich and William Koski, “The State’s Obligation to Provide Education: Adequate Education or Equal Education?” (unpublished manuscript, Stanford University, 2006); Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, “Equality, Priority, and Positional Goods,” *Ethics* 116 (2006): 471–97.

3. I am assuming that some hierarchy of offices is necessary for efficient production of goods and services and that a regime that rotated everyone through all official ranks would be infeasible in any advanced society.

cations, its membership must be drawn from all sectors of society, including the less advantaged. Moreover, these diverse members must be educated together, so that they can develop competence in respectful intergroup interaction. A democratically qualified elite must be an elite that is integrated across all the major lines of social inequality and division that characterize it.

Working backward from the good we demand elites to do for everyone in society to their necessary qualifications, we arrive at a standard for the educational opportunities a democratic society must provide to its youth. A just K–12 educational system must prepare students from all sectors of society, and especially those disadvantaged along any dimensions, with sufficient skills to be able to succeed in higher education and thereby join the elite. This yields a sufficientarian or adequacy standard for just provision of opportunities for education: every student with the potential and interest should receive a K–12 education sufficient to enable him or her to succeed at a college that prepares its students for postgraduate education.

Against this adequacy standard, advocates of equality object that it ignores the positional advantages of students who, in virtue of the state's richer investment in their K–12 education, are more qualified for college and hence more likely to get admitted.⁴ This objection, however, presumes a narrowly academic conception of qualification for college, according to which students can be arrayed on a single scale of merit from top to bottom. On the broader four-dimensional conception of qualification articulated above, some qualifications are essentially dispersed across all sectors of society, and others can only be developed jointly by an integrated elite. This is not to deny the relevance of academic qualifications. It is to insist that this is a partial conception of qualification. When colleges select an elite that is truly qualified to serve everyone in society, they must select for all dimensions of qualification. This substantially reduces the positional advantages of those who are highly qualified by narrowly academic standards and grants positional advantages to those whose dispersed knowledge is relatively scarce among elites as currently constituted.

Oddly, the adequacy versus equality debate has been conducted in abstraction from the debate about the value of "diversity" in education that lies at the core of current arguments in favor of affirmative action. This is ironic, since affirmative action is explicitly designed to open educational opportunities to the disadvantaged by flattening out the positional advantages of students who have benefited from unequal state investment in their educations. The conception of elite qualifications

4. Reich and Koski, "The State's Obligation to Provide Education"; Brighouse and Swift, "Equality, Priority, and Positional Goods," 475–77.

that I have just articulated is just another way to capture the underlying point of diversity—with two twists that are often elided in discussions of this topic. First, “diversity” contributes to the qualifications of an elite; it is not a consideration that competes with meritocratic criteria. Second, it contributes to the qualifications of a group only when its members work together across sectional lines. It is not a qualification a group has simply in virtue of the range of identities possessed by its individual members. To see how these claims can be true requires a deeper understanding of how diversity—or integration, as I prefer to call it—is supposed to work.

This is not a brief in favor of affirmative action. Affirmative action is but one policy, and a belated and marginal one, that aims to tackle the educational problems that arise for a democratic society in the face of social inequality, especially in the context of group segregation. My brief is rather for comprehensive group integration in all of a country’s institutions and hence for integration of schools at all levels. Standards for fair educational opportunity must be determined with this end in mind. I shall argue that if they are, and society lives up to such standards, then the less advantaged will have no grounds for complaint.

HOW DISADVANTAGE IS TRANSMITTED THROUGH COGNITIVE DEFICITS AMONG ELITES: SEGREGATION AND GROUP STEREOTYPES

Let us begin our inquiry by exploring the ways elites in a democratic society may lack the qualifications they need to effectively serve the interests of people from all walks of life. We are particularly interested in how elites may fail to be responsive to the interests of people from social sectors that are defined hierarchically as dimensions of social disadvantage, since these failures are most threatening to democratic ideals. Our concern is not with all of the modes by which disadvantage is socially reproduced but specifically with the paths that work through cognitive deficiencies among elites. I shall focus on two such modes: segregation and group stereotypes. Sociologists and social psychologists have told us much about how these mechanisms systematically reproduce disadvantage, often by depriving the disadvantaged of knowledge they need to gain access to resources, esteem, and power. This knowledge-based perspective on disadvantage is not mistaken, but it is partial. I shall stress the other side of the story: how segregation and group stereotypes generate knowledge deficits on the part of the advantaged, and especially within elites, and how their ignorance and incompetence put others at a disadvantage.

Some conceptual clarifications are in order. Let us define the “advantaged” as those who systematically enjoy relatively superior access to resources, social esteem, power, and influence (including elite status)

in virtue of their socially ascribed group identities. The “disadvantaged” may be defined in corresponding fashion. Depending on the society in question, systematic advantages and disadvantages may be attached to identities such as class, gender, race, ethnicity or nationality, immigrant status, tribe, age, religion, caste, marital and parental status, sexual orientation, family membership, language/dialect/accent, and disability. Given that access to advantage and disadvantage is governed by many cross-cutting social identities, any given individual may be advantaged in some respects and disadvantaged in others. Hence, “the advantaged” and “the disadvantaged” do not define mutually exclusive classes of individuals but rather dimensions of social analysis that may vary depending on the context and the question one is asking. In addition, the ways any given identity may function to aid or hinder access to resources, esteem, and power may interact with the other identities an individual has, often in reinforcing but not simply additive fashion.⁵ For example, in the United States, particular disadvantages are attached to poor single black mothers over and above the disadvantages attached to each identity taken separately, partly in virtue of stigmatizing stereotypes associated with those possessing this combination of features—for example, suspicions of sexual licentiousness, drug addiction, and welfare dependency.

In today’s democratic societies, elites include some members who are disadvantaged along one or more dimensions. But they are still dominantly composed of members who are multiply advantaged, especially in society’s higher positions (chief executive officers and board members of major corporations, legislators, judges, occupants of executive offices, and so forth). Moreover, attainment of elite status, which I have defined in terms of office or occupation, need not erase the disadvantages a person may suffer in contexts outside the exercise of the powers of that office. A black businessman may still encounter difficulty hailing a taxi.⁶ An elite individual’s disadvantaged group identity may also condition her elite status, limiting the powers and advantages usually attached to her office. A female executive may face sexual harassment or insubordination on the part of male and female staff who resent having a woman as a boss.⁷ Thus, while possession of an advan-

5. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989: 139–67.

6. For further discussion of how race undermines access to privilege on the part of those who have seemingly “made it,” see Ellis Cose, *The Rage of a Privileged Class* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993); and Joe Feagin and Melvin Sikes, *Living with Racism: The Black Middle-Class Experience* (Boston: Beacon, 1994).

7. Vicki Schultz, “Reconceptualizing Sexual Harassment,” *Yale Law Journal* 107 (1998): 1683–1805.

tagged or disadvantaged identity is distinct from elite status, each conditions the other.

Keeping these observations in mind, let us examine how segregation and group stereotypes transmit disadvantage through their cognitive effects on elites. These mechanisms operate in similar ways that abstract from the identities of the groups in question. Thus, I speak in general terms about how modes of social stratification affect the cognition of groups in advantaged or disadvantaged positions. For any particular society, we could apply these claims to particular groups—for instance, to how U.S. whites are ignorant of and misperceive African Americans. The generality of these mechanisms helps us see that these cognitive deficits are not due to whites' ancestry, skin color, genes, or mythical racial essence, but simply to their contingent social positioning as a segregated and advantaged group.

Segregation

Socially stratified societies are typically characterized by high degrees of group segregation along dimensions of social inequality. In the United States, the prosperous and the poor, natives and immigrants, and whites and members of disadvantaged racial groups tend to live in different neighborhoods, attend different schools, and belong to different churches and voluntary associations. Even when they are not spatially segregated, these groups still tend to practice social segregation, choosing friends, associates, and acquaintances more from members of their own group than from members of other groups.⁸ Assortive mating patterns ensure that family lines, too, tend toward internal homogeneity. Family-owned businesses transmit this segregation to the sphere of work, to the extent that they preferentially hire from within the homogeneous family and friendship network. Gender poses only a partial exception to the general pattern of segregation of the more from the less advantaged. While heterosexual families, public schools, and churches are gender integrated, the perpetuation of "separate spheres" for men and women is manifested in an intense gender segregation of paid occupations, sports teams, and many exclusive private clubs, especially those established by elite businessmen.⁹ Certain orthodox religious sects also segregate men and women in their houses of worship and in other spheres of social exchange.

8. On class segregation in the United States, see Paul Jargowsky, "Take the Money and Run: Economic Segregation in U.S. Metropolitan Areas," *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 984–98; on racial segregation, see Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

9. Maria Charles and David Grusky, *Occupational Ghettos: The Worldwide Segregation of Women and Men* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

Segregation transmits disadvantage in numerous ways. Spatial segregation of neighborhoods enables advantaged groups to provide public goods to themselves while denying them to the disadvantaged.¹⁰ This is notoriously true for public schools. The citizens of a rich town may vote for zoning regulations that prevent the construction of housing for lower-income people. They may then provide themselves with excellent schools from which they have effectively excluded the less advantaged. They may insist on local funding of schools, to prevent the less advantaged from gaining access to revenues drawn from property taxes on the rich. Spatial segregation also facilitates the concentration of negative externalities on the disadvantaged. Socially necessary but undesired facilities such as toxic waste dumps, polluting factories, and homeless shelters can be located in neighborhoods populated by the poor, immigrants, blacks, and Native Americans.

Spatial segregation also helps perpetuate social segregation, which often also exists even in formally integrated spaces. Social segregation reproduces disadvantage by limiting the circulation of social and cultural capital to those already well endowed with these assets. "Social capital" refers to the networks of associates by which knowledge of and access to opportunities is transmitted.¹¹ Individuals tend to learn about job and educational opportunities from their families, neighbors, coworkers, and friends. If one's associates have limited acquaintance with better jobs and have never been to college, then one is likely to remain ignorant of these opportunities as well. Associates also provide the crucial personal connections needed to open doors to opportunity, through referrals and recommendations. Many employers recruit new employees by advertising openings through their current employees. This habit not only saves on advertising costs but may also yield a more reliable workforce, since current employees are likely to want to protect their own jobs and reputations by recommending only associates whom they believe will be good workers. Similarly, admissions officers at selective schools tend to weigh more heavily the recommendations of those they know personally. While reliance on social networks to recruit new employees or members of the elite may therefore save on search and evaluation costs, it tends to reproduce disadvantage in segregated societies.¹²

"Cultural capital" refers to knowledge of and facility in the often informal or little-publicized norms, conventions, and codes of conduct

10. Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*, 148–60.

11. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241–58.

12. Barbara Reskin, *The Realities of Affirmative Action in Employment* (Washington, DC: American Sociological Association, 1998), 32–33.

that govern access to advantages.¹³ It is transmitted through families and informal social engagement more than through formal education.¹⁴ College-educated parents transmit cultural capital to their children when they teach them how to polish their résumés and personal statements, how to make a good impression in an interview and on the job, how to ask for a raise or promotion, how to get the inside track on good internship opportunities. Rules of etiquette, body language, proper modes of dress, decorum, and taste, an “educated” accent and avoidance of slang, facility in the art of “small talk” within elite circles, and innumerable other subtle and often unarticulated skills, habits, and expectations attached to better opportunities remain hidden from the disadvantaged insofar as they are socially segregated from those who possess such cultural capital. This impairs the ability of the disadvantaged to successfully navigate more privileged social settings.

As this brief summary of the impact of segregation on the disadvantaged suggests, most scholars who study segregation stress how it deprives the less advantaged of the knowledge and skills, including social and cultural capital, they need to advance. This is correct, but it is only part of the story. Segregation also deprives the more advantaged of knowledge. To the extent that they lead lives that are isolated from the lives of the disadvantaged and personally know few disadvantaged people, they are liable to be relatively ignorant of the problems the latter face in their lives and of the constraints within which the latter must cope with their problems. When the elite is drawn overwhelmingly from multiply advantaged, segregated groups, their cognitive deficits hurt the disadvantaged, because elites constituted in this way lack awareness of and responsiveness to the problems and interests of the disadvantaged.

Consider, for example, the case of a personnel manager at a midsize firm who once told me of the failure of an employee benefit she wanted to promote among her staff, many of whom were working mothers with children in day care. The benefit was a tax-sheltered dependent-care expense account. Employees who enrolled in the program would have a designated amount of money withdrawn from each paycheck and deposited in a special child care expense account. They would submit their expenses for reimbursement, which would be provided on a tax-free basis. The benefit promised to cut the cost of child care by the employee’s marginal tax rate. After publicizing the advantages of the program, the manager was puzzled and disappointed that none of the lower-paid staff in her firm signed up for it. When she asked the sec-

13. Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital.”

14. Pierre Bourdieu, “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction,” in *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change: Papers in the Sociology of Education*, ed. Richard Brown (London: Tavistock, 1973), 80.

retaries why they hadn't enrolled, they explained that on their salaries, they couldn't afford the float. Between the time of incurring the expense and receiving reimbursement, they would have paid twice the cost of day care—once to the provider and once to the dependent-care account. If their paperwork was rejected for some reason or if they were a few days late submitting it, they could find themselves having to cover three months of expenses at once. Their remaining salary was not enough to make ends meet.

The tax-sheltered dependent-care account is an example of a policy designed with the interests and capacities of upper-middle-class working parents in mind. It neglects the needs and constraints of working-class parents. Were the elite drafters of this tax policy unaware of the constraints faced by low-paid working parents, or did they simply not care? Either way, they lacked at least one of the qualifications a democratic elite needs to perform competently in office—awareness of the problems of those they are supposed to be serving and a disposition to respond to these problems. Had the elites in charge of tax policy included people who had personally experienced such problems or had their social networks included such people, these problems would likely have been more salient and action guiding. Segregation of elites from the disadvantaged deprives them of the social capital (personal acquaintance with others) and hence propositional knowledge they need to do their jobs well.

Segregation also deprives multiply advantaged elites of the cultural capital that circulates in disadvantaged social circles.¹⁵ This makes them less qualified to do their jobs, because, to serve the less advantaged effectively, elites need facility with the language and styles of communication, body language, manners, and other subtle cultural habits of the less advantaged. For example, to effectively diagnose and treat a patient from an immigrant community, health care providers need not only the capacity to communicate in the immigrant's language but familiarity with the immigrant's cultural norms. Such norms may lead the patient to minimize complaints about symptoms, interpret symptoms in radically different terms than physicians do, seem to defer to the doctor's recommendations in the clinic in obedience to immigrant community norms while signaling a different attitude through body language, and so forth. Health care providers' lack of cultural knowledge of the immigrant community may lead them to misdiagnose and mistreat immigrant patients or to fail to effectively communicate medical needs to

15. Here I use the terms "social capital" and "cultural capital" in a normative sense, to refer to what people need to perform competently in elite positions, according to democratic standards. This contrasts with the sociological or descriptive sense of these terms, used to refer to what people need to gain access to elite positions.

them.¹⁶ Similarly, middle-class educators who are geared to respond to pushy middle-class parents and to design interventions in light of active and articulate parental inputs are liable to let the learning problems of less advantaged children “slip through the cracks” when the children’s parents obey working-class norms of deference to the “experts.”¹⁷

Communicative competence is a shared good of the communicators. It is not a private possession that one party has and the other lacks. If A and B are not communicating effectively due to cultural differences, then both lack cultural capital with respect to each other. Segregation of the advantaged from the disadvantaged reproduces this mutual lack of cultural capital. When elites are overwhelmingly drawn from segregated advantaged groups, they share their deficits in cultural capital.

Stereotypes

Social group stereotypes were originally viewed by psychologists as expressions of preexisting group prejudice, bigotry, or antipathy. Today, cognitive psychologists tend to view stereotypes as a generic mode of representing all classes of objects, which may be detached from affects and attitudes.¹⁸ A stereotype is conceived as a schema for making inferences about the nature of a particular object once it has been recognized as a member of a class with an associated schema. Stereotypes are crude, typically unconsciously held heuristics that enable people to economize on information processing and react quickly to situations involving the object. Stereotypes “work” in the sense that those who think in terms of one usually find their purposes satisfied by relying on it.¹⁹

Stereotypes embody several cognitive biases. They distort people’s reception of new evidence about their targets, making stereotype-confirming evidence highly salient, while leading them to overlook stereotype-disconfirming evidence. Hence, they are resistant to change in light of contrary evidence. They tend to exaggerate the homogeneity of members of a particular class and to exaggerate the differences between

16. Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1998), documents a tragic case of cross-cultural miscommunication between American physicians and Hmong immigrants whose daughter suffered from epilepsy.

17. Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 198–220, documents how the mismatch of middle-class educators’ cultural capital to working-class parents’ cultural styles systematically disservices the working-class students.

18. Linda Krieger, “The Content of Our Categories: A Cognitive Bias Approach to Discrimination and Equal Employment Opportunity,” *Stanford Law Review* 47 (1995): 1161–1248, briefly surveys the history of social psychology’s theorization of stereotypes.

19. Susan Fiske, “Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination,” in *Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Daniel T. Gilbert, Susan T. Fiske, and Gardner Lindzey (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 357–411, reviews the numerous uses of stereotypes.

members of different classes.²⁰ They also bias causal explanations of the behavior of members of the class. When an object's behavior conforms to the stereotype, those who hold the stereotype tend to attribute the behavior to the object's internal characteristics. When the object's behavior contradicts or fails to conform to the stereotype, those who hold the stereotype tend to attribute the behavior to circumstances external to the object.²¹

Although the general theory of stereotypes represents them in cognitive rather than affective terms, this reflects the high level of generalization at which most cognitive psychologists operate, which abstracts from the content of particular stereotypes. The content of stereotypes of advantaged and disadvantaged social groups reflects historical patterns of oppression and ideological rationalizations of inequality. Besides attributing positive qualities to advantaged groups and negative qualities to disadvantaged groups, such social group stereotypes often engage multifarious forms of antipathy against disadvantaged groups, including hatred, fear, disgust, contempt, distrust, resentment, estrangement, and aversion.

These cognitions and their associated feelings perpetuate group disadvantage in numerous ways. When the advantaged hold negative stereotypes toward the disadvantaged, this tends to lead to avoidance behavior and inchoate feelings of discomfort in the presence of the disadvantaged. This reinforces the social segregation of the advantaged from the disadvantaged and the cognitive deficits such segregation engenders in both groups. Stereotypes also have direct effects, causing discrimination against members of disadvantaged groups, especially when they have or seek access to elite positions.²² Since, in socially stratified societies, the stereotype of an elite group member is one who is multiply advantaged, members of disadvantaged groups seem not to "fit" the stereotype of an elite and are therefore less likely to be seriously considered for elite positions.²³ In addition, to the extent that promotions are conditioned on making friends with the boss, winning his trust, and making him feel comfortable working at close quarters with him, aversive stereotypes close off the disadvantaged from this avenue of

20. Fiske, "Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination," 362.

21. Barbara Reskin, "The Proximate Causes of Employment Discrimination," *Contemporary Sociology* 29 (2000): 319–29, succinctly reviews the literature on these themes; for a more exhaustive survey, see Fiske, "Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination."

22. Reskin, "The Proximate Causes of Employment Discrimination"; Samuel Gaertner and John Dovidio, "The Aversive Form of Racism," in *Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism*, ed. John Dovidio and Samuel Gaertner (New York: Academic Press, 1986), 61–89.

23. Reskin, *The Realities of Affirmative Action in Employment*, 35–36.

advancement.²⁴ The attribution biases associated with group stereotypes also distort elite judgments of their subordinates' performance. If a white or Asian male computer scientist does a good programming job, this is likely to be credited to his innate talent, whereas an equally good performance on the part of a female or black computer scientist is more likely to be credited to good luck or help from others. Such biases reproduce the stereotype of the "good" computer programmer as white or Asian and male, thereby engendering further race- and gender-based discrimination.

Thus, stereotypes held by elites (decision makers) and by advantaged groups more generally perpetuate the disadvantages of subordinate groups. The causes of this disadvantage lie in cognitive defects on the part of an elite that is overwhelmingly drawn from the ranks of those who are multiply advantaged and segregated from the less advantaged. Such an elite lacks the qualifications it needs to serve people from all social groups fairly and competently.

REMEDIES FOR THE COGNITIVE DEFICITS OF ELITES

If major social problems are caused by cognitive deficits on the part of multiply advantaged, segregated elites, deficits that deprive them of the qualifications they need to do their jobs, we should expect the educational system to remedy these defects. Unfortunately, the primary model we have for the kind of knowledge that education offers, which is supposed to qualify elites for leadership positions, is not up to the task of remedying the cognitive deficits just identified. The educational system, especially at its highest levels, takes the production and transmission of conscious, articulate, impersonal propositional knowledge as its primary function. Call this knowledge "academic." This is the knowledge that is explicitly taught in classrooms, tested in exams, and measured by course grades and test scores. Possession of academic knowledge is taken to be the touchstone of elite qualification. However, the deficits in elite qualification identified above do not fundamentally take this form. Nor can additional academic knowledge remedy the problem. In terms of the four qualifications needed by an elite in a democratic society—awareness, responsiveness, technical knowledge, and competence in respectful intergroup interaction—academic knowledge covers only technical knowledge and, to a lesser extent, awareness of the problems and

24. George Wilson, Ian Sakura-Lemessy, and Jonathan P. West, "Reaching the Top: Racial Differences in Mobility Paths to Upper-Tier Occupations," *Work and Occupations* 26 (1999): 165–86, show that, in white-dominated workplaces, whites have two paths of access to managerial and executive positions—demonstration of formal qualifications such as prior experience and demonstration of vague qualities such as loyalty through informal association with the boss—whereas blacks usually have only the formal path to promotion open to them.

circumstances of people from different walks of life. The deficits of an elite, when it is drawn overwhelmingly from multiply advantaged and segregated groups, primarily lie with other kinds of knowledge. Competence in intergroup interaction is a form of cultural capital or know-how, crucially dependent on savvy in building rapport across group divisions. Awareness and responsiveness centrally involve facility in and readiness to engage in first- and second-person perspective taking: drawing upon personal knowledge of life in disadvantageous positions and imaginatively projecting oneself into another's shoes, while holding oneself accountable to how the other reacts to and makes claims on one's own conduct. To endow an elite with these other forms of knowledge requires that the elite itself be fully socially integrated across all major lines of social inequality and that the diverse prospective members of the elite be educated together.

Three distinctions in knowledge are important here. First, knowledge may be embedded in and derived from different points of view. Academic knowledge represents the world from a detached, third-person point of view. By contrast, a first-person point of view represents the world from the perspective of a particular agent, in terms of the obstacles, opportunities, and experienced qualities of the world—what it is like—for that agent, as the agent sees them. The first-person point of view is immediately experienced by the agent, but it may also be communicated to others through testimony. For others to get access to the first-person point of view of another, they typically need personal contact, communicative competence, and rapport with the other, or else they need someone else with such social and cultural capital to mediate between the other and oneself. The second-person point of view represents the perspective we take when we address claims to others and evaluate the claims others make on us. Claims are demands for responsiveness to another's interests and evaluations, conceived as drawing their authority or normative force from the moral standing of the claimant rather than from the impersonal value of states of affairs. They are embodied in normative judgments that purport to offer authoritative claims on others' actions and feelings. Claims of justice are of this type, as are, more generally, any claims whereby we claim authority to hold others accountable for their actions and feelings, submit them to judgment and blame, and so forth.²⁵

Second, knowledge may be propositional or personal—knowledge of a proposition or of a person. Knowing a person involves more than knowing true third-person propositions about that person. It involves having rapport with that person, so that he or she reveals herself to the

25. Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), provides the definitive treatment of this idea.

knower, enabling the knower to empathize, or take up the other's first-person perspective. More ambitiously, personal knowledge involves mutual regard and reciprocal first-person perspective taking. This is the foundation for access to the second-person point of view, wherein we recognize one another's moral standing and authority to make claims on each other and judge the validity of those claims understood as drawn from our equal standing.

Third, knowledge may be more or less practically engaged, or disposed to guide action. Practical engagement may occur in conscious deliberation, unconscious habit, or both. For a representation to be practically engaged in conscious deliberation requires that it (i) be salient, or come readily to mind, whenever it is normatively relevant to resolving the practical question at stake in deliberation and (ii) arouse, or be clothed in, some motivationally engaged feelings, such as delight or disgust, alarm or appeal, guilt or outrage. The arousal condition is needed to ensure that the consideration in question, once it comes to mind, is not immediately dismissed but presses insistently on consciousness as something that demands to be weighed in practical deliberation. To be practically engaged in deliberation, representations need to have some felt normative force behind them.

Matters are somewhat different for representations that are practically engaged in unconscious habit. Most of our activity is habitual. It doesn't surface to consciousness but rather works behind our backs, more or less automatically, in ways that often defy our consciously held normative judgments. This does not mean that habitual activity is non-cognitive. We are not speaking of mere reflexes but of habits that are guided by entrenched, automatic, unconscious representations. Notably, stereotypes and attribution biases function in this way.²⁶ Such entrenched and practically engaged representations tend to shape action more reliably than consciously engaged representations, because we don't have to stop and deliberate to make them causally efficacious and because they work even, and especially, when we face pressure to respond quickly to a situation. Importantly, they often guide action contrary to our consciously endorsed evaluative judgments. They operate behind our backs whenever we are not consciously deliberating and even shape our deliberative habits—the considerations that are salient or overlooked by us, the evaluative judgments we tend to make upon the presentation of certain sorts of evidence.

I claim that possession of academic knowledge alone is not sufficient to qualify a segregated, multiply advantaged elite for positions of lead-

26. Anthony G. Greenwald and Mahzarin R. Banaji, "Implicit Social Cognition: Attitudes, Self-Esteem, and Stereotypes," *Psychological Review* 102 (1995): 4–27; Fiske, "Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination," 364–75.

ership and responsibility in a democratic society. This is so for several reasons. (a) The knowledge elites need for full awareness of the problems and interests of the disadvantaged is often first-person. (b) The knowledge they need for responsiveness to these problems and interests is often first- or second-person. (c) Adequate responsiveness requires that knowledge be salient, emotionally engaged, and habitually entrenched, so that it does not require Herculean conscious effort to mobilize. First- and second-person knowledge more often has these features than third-person book learning. (d) Merely superficial academic knowledge and consciously avowed moral principles lack the practical entrenchment necessary to override or block the influence of biased, unconscious stereotypes. (e) Ready access to first- and second-person points of view requires communicative competence in the form of the social and cultural capital needed to build personal knowledge of and rapport with the disadvantaged. This requires social integration, for which mere academic knowledge about the disadvantaged is no substitute.

Consider first the awareness qualification. For some types of policy decisions that are consequential for the disadvantaged, academic knowledge may be sufficient. An exemplary case might be central banking policies directed toward reducing unemployment. Arguably, one needn't get inside the heads of those affected by such policies to figure out what to do or determine whether they work. Objective data may be enough. But for other policies, understanding what to do, and especially why policies are not working as expected and how they might be revised to be more effective, involves taking up the personal perspective of those affected and viewing matters from their point of view. I illustrated this point above with the case of tax-sheltered dependent-care accounts. In principle the same knowledge could be discovered by examining low-wage workers' necessary expenses in relation to their budget constraints. However, this knowledge is much more readily accessible first-personally. What the low-wage worker knows immediately and first-personally about the value of dependent-care accounts for her could be deduced third-personally (by outsiders without consulting her) only after painstaking data gathering and calculation.²⁷

In other cases, especially when the knowledge needed concerns

27. One might also gain such knowledge by imaginatively projecting oneself into the other's situation and thinking about what one would do if one were in their shoes. However, the ability of segregated elites to reliably gain knowledge in this way may be questioned. When one faces real gaps in knowledge of others' circumstances, it is all too easy to substitute stereotypes about them, or else generalizations from one's own experience, to facilitate inferences about others. For an insightful discussion of the potential and pitfalls of gaining knowledge about others through imaginative projection, see Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perception," *Hypatia* 2 (1987): 3–19.

individuals' interpretations of and responses to what they see as the meanings of different actions and events, there is no substitute for taking up the first-person point of view. Effective treatment of Hmong immigrants for epilepsy requires a grasp of their interpretation of this disease as a somewhat lucky spiritual possession.²⁸ Effective contraceptive policies require an appreciation of how some groups of women have internalized norms that stigmatize them for having premarital sex, how this makes them reluctant to view themselves as sexual agents, actively choosing to have sex, and hence deters their use of forms of contraception that require planning ahead or daily use.²⁹

Elites can gain access to this knowledge in two ways. They could include people with the relevant first-person experiences. Or they could talk to those who have such experiences, taking their testimony as authoritative about what it is like to be in their position. This second, ethnographic route requires the investigator to cultivate communicative competence across social divisions. This, in turn, requires the investigator to acquire some of the social and cultural capital—social connections to the disadvantaged and facility in their cultural norms—that circulates among the disadvantaged. Either route requires some social integration of elites with the disadvantaged.

Consider next the responsiveness qualification. It's not enough that elites know relevant facts about the problems and circumstances of the disadvantaged. These facts must be both salient and pressing in their deliberations concerning matters that affect the disadvantaged. Formal academic training may give segregated elites some knowledge of the disadvantaged that was originally acquired by the ethnographic route. They could take a sociology course on poverty, for example. However, academic exposure does not generally lead to that knowledge being practically engaged when elites need it for decision making. They may be able to recall it when their own interests are at stake—for instance, when they have to pass the exam in Sociology 101. But in the absence of some powerful motivation to care about the disadvantaged, that same knowledge is unlikely to be practically engaged when elites need it to exercise their powers responsibly. It is all too easily forgotten or buried once formal training has been completed. Even if it is recalled, what will make it pressing? Under conditions of social segregation of multiply advantaged elites from the disadvantaged, the latter have little recourse but to rely on elites' sense of charity and abstract conscientiousness toward the disadvantaged to ensure that they give proper weight to what they know about the disadvantaged.

Contrast this with the motivations available to elites who are socially

28. Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*.

29. Kristin Luker, *Taking Chances* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

integrated across social divisions. In that condition, some elites will come from the ranks of the disadvantaged themselves. Relevant first-person knowledge of disadvantage is likely to be more salient to such elites. They also have access to an additional motivational path that could endow this knowledge with motivational force—namely, identification with their disadvantaged group. While there is no guarantee that each elite drawn from the ranks of the disadvantaged will be motivated to help those of their group, the availability of the motivational path of personal identification in addition to charity makes this more likely. More important, social integration dramatically improves elite access to second-person claims made by or on behalf of the disadvantaged and enhances their motivational force. There is nothing like face-to-face interaction with people making claims on one's own conduct to motivate people to heed those claims, especially when the claim makers are in a position to hold one accountable for neglecting those claims. Fellow elites are in a far stronger position to do this than nonelites. They have constant contact with fellow elites, must work with them in official contexts, are often in a position to judge them on their performance and sanction them formally or informally for poor performance, and are more likely to associate with them in private life as well. The bonds of affiliation and trust forged in private life are likely to spill over to greater conscientiousness in heeding their second-person claims in official contexts as well.

Constant personal contact across social divisions enhances the personal knowledge elites have of the disadvantaged, making knowledge of their interests and circumstances more salient. Constant interaction across divisional lines in contexts where cooperation is required enhances elite intergroup competence to learn about and heed relevant first- and second-person knowledge. Constant pressure to heed the second-person claims of the disadvantaged helps entrench their perspectives practically in elite decision making. In these ways, an elite that is socially integrated across lines of disadvantage is more qualified to perform its functions than a socially insular elite drawn overwhelmingly from the ranks of the multiply advantaged. If segregation makes an elite ignorant and incompetent, then integration makes it more knowledgeable and competent.

Social integration also reduces the problem of stereotypes and attribution biases against the disadvantaged. All groups in socially stratified societies, whether advantaged or disadvantaged, share similar cognitive biases against the disadvantaged.³⁰ However, the disadvantaged, more

30. John Jost, "Outgroup Favoritism and the Theory of System Justification," in *Cognitive Social Psychology: The Princeton Symposium on the Legacy and Future of Social Cognition*, ed. Gordon Moskowitz (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2001), 89–102, provides a survey and explanations of this phenomenon.

often than the advantaged, live in conditions in which counteracting ideas are practically engaged. In general, people tend to prefer members of their own group to out-group members and are more sensitive to in-group heterogeneity than outsiders are. In-group cooperation enhances both of these effects.

The good news is that stereotype-reducing conditions can be secured for elites through social integration. Groups do not have to be defined along sectional lines of ascriptive identity. They can be defined by formal commitment to cooperation toward an institutionally supported goal. When a cooperative group contains both advantaged and disadvantaged members working together toward common goals, the need to obtain individuating information about fellow cooperators helps overcome out-group stereotypes. Cooperation with the disadvantaged on terms of equality also tends to induce in-group favoritism toward all cooperators, which helps overcome generalized antipathy toward the disadvantaged. The experience of working together reduces prejudice and intergroup antipathy.³¹

It follows that socially integrated elites who are educated together on terms of equality under conditions of institutionalized support for intergroup cooperation are less prone than segregated elites to prejudicial cognitive biases. An integrated elite is therefore more qualified to carry out its responsibilities than is a socially insular elite that is drawn overwhelmingly from the ranks of the multiply advantaged.

The cognitive benefits of social integration cannot be replicated simply by inculcating academic knowledge. Explicit, formal instruction concerning the falsehood of group stereotypes and the injustice of acting on them has only modest effects on behavior. People who sincerely express commitment to principles of equal treatment and who consciously disavow negative stereotypes of the disadvantaged still discrim-

31. This is the famous "contact hypothesis" first advanced by Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954). Importantly, not all intergroup contact is equally good at reducing stereotypes and group antipathy. Formal, institutionally supported contact aimed at promoting shared goals works better than informal contact. See Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002). It is also important that groups interact on terms of equality, as peers, rather than in contexts where the advantaged occupy elite positions and the disadvantaged occupy subordinate positions. Recent studies supporting Allport's hypothesis that integration on terms of cooperation and equality reduces group prejudice and stereotypes include Cynthia Estlund, *Working Together: How Workplace Bonds Strengthen a Diverse Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Samuel Gaertner and John Dovidio, *Reducing Intergroup Bias: The Common Ingroup Identity Model* (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2000). For a review of the literature, see John Dovidio, Samuel Gaertner, and Kerry Kawakami, "Intergroup Contact: The Past, Present, and the Future," *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 6 (2001): 5–20.

inate against the disadvantaged.³² This is because stereotypes and antipathy targeted at the disadvantaged are practically entrenched in habit and operate unconsciously. Merely formal absorption of explicit beliefs rarely penetrates deeply, unless people are put into circumstances where they are forced to repeatedly put these beliefs into practice, so that these counterstereotypical beliefs become entrenched in habit. The relevant circumstances are ones in which people must cooperate with disadvantaged group members on terms of equality and are held accountable both for successful cooperation with them and just conduct toward them.³³ This requires personal interaction with the disadvantaged. We change our habitual beliefs about and attitudes toward others through personal knowledge of and cooperation with them—by way of first- and second-person knowledge—not by way of formal instruction.

If it is hard to appreciate these points, this is because the academic model of the knowledge that counts toward elite qualification has profoundly distorted debates over the value of “diversity” in education. Institutions of higher education in the United States today recognize the educational value of diversity, but they have struggled to articulate this value within the terms of the academic model. Opponents of affirmative action, accepting this model, frame diversity-oriented admissions as a compromise of standards of academic merit. They challenge proponents to show evidence that students’ grades and test scores improve with diversity. Lacking much quantitative evidence of conventional academic improvement, defenders of affirmative action attempt to cast its benefits in more qualitative terms—for instance, in terms of the cognitive benefits of the greater diversity of observations that heterogeneous students make in class participation. Against this point, opponents argue that if diversity of opinion is valuable, then schools should select directly for ideological diversity rather than using social identities as a proxy for this.

The opponents’ reply is inapt insofar as what elites lack is not ideological diversity but diversity in first-person experiences that have been shaped by membership in various disadvantaged groups and by exposure to diverse second-person claims by the disadvantaged. The proponents’ attempts to cast this argument merely in terms of ideas that students will hear in class discussions also concedes far too much to the academic model of education.

32. Gaertner and Dovidio, “The Aversive Form of Racism.”

33. For general discussion, see Reskin, “The Proximate Causes of Employment Discrimination.” An important empirical study illustrating the importance to reducing prejudice of institutionally supported racial integration, valuation of intergroup competence among elites, and accountability of elites for their conduct toward disadvantaged racial groups is Charles Moskos and John Butler, *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way* (New York: Basic, 1997).

Elite educational practice in higher education is wiser than its rhetoric. Most selective colleges in the United States are residential colleges, for sound educational reasons. Living away from home, and with students from diverse social groups, provides prospective elites with crucial opportunities to reshape their identities in a more integrated, diverse environment than what they experienced in their homes and neighborhoods. For many elite students, especially for those who are multiply advantaged, college is their first opportunity for significant contact on terms of equality with members of other racial groups and class origins.³⁴ Much of the critical learning that elites need to undertake is grounded in intergroup peer interactions out of class, not in formal in-class discussion or class assignments. For the educational value of diversity is located not just in academic knowledge but in other ways of knowing—personal knowledge of others in face-to-face interaction, direct confrontation with their first- and second-person claims, and cultivation of forms of social and cultural capital that circulate beyond the bounds of the social circle within which one grew up and that enable competent interaction across lines of social inequality. Pursuit of diversity and integration in higher education, then, does not compromise the qualifications of elites but rather enhances their qualifications.

A SUFFICIENTARIAN STANDARD FOR FAIR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

I have argued that an elite qualified to serve a socially diverse society must be socially integrated, incorporating that diversity within itself not just in membership but in social interactions among its members. This means that the members of the elite must be drawn from all significant social groups and be educated together. Working backward from the requirements for a qualified elite, we can derive a standard of fair educational opportunity to which all social groups should be entitled. Access to elite status is largely governed by attainment of a four-year college degree, reflecting success in a curriculum demanding enough to prepare students for postgraduate (professional) education. Since the elite must draw its membership from all social groups, members of all social groups must have effective access to a primary and secondary education sufficient to qualify them for success at a four-year residential college with such a curriculum. By “effective access” I mean access within the realistic reach of students exercising substantial but not extraordi-

34. Douglas Massey, *The Source of the River: The Social Origins of Freshmen at America's Selective Colleges and Universities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 198–201, observes that this is particularly true for white students, who come from far more segregated and homogeneous family, neighborhood, and school backgrounds (as measured by race, class, parents' marital status, and so forth) than their more diverse black and Latino peers.

nary effort and within the financial reach of their families. In practice, I believe this entails that every student with the underlying potential should be prepared by their primary and middle schools to be able to successfully complete a college preparatory high school curriculum and should have such a curriculum available to them in high school upon successfully completing the requisite prior course work. This yields a high but not unattainable sufficientarian standard for fair educational opportunity.

Sufficientarian principles do not constrain inequalities in educational access above the sufficiency threshold. Parents who want to provide their children with more education than the minimal required to enable them to complete successfully a serious four-year college degree are free to do so, using their own private resources or by demanding that their public schools provide more. The sufficientarian standard thus rejects “leveling down” educational opportunities to the lowest common denominator in the name of equality. I believe such leveling down ought to be rejected, because the development of human talents is a great intrinsic good, a good to the person who has it, and a good to others. More highly educated people are better able to serve others in demanding jobs and volunteer service positions.

Against this claim, defenders of an egalitarian distributive principle argue that it is unfair for the state to channel more educational resources to some students than to others. It should treat all students equally. However, the consequence of implementing an equality-of-resources criterion of fair educational opportunity would be to level down opportunities to the tastes of the median voter. This would come at a significant cost to human development. In addition, the kind of equality that matters is not equality of resources. Equality refers fundamentally to an ideal of social relations, in which people from all walks of life enjoy equal dignity, interact with one another on terms of equality and respect, and are not vulnerable to oppression by others.³⁵ This requires that people with diverse identities share a common stock of cultural capital whereby they can cooperate competently with one another and respond to one another’s claims and that each have enough human capital to function as an equal in civil society. It does not require that everyone have equal education. Inevitably, some people will have more human capital than others, if not because of differential external investment, then through differential underlying potential and tastes for education. If inequalities in human development due to different talents and ambitions do not undermine equal standing in civil society, then inequalities due to differential public or private investment need not undermine this standing either—provided the sufficiency standard is met.

35. Elizabeth Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?” *Ethics* 109 (1999): 287–337.

Egalitarians object that my stress on the egalitarian civic value of education neglects the value of education as a private good to the individual, which is positional.³⁶ The more education one has, the better able one is to compete for coveted positions at selective colleges and, in turn, for better-paying, more prestigious, and intrinsically rewarding careers. Even if everyone is educated to a sufficiency standard, those who benefit from greater public or private investment in their human development will outcompete the others for these coveted positions. This is unfair to those who enjoyed less investment in their educations, especially if the state is responsible for the unequal investment.

This objection assumes that the positional advantages attributed to additional formal education accrue across lines of social inequality. That is, it assumes that the prosperous can convert their greater resources into a competitive advantage over the less well-off in access to higher education by investing more in K–12 education. The qualifications required for a democratic elite put sharp constraints on the ability of the better-off to gain competitive advantages in this way, however. Since an elite overwhelmingly drawn from the already class-privileged is less qualified than an elite drawn from all socioeconomic classes, colleges that are doing their jobs must sharply discount the positional advantages that the prosperous can accrue by endowing their children with more academic knowledge. 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.

Other egalitarians have suggested limiting the positional advantages that accrue to more education as well.³⁷ Reich and Koski dismiss their suggestions for compromising meritocratic standards as utopian.³⁸ The argument of the last section supplies a strictly meritocratic case for limiting the positional advantages of formal education. Academic knowledge is but one of the types of knowledge elites need to have. Acquiring the other types of knowledge requires that elites be drawn from all social groups and be educated together, in integrated settings that foster intergroup communication and cooperation on terms of equality. Since additional academic knowledge is no substitute for these other types of knowledge, its marginal value as a qualification for access to higher education really does decline as more highly academically prepared students are admitted, and schools seek students with other qualifying

36. Reich and Koski, "The State's Obligation to Provide Education."

37. Brighouse and Swift, "Equality, Priority, and Positional Goods," 488–89, suggest allocating desirable jobs by lottery or nepotism rather than by meritocratic criteria such as educational achievement.

38. Reich and Koski, "The State's Obligation to Provide Education."

features. Once we admit social integration as a key to educating a qualified elite, we must acknowledge that certain qualifications for admission to the elite are essentially distributed across group lines. Other qualifications that elites need can be developed only by a socially integrated elite drawn from all sectors of society. This does not entirely eliminate the positional advantages of more education. In particular, it will still count in within-group competition. Nor should these positional advantages be wholly eliminated. Academic qualifications are genuine. But considerations of social integration sharply limit the positional advantages that accrue to higher academic achievement in competitions between the multiply advantaged and the disadvantaged for access to elite positions.

It might be objected that the case for integration justifies only token representation of the disadvantaged in higher education and so would do little to counteract the positional advantages of differential educational investment at the K–12 level. My argument, however, is for very substantial representation of disadvantaged groups in higher education. Elite ignorance and neglect of the problems of the disadvantaged is vast. Integration has little hope of correcting this deficit unless multiply advantaged elites have a high probability of encountering the disadvantaged as peers frequently, in substantial numbers. If they are present in only token numbers, members of advantaged groups will have few opportunities for significant interaction with them.³⁹ Tokenism also primes group stereotypes rather than defusing them. People learn to pay attention to the internal heterogeneity of out-groups only when they are present in substantial enough numbers that their presence is not perceived as unusual.⁴⁰

So far, I have derived the requirements for fair educational opportunity from an analysis of what opportunities must be effectively accessible to individuals in order to constitute an elite that is qualified and disposed to serve the interests of all classes in society. This satisfies the interest that the disadvantaged have in how effectively the elite will serve it. Does it also satisfy the interest the disadvantaged have in getting the chance to serve in elite positions themselves? I believe so. The demand for a thoroughly integrated elite serves both interests at once. If everyone has effective access to an education that prepares them for a college that qualifies its students for professional positions, and colleges follow admissions

39. William Bowen and Derek Bok, *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 234–36.

40. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, “Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (1977): 965–90; Reskin, “The Proximate Causes of Employment Discrimination,” 325.

procedures that give substantial weight to the imperative of integration, this amounts to giving the less advantaged a positional good that counterbalances the positional advantages the prosperous obtain from investing more resources in their children's academic preparation.

It might be thought that, even if the positional objection is met, the disadvantaged still have a just complaint against arrangements that channel more public resources to educating the children of the prosperous than to educating others. Shouldn't the state invest equal resources in everyone's education? I think not, for three reasons.

First, equality of resources is not the right standard of equality. In some cases we can and do invest more educational resources in the disadvantaged. This is particularly evident for the education of the disabled, who receive far more intensive investments than their peers. Rather, the proper egalitarian aim is to ensure, to the extent feasible, that everyone has sufficient human capital to function as an equal in civil society—to avoid oppression by others, to enjoy standing as an equal, to participate in productive life, and so forth. This sometimes requires more intensive investment in the disadvantaged than an equality of resources standard would allow. Even in cases of severe disability, where the egalitarian standard cannot be met, there is a strong case for doing what we can to improve disabled children's basic functioning so that they can participate meaningfully in community life.

Second, once the positional objection is met, the less advantaged have no just complaint against groups that value education highly from taxing themselves so as to invest more public funds in education than the median voter would choose. Different groups have varying tastes for public goods and should be free to tax themselves accordingly.⁴¹ Moreover, once educational institutions are designed so that more highly educated elites are genuinely responsive to everyone's interests, everyone benefits from others' education, and we all share an interest in having some be educated more highly than the median voter would be willing to fund.

Third, the objection presupposes a condition of class segregation

41. It does not follow from this that different communities within a state are entitled to draw on vastly unequal tax bases to fund their unequal tastes for education. John Coons, William Clune III, and Stephen Sugarman, *Private Wealth and Public Education* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1970), propose an "equal tax rates, equal spendable dollars" criterion of equity in public school finance, according to which communities should be entitled to draw funds from a common tax base in proportion to their willingness to tax themselves, with equal tax rates yielding equal tax revenues. It isn't clear how much more people would be willing to tax themselves once they provided the revenues needed to secure for all the high level of sufficiency proposed by my criterion. To the extent that they would, I suggest that the Coons et al. standard offers a fair starting point for justly allocating surplus tax revenues.

in which municipalities differentiate themselves not simply by their provision of public goods in accordance with the tastes of their residents but also by the class composition of their residents. I have argued that social segregation is itself unjust, in that it creates an insular, clubby, self-serving, negligent, and ignorant elite. We cannot rely on affirmative action in college admissions to correct the problems of pervasive class and racial segregation. While affirmative action is necessary, taken alone it is too little, too late. The argument of this article entails much more extensive policies designed to integrate education at all levels. For starters, this could include a right of any child to cross municipal lines to be admitted to any public school in which their group is underrepresented, relative to the demographics of their state or their metropolitan area, provided that their parents or guardians pay the school the same tax rate that prevails in the community where the school is located. This would not deter the poor from attending schools in wealthy communities, since the poor typically pay higher school tax rates than the rich do.⁴²

Over the long term, comprehensive social integration of schools by class and race requires dismantling the laws and practices that currently enable advantaged communities to segregate themselves from the less advantaged. Class-exclusionary zoning laws that require minimum lot and home sizes, prohibit multifamily units or rental units in homeowner neighborhoods, and so forth should be prohibited. Housing discrimination laws should be vigorously enforced by using testers and imposing severe penalties for violations. Private developers should be required to build mixed-class housing in all residential tracts. Such measures would profoundly alter current habits of segregation. While they seem radical, extreme class segregation has been a fact of U.S. life only since the spread of zoning laws in the 1920s and didn't become the rigid norm until well into the postwar suburban boom.⁴³ If prosperous Americans less than a century ago grew up rubbing shoulders with less advantaged neighbors, we can learn to do so again.

This article has focused on fair educational opportunity, not fair educational outcomes. Yet we cannot be indifferent to actual educational achievement. The egalitarian goal is to create a society in which all of

42. See, e.g., Jeffrey Cohan, "Shrinking Tax Bases Crippling Suburbs," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 7, 2004, <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/04067/281673.stm>, and "Local Taxes Display an Uneven Bite: County Residents Who Are Black or Poor, Pay More," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 8, 2004, <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/04068/282688.stm>, documenting how poor and black communities pay far higher local tax rates (sometimes ten times as much), for far less revenue yield, than wealthy and white communities.

43. William Fischel, "An Economic History of Zoning and a Cure for Its Exclusionary Effects," *Urban Studies* 41 (2004): 19–26, traces extreme exclusionary zoning policies to the 1970s.

its members stand in relations of equality to one another in the major institutions of civil society, especially at work and in civic activities. Equal standing in relation to others entails a negative and a positive goal. Negatively, it requires that each person have sufficient internal capacities and external resources to enjoy security against oppression—violence, domination, material deprivation, social exclusion, stigmatization, and the like. Positively, it requires that each person have enough to function as an equal in society—to fulfill a respected role in the division of labor, participate in democratic discussion, appear in public without shame, and enjoy equal moral standing to make claims on others. These goals set a minimum threshold of acceptable educational outcomes that varies with the general level of attainment in society. In developed societies, more than basic literacy and numeracy is required to hold one's own in interactions with others, whereas this would not be required in a society where literacy is rare and few jobs require it. I suggest that in the developed world attainment of a high school diploma or its equivalent, representing real twelfth-grade-level achievement, is necessary for equal standing. I venture also that this would be sufficient for equal standing provided elites with greater education were actually qualified for their positions by democratic standards—which is to say, aware of and responsive to the interests and claims of the less educated.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

Recent work on justice in the distribution of educational opportunity has proceeded on the assumption that just distributive principles in this area can be determined independently of what we need the most highly educated to do for the rest of us and what it would take to qualify them for the roles we expect them to serve. On this assumption, advanced education is conceived as just another private good, access to which is determined by positional competition in the realm of cognitive development. This model treats one person's cognitive development as an injury to others, because it puts others in an inferior position to compete for higher education and the further private goods it helps people secure.

44. I thus wish to dispel the "positional arms race" metaphor that pervades the literature on educational opportunity. In my view, this metaphor supposes that the content of education remains fixed on traditional academic goals, ignoring practical education in intergroup cooperative competence and the other educational functions of integration. I have been arguing that more education for elites does not necessarily widen inequalities in functioning between elites and the rest. If elites are properly educated to be responsive to others, more education for them will redound to the benefit of the less advantaged. This entails that elite education should be a humbling experience oriented to their obligations of service to others, rather than what it currently is, a celebration of their supposed "giftedness" that only sharpens their heightened sense of entitlement to all things good.

I have argued elsewhere that such a conception of the value of cognitive development reflects a political economy of envy, with its accompanying destructive and wasteful implications.⁴⁵ In this article I have tried to recover for egalitarian thought two Rawlsian insights that are critical for detaching egalitarianism from the politics of envy. First, inequalities in the distribution of a good are justified if they redound to the benefit of everyone. Second, we should conceive of the asymmetrical distribution of human knowledge and talents as a public good and arrange social institutions so that this distribution functions as a resource that benefits everyone. Rawls took the difference principle, which encapsulates the first insight, to embody the conditions under which the distribution of human talents does function as a public good.⁴⁶ He argued that, if we take these insights seriously and realize them in our social arrangements, then we will avoid the politics of envy, because we will see that “it is not in general to the advantage of the less fortunate to propose policies that reduce the talents of others.”⁴⁷

I use Rawls’s insights to different ends than Rawls himself did, because my concern lies with nonideal theory—that is, with constructing workable criteria of justice in educational opportunity for our currently unjust world, rather than for a well-ordered society. Hence, the asymmetrical distribution of human knowledge and talents that is my focus is based not on nature or genetics but on the epistemological consequences of social inequality and segregation. They entail that certain knowledge and skills essential to serving everyone, and especially the disadvantaged, are held by the disadvantaged themselves or else can be reliably generated only by comprehensive integration of the disadvantaged into all positions in society, including elite positions. The knowledge and skills elites need to serve everyone are essentially distributed across all social sectors, or best created in socially integrated cooperative settings, and hence require that the elite be constituted from all social sectors and educated so that members from all sectors learn to work together on terms of equality.

This alternative conception of human knowledge as diverse and socially distributed, rather than as arrayed on a single hierarchy of cognitive development, undermines the presuppositions of the positional competition model of education, which implicitly takes pervasive social

45. Elizabeth Anderson, “Rethinking Equality of Opportunity: Comment on Adam Swift’s *How Not to Be a Hypocrite*,” *Theory and Research in Education* 2 (2004): 99–110.

46. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 87 (“The difference principle represents, in effect, an agreement to regard the distribution of natural talents as in some respects a common asset and to share in the greater social and economic benefits made possible by complementarities in its distribution”).

47. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 92.

segregation for granted. To do justice to the alternative conception requires a comprehensive commitment to the practice of integration. I have argued that if we practice integration in our educational institutions to the extent required to produce a qualified elite, the resulting distribution of educational opportunity will redound to the benefit of all and provide no grounds for complaint on the part of the disadvantaged, even if some receive more investments in their education than others.