An internal defence of educational meritocracy

Haoyuan Wang

UCL

MPhil Stud Philosophical Studies

Declaration

I, Haoyuan Wang confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Impact Statement

This thesis presents a new argument for the meritocratic distribution of formal education. It will contribute to understanding the conception of educational merits and why we should take merits as a core criterion for distributing educational goods. In addition, the new account opens a new way to view the relationship between meritocracy and social equality.

Abstract

Meritocratic distribution is a common way of allocating formal education at higher levels. But is it morally defensible? In this paper, I propose a new argument ('internal account') for the meritocratic distribution, which differs from the typical defence based on social efficiency or a theory of individual desert. The key idea is that educational goods should be distributed according to one of education's intrinsic aims—promoting individuals' self-development. "Merit", properly understood, is a way of tracking this feature.

The paper is built on a methodology for identifying the appropriate distributive criteria according to the distributive context. Following Michael Walzer, I argue for selecting 'core' guiding criteria according to the 'internal logic' of distribution in particular spheres. Merit, for its relevance to the intrinsic aim of education, can be seen as the core criterion of the sphere of education.

I also develop Dewey's 'growth' theory as an appropriate account of the intrinsic aim of education. I define merit as a conception based on the 'growth' theory: Merit is what enables an individual to gain growth from the process of education. Hence, distributing educational resources according to one's merits ensures that one can genuinely benefit from the resources given to her. In other words, meritocratic distribution guarantees the realization of the intrinsic educational goal, i.e., the development of an individual.

Furthermore, though meritocracy is usually thought of as in tension with egalitarianism, the internal account of meritocracy is not necessarily inconsistent with the requirements of social equality. The paper also compares the internal account of meritocracy with the traditional account of meritocracy by referring to three different types of social-egalitarian proposals: the fair equality of opportunity principle, the adequacy principle and the prioritarian principle. I conclude that the internal account can better accommodate some core claims made by these proposals.

Content

1. Introduction

1.1 Meritocratic distribution of education

Meritocracy, or distribution according to one's merit, is one of the common ways of distributing resources. A meritocratic principle generally requires that a distribution of goods should favour (i.e., typically, preferentially assign goods to) meritorious agents. According to Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, there are usually two components of the meritocratic principle. First, there should be an open competition for the goods. In the case of education, this implies that students should compete for educational resources, such as places in higher education. Second, other things being equal, better-qualified candidates are preferentially entitled to the distributed goods. If we arrange a competition but end with selecting a less-qualified candidate, we disobey the meritocratic principle (2020:230). For instance, if we decide to use standard test scores as a benchmark for admitting students into a degree programme, the meritocratic principle requires us to choose the candidate having the best test score, regardless of other features, like the background or characteristics of the candidate.

Meritocratic distribution is prevalent in our practice of arranging educational resources. Compulsory general education stops at some point, with some regions or countries earlier and some later. After the termination of compulsory education, advanced education examines students' academic performance. They need to present proof of stronger capabilities to enter another stage of learning.

However, meritocratic distribution, in general, may be something that proponents of social equality or democracy aren't happy with. In Michael Young's time, he expected that meritocracy would divide social classes too sharply, with the lower class less and less likely to share knowledge, status and power with the elite class. It draws us back to the principle of hereditary, which we have strived to break for two centuries (1994:175). Daniel Markovits also recognises the problem of snowball inequalities brought by meritocracy. Due to the unequal inheritance of resources to compete, the children of the middle class are very likely to be denied access to the elite social opportunities. Besides, the elite class is also burdened by competition. He points out that meritocracy caused the alienation of the elites, or the meritocrat, as he states,

> At its worst, the meritocratic elite squanders the capacity to set and pursue authentic, intrinsically valued goals, so that honour is reduced to being useful without fuss. Even at its best, meritocracy invites deep alienation…Meritocratic production, by making elite workers rentiers whose incomes depend on exploiting their own human capital, renders work a site of suppression rather than expression of the superordinate worker's true self. (2020:40)

Hence, for proponents of democracy and social equality, if possible, providing abundant and equal resources for all citizens so that they can engage in various activities throughout their lives might be a more defensible approach.

However, on the other hand, the prevalence of such meritocratic practices may suggest that we have intuitions favouring the meritocratic distribution of educational resources, even in the face of a general egalitarian ethos. For instance, Michael Walzer makes the following claim.

> Specialized education is necessarily a monopoly of the talented or, at least, of those students most capable at any given moment of deploying their talents. But this is a legitimate monopoly. Schools cannot avoid differentiating among their students, advancing some and turning others away. (Walzer 1983:211)

So the question we have to answer is roughly this: if we support ideals of equality and democracy, can we justify unequal distributions guided by a meritocratic principle? And if so, how? Is our (many people's) intuitive acceptance of meritocratic distribution in education defensible, given that it seems to clash with other attractive ethical/political ideals?

1.2 The case of education

The aim of the paper is to examine one particular sector, which is formal education, where meritocratic distribution is commonly applied. However, the system of meritocratic distribution usually covers at least two different social sectors. The first operating institution of meritocracy one encounters is education, which has been turned into a 'rigorous and intense contest to join the elite. It

concentrates training in the narrow, super-educated caste that wins the competition for places and grades at the top schools and universities (Markovits 2020:5).' The second institution closely follows the first. The job market offers and disproportionately rewards the immensely demanding work that is only qualified by the well-educated and capable elite. One may ask: if meritocracy refers to the whole social system—from education to the job market, from the distribution of labour and profession to wealth and social status, why do I focus on the sphere of education in particular? What makes it deserve special emphasis?

First, compared with the case of jobs, the reason to allocate educational resources meritocratically seems less clear. In job market, taking people's abilities and skills as part of consideration can be easily explained by social efficiency, such as providing quality service for other people. As Young has mentioned, 'the poorest technician was glad if when his wife was ill, he could call a doctor with an I.Q. of at least 100…Everyone gained from having the best men as Chiefs of Staff, Astronomers Royal, Vice-Chancellors of Universities, or Chairmen of the Social Science Research Council (1994:145).' Even though we do not have the best men for each profession, we can hardly afford to live in a situation where technicians lack relevant expertise, scientists and scholars are poor at research, and politicians are ignorant of how to address the pressing problems in society. Even for egalitarians, the possible levelling-down situation brought by letting unqualified workers take relevant roles is surely what they want to avoid.

But why we adopt meritocracy at the prior stage—the stage of formal education—seems less clear. Education determines whether one has the relevant skills and knowledge that enable him to compete for a job. In other words, the meritocratic distribution of formal education itself is responsible for individuals' different levels of 'merits' during the later stage. People entering higher education, or even top universities have chances to cultivate the relevant abilities for job competitions. Yet why do we let them have access to educational resources far better than the others so that they can outcompete the others? We cannot easily answer this question by appealing to utility, as we do in the case of jobs. Is meritocracy at this stage defensible? If there isn't anything morally valuable to distinguish people by their merits during the process of education, why not favour a more egalitarian

distribution? For example, why not ensure everyone has the same educational resources which enable them to develop similar levels of abilities and skills?

Another special reason to focus on the case of education is that, compared to job distribution, merit is usually more decisive a criterion in guiding education distribution (after the stage of compulsory education). Though one's skill or talent is also important when considering whether a job can be given to her, outside of the most elite and competitive professions, the distribution may not take these as the dominant criterion. As Michael Walzer mentioned, many positions only require minimal qualification, and in fact 'no additional training would enable them to do it better (1983:135).' More importantly, what counts as qualifications for a job can be relatively loosely tied to common ideas of merits (e.g., talents and abilities). For instance, Walzer thinks if we want to give a prize to someone who writes the best novel of the year, it is necessary for the committee to evaluate the novel on behalf of literary merits. By contrast, if a hospital wants to enrol new doctors, it not only refers to the candidates merits, such as his medical knowledge and expertise but also other facts, like whether the candidate shares the same working values as the hospital. As he says,

> …it must be true that anyone who studies hard, works through the necessary material, and passes the examination, deserves to be a doctor…But it would not be unjust to deny him an internship or a residency in a particular hospital. The hospital selection committee need not choose the applicant with the highest score. (Walzer 1983:138)

However, in the case of education, qualifications for entrance to higher education, especially top schools, are more directly dependent on one's merits. We arrange standard exams officially or using many other types of assessment to track students' academic performances. The results of these tests determine, to a great extent, students' chances to get into desirable schools. In other words, our distribution of educational benefits tends to be more meritocratically determined.

1.3 Why seek a defence?

The paper attempts to establish an account of meritocracy, which defends merits as a core criterion

for distributing educational goods. I'm not claiming that a meritocratic distribution of educational goods will always be justified, once all relevant normative considerations have been taken into account. The view I'm trying to defend is this: the fact that some distribution of educational goods is meritocratic, is a *pro tanto* reason to favour it, over a non-meritocratic alternative. [1]More importantly, my account of meritocracy defends meritocracy from the aforementioned general worries. I argue that meritocratic distribution of education is not necessarily inconsistent with pursuing social equality.

Perhaps in present days meritocracy has numerous problems. Even if we can defend that conclusion (that there's something justifiable about educational meritocracy), we could still have all sorts of reforms to make to existing meritocratic practices, to try to bring them closer to our ideal of meritocracy. In other words, the aim isn't to defend the status quo in all its details. The aim is to defend the best version of the distributive ideal that our existing arrangements seem to be (imperfectly) attaining to.

There are two reasons for seeking such an account. First, we can better understand the moral justification for meritocracy. Is meritocracy only favourable when it can serve public interests? Is it aimed at giving everyone what he deserves so that the distribution can be fair? Articulating the moral ground of meritocracy is important, especially given its potential tension with social equality. Egalitarians argue that there are problems with the meritocratic ideal, at least with the contemporary practices of meritocracy. However, is meritocracy necessarily opposed to equality? Can we have a meritocratic ideal which accommodates our egalitarian aims? Only when we recognize the values we want to achieve by meritocracy, can we know whether and how they are in conflict with equality.

Second, as mentioned, meritocracy is prevalent in the case of educational distribution, and it may be practically more helpful to think about what we can do with the status quo. Meritocracy has deeply influenced the modern social structure, as well as the educational system. If we want to abandon meritocracy, what other alternatives should we adopt? Shall we use a lottery to decide who

[1] By 'pro tanto' reason, I mean the distributive criterion of merit can possibly compromise with other morally significant concerns, even though it is a default option in typical cases. See more discussion in 4.3.

can go to top universities? It is doubtful that we could overturn the whole institution of meritocracy before striving for an improvement. As Johnathan Wolff suggests,

> We must start from where we are. Rarely, if ever, do we make a 'fresh start' with all possible outcomes on the table. Debate has a 'status quo bias' and in policy terms we are stuck with this, however much we feel it is philosophically unjustified. (2011:8)

Despite arguments against the contemporary meritocratic system, Markovits also admits the possibility that meritocracy may solve the problems it raises. Even though the current practice of meritocracy brings huge inequalities and risks of class conflicts, and the feeling of alienation, the solution to these difficulties invokes virtues, like 'clarity of mind and the capacity to convert understanding into effective action—that are themselves commonly associated with meritocracy' (2019:xxiii). More generally, 'there is no contradiction in thinking that meritocracy might solve its own problem, unlock its own trap, to recover its original, democratic promise and refashion an open, fair society whose elite does well by promoting the social good' (2019:xxiii).

The new account of meritocracy follows this line of thought, attempting to explore an ideal of meritocracy which carries its genuine moral function. In other words, it does not only provide one explanation about why merits are relevant reasons for allowing different treatments of people, i.e., a justification of merits but also aims at something more ambitious, that is, to make such an account responsive to the potential challenges faced by contemporary operation of meritocracy.

There are two more clarifications about the scope of my defence. First, the new meritocratic account, like the typical meritocratic system of selection, mainly applies to elder students. For example, the case of higher education is where meritocratic selection typically takes place. Admittedly, when it comes to students at secondary school, primary school and even pre-schooling institutions, referring to merit may become more and more controversial, though it may not mean the notion of merit becomes meaningless at all. I leave open the question of what particular stage meritocracy becomes applicable. In the following discussion, I assume that the context in which meritocracy is adopted is appropriate, like the typical case of higher education.

Second, one may question whether the aim of the paper is to justify a meritocratic distribution of education in a particular society, for example, a democratic society, or a society embracing a meritocratic ethos. If a society doesn't have a commitment to a democratic ideal or a tendency to pursue meritocratic social order, it may not experience the aforementioned tension between the two values. Is the following discussion meaningful to them? I think yes. Meritocracy and its possible tension with democratic values are worthy of discussion in many ways, even for those who do not think that they are pursuing a more democratic or meritocratic society. This is because these cultural and social groups are still likely to have some ways to distribute education when the resources are limited and require some standards of distribution. They may have their own assumptions about the purpose of the educational system as well as the purpose of distributing education which are worthy of reflection. Therefore, discussion around these issues may be worthwhile for them. Yet does my conclusion suggest that they must favour meritocracy or a democratic egalitarian ideal if they don't? No. I don't think that there is one fixed justifiable aim and only one right answer to arrange education and its distribution that everyone should follow. I leave open the question of whether there are other morally justifiable and valuable ways for a particular cultural or social group to organize educational distribution.

1.4 Outline

The plan of this dissertation is roughly as follows:

In Sections 2-3 I rehearse objections to the defences/justifications of meritocracy that appeal to social efficiency and individual desert, and then motivate my alternative approach.

In Section 4 I discuss a methodology for identifying the appropriate distributive principle according to the context/sphere in which the distribution takes place. Following Michael Walzer, I argue for a strategy that selects 'core' guiding principles or criteria according to the 'internal logic' of distribution in particular spheres or the 'meaning' of the particular distributed goods. This strategy suggests that if merits can be taken as a core criterion of distribution in the sphere of education, we can justify

meritocracy by referring to the internal logic of education.

In Section 5 I make a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic merits, in order to separate the definition of merits from a utilitarian understanding, which regards merits as conceptually attached to utility. I also suggest that inquiring about the intrinsic conception of merits requires us to examine the intrinsic aims of formal education.

In Section 6, I review Dewey's theory of education, especially his idea of 'education as growth.' I take this growth theory as offering a plausible account of the intrinsic aim of education.

In Section 7 and 8, I propose an alternative conception of merit and an argument for meritocratic distribution of educational resources, following Dewey's growth theory. I argue that meritocracy can be seen as a process to realize the educative aim—ensuring individual growth when the notion of merit is appropriately understood.

In Section 9, I compare my internal account with some egalitarian proposals. I argue that the internal account of meritocracy is consistent with some key ideas for promoting social equality, and I conclude in Section 10 by discussing this account's practical implications.

2. Social Efficiency and Desert-Based Defences of Meritocracy

Before introducing my defence of meritocracy, let us first examine two typical defences—the social efficiency[2]-based defence and desert-based defence. This may be helpful to show why an alternative account is needed.

David Miller shows that meritocracy has its roots in common opinion. Under many circumstances, people prefer distributing goods according to their contribution to the community. What kind of values support this common preference? Miller finds that the dominant thing people look at is one's contribution. However, they also allow equality to offset it to some degree (1992:569).

The notion of 'contribution' seems to combine two factors—efficiency and desert—together. We may think people capable of contributing more are those who should be given the resources *because that gets us more of whatever is being contributed*, i.e., we can get better outcomes through meritocracy. Alternatively, we may think these people should be given resources *because of their contribution*, i.e., those who increase efficiency deserve the rewards.

However, we can separate two arguments from one another to clarify the two different directions this argument can go in. The first kind of argument refers to a utilitarian principle, claiming that selecting the most talented/capable students is the most efficient way to organize our educational resources. In short, meritocracy is justified by the appeal to *social efficiency*. The meritocratic principle is a tool to help us achieve what a utilitarian principle requires, i.e., generating the most social goods. The argument sometimes depicts an attractive picture of educational distribution, that if the more talented and capable individuals gain the best resources and become good teachers, doctors, engineers, scientists and policy-makers, they will bring huge benefits for the whole society. For example, the ancient Chinese institutions used to adopt a meritocratic distribution of public offices. They believed that when the most qualified candidates are selected, the utility of the state and society

[2] I use 'efficiency' and 'utility' interchangeably in this dissertation.

is promoted. Plato also makes similar consequentialist arguments, claiming that the best political system should be ruled by people who are well-equipped to manage the government (see Mulligan 2018:9).

Another typical defence is to introduce some ideas of individual *desert*. Individuals are said to be justified for what they are assigned (e.g., educational resources or opportunities), or are even entitled to them due to their relevant merits. For instance, Aristotle makes the following comments in his *Politics*, implying that meritorious individuals deserve better resources:

> …those who are superior or inferior should receive superior or inferior amounts, in proportion to the degree of their superiority or inferiority…When a number of flute-players are equal in their art, there is no reason why those of them who are better born should have better flutes given to them; for they will not play any better on the flute, and the superior instrument should be reserved for him who is the superior artist. (2020:112-113)

Both defences face challenges. Let's start with the utilitarian defence. First, there are numerous objections raised to social utilitarianism in general. From these criticisms and debates, we basically agree that utility should not be viewed as the single or even dominant criterion. We won't adopt a policy that promotes the well-being of most people by exerting disproportionate harm on a minority group. We also try to avoid intervening in individuals freedom of choice when the intervention can bring us better outcomes. For instance, the government does not coerce people to consume healthy food products for themselves, even though this may improve health conditions (and perhaps happiness) at a populational level. That is to say, utility is required to be balanced and compromised with other important values, such as social equality, solidarity, protection of individual rights, and so on. Therefore, if meritocracy is merely justified for the reason of generating utility, it is also subject to constraints set by other concerns which may outweigh our appeal to utility.

Second, meritocracy does not always prefer a distribution which may be favoured by the principle of efficiency. Having distinguished scientists and engineers may improve the living conditions of people through technological development. But suppose that investing the same amount of money on a program delivering basic scientific knowledge which is useful in daily life to those 'average'

learners may improve people's living and promote happiness to a larger degree. In that case, a utilitarian principle would not favour a meritocratic distribution.

Most importantly, for utilitarians, since meritocracy is just one among several approaches to maximising overall benefits, it is only taken as having an instrumental value, instead of being intrinsically appealing. Suppose the officials of Region X issued a policy that schools with the best test outcomes will be awarded a large sum of money. By carrying out a meritocratic distribution, School X will enrol more talented students thus ranking first in the region. But suppose there is another plan available, plan B: if School X only enrols local students who usually come from rich neighbourhoods, it may gain some donations (which does not outnumber the regional reward) from the parents. If the school is mostly concerned with financial rewards[3], Plan A (i.e., the meritocratic distribution) is judged as preferable as it brings more benefits to School X.

Through the admission policy prefers a meritocratic distribution, the decision is only be based on the contingent fact that it happens to generates more money (and because the regional officials can provide a generous reward). A utilitarian defence of meritocracy thus does not capture what seems most meaningful to apply the meritocratic distribution, i.e., what is intrinsically good about providing the resources for the more capable students. If there are alternative plans to realize the utilitarian goals, we will shift from the meritocratic distribution to prefer something else. Therefore, I believe we need to defend meritocratic distribution with an account emphasising its intrinsic values, rather than its (potential) instrumental utility in some cases.

Now consider the desert-based defence. It takes talents, abilities and ambitions (i.e., merits) as some natural or nurtured characteristics one possesses. The entitlements to certain goods are based on their possession of certain characteristics. But the obvious question/problem with this is why, exactly, we would think that the possession of certain characteristics makes one entitled to social goods. Won't possession of characteristics, either by nature or nurture, be arbitrary, since it depends on

[3] One may worry that I use the term 'utility' here in a too narrow sense. Utility can go much beyond economic benefits. This is true. But the point here is to show that meritocracy is only instrumentally valuable for the efficiency-based defence since whether a distribution promotes efficiency does not necessarily depend on meritocracy but on other facts.

contingencies or luck for an individual? The connection between merits and entitlements to goods can hardly be invoked without controversy. Lippert-Rasmussen also points out that there may be some other features which usually grant entitlements to certain goods, for instance, the possible benefits selecting the best-qualified will bring about (i.e., efficiency) or the recognition for one's efforts put into work. These features show that merit alone is insufficient to ground a claim of entitlement (2020:239).[4]

However, I won't argue against the 'desert' defence of meritocracy here, beyond identifying this obvious and significant challenge that it faces. There may be room for proponents of the 'desert' theory to develop better arguments, yet the existing controversy still offers a reason not to start from the notion of desert to defend meritocratic distribution.[5]

The question that I want to explore is whether there is any other type of approach that's viable: whether we could, in principle, offer a justification of the meritocratic principle without referring to social efficiency *or* desert, thus avoiding the controversies and drawbacks in these two theories.

[4] Additionally, Michael J. Sandel argues that even though we may be said to be entitled to the goods, we may still don't deserve the goods. The possession of attributes that give rise to the benefits is inadequate to ground desert in the strong sense. (Sandel 1982:71-72)

[5] For example, Thomas Mulligan attempts to make a systematic desert-based argument for meritocracy. See Justice and the meritocratic state (Mulligan, 2018).

3. An ‘Internal’ Defence of Meritocracy

The previous defences based on efficiency or desert attempt to provide a general justification for meritocracy. The notion of desert or the value of social efficiency is to provide the moral ground for meritocracy no matter what context we adopt such distribution. In other words, they are regardless of what kind of goods (e.g., education or jobs) are to be distributed or for what aims they are to be distributed. However, I think there is a possibility that our intuitions to view meritocracy as defensible are to be explained by the special context of education, given that it is often treated as a decisive criterion (as said in 1.2). This is close to what Walzer has argued. Recall his comment on the meritocratic distribution of education.

> Specialized education is necessarily a monopoly of the talented or, at least, of those students most capable at any given moment of deploying their talents. But this is a legitimate monopoly. Schools cannot avoid differentiating among their students, advancing some and turning others away. (Walzer 1983:211)

Walzer suggests that the monopoly of ‘talented’ or meritocracy, is legitimate especially in the cases of educational distribution, as if such a distributive pattern naturally ‘flows’ from this specific context. He also argues that there may be some ‘internal logic’ (see explanation in the next section) governing the distributive sphere of education, such a principle should be what is relevant to the ‘meaning’ of the distributed goods. I want to try to develop and vindicate this approach.

If there is internal logic within various spheres, we would probably be justified to say there are principles favoured according to this internal logic. I would call these principles ‘core principles’ which are relevant to the meaning of the distributed goods and capture the internal logic of distribution (see Section 4). The basic thought is that if we can establish an account of what the internal logic of education is, we can use this to establish what exactly merit is, in the context of education. Thus, meritocracy may be justified (if this approach is viable), by virtue of it being an internal feature of educational systems/practices. I will call this an internal account of meritocracy.

What would this internal account provide for us? First, we can have a stronger defence of meritocratic selection without referring to efficiency or desert especially when the latter accounts face challenges from other social values or rest on potentially controversial assumptions. In this sense, we can say our new approach of defending meritocratic principles isn't necessarily in competition with the typical defences. They can work together for a stronger defence of meritocracy, based on offering different sources of justification.

Second, we may have a better understanding of the intrinsic moral value of meritocracy which renders meritocracy its intuitive justification in particular contexts (e.g., in the sphere of education). As mentioned, from a utilitarian point of view, meritocratic distribution isn't called for if we have better ways to maximise utility. If meritocracy is an appropriate arrangement for educational resources, it seems counterintuitive to conclude that it is always replaceable once any other methods of promoting utility can be found. In this sense, my new is a crucial supplement to any utilitarian account of the legitimacy of meritocracy, since it captures (as a utilitarian account doesn't) what is intrinsically appealing about meritocratic distribution.

There is another goal of the paper. As mentioned in 1.3, my defence of meritocracy in some way is constructive. The internal account aims to establish an acceptable conception of exactly what educational merit, as such, consists of. This is not only because meritocracy is often criticised for taking on controversial definitions of merits, but also due to the requirement of separating a non-instrumental conception of merits from a purely utilitarian/instrumental understanding of merits. Otherwise, the defence of meritocracy won't be independent of social efficiency, and won't be able to act as a distinct source of justification (see Section 5). However, the two tasks may turn out to be two dimensions of the same problem. If we finally arrive at an acceptable account of the internal logic of educational distribution which justifies meritocracy, it will entail what kind of merits we should be appealing to. Or if we find out that referring to some ideas of merits is required by the internal logic of educational distribution, then it also follows that a meritocratic distribution is justified (see Section 7 and 8).

4. Distributive criteria within particular spheres

In this section, I develop an account made by Walzer in Spheres of Justice (1983). Walzer proposes that given the distinct meaning of the diverse social goods, there won't be a single set of principles or criteria appropriately applied to various dimensions of social distribution. For every sphere of distribution (e.g. offices, money, health, education), there are special criteria and arrangements which are proper to refer to, as they constitute a kind of 'internal logic' of the distribution. However, articulating why and how certain criteria and principles are more appropriate for certain dimensions of distribution is challenging. Thus, for Walzer, no account of the meaning of social good, or of the boundaries of the sphere within which it legitimately operates, will be uncontroversial. Nor is there any neat procedure for generating or testing different accounts. (1983:21)

I will start by introducing Walzer's strategy and basic ideas. Then I propose a distinction between the core and peripheral criteria we use in different contexts of distribution (in 4.2). This distinction is intended to respond to Dworkin's challenge to Walzer's account. Dworkin criticises Walzer for neglecting interactions between different spheres of distribution. Hopefully, the core/peripheral model can both retain Walzer's main idea of arranging distribution according to spherical differences, and accommodate the need for regulating between spheres. I argue that core criteria gain special justification from the distinctive internal logic of the sphere, although this does not mean they cannot be required to compromise with some non-trivial peripheral concerns (in 4.3). Finally, I suggest that for the sphere of education, merit may be regarded as a core criterion of distribution, while social efficiency acts as a peripheral criterion (in 4.4).

4.1 Spheres of distribution and their 'internal logic'

How do we decide the way we distribute educational goods? Or, how do we decide the distribution of social goods in general? The philosophical literature provides us with abundant materials to refer to. Some are based on commonplace ideas like individual deserts, freedom of exchange, satisfaction

of people's needs, etc. Others are developed into more refined accounts combining considerations from fairness, social equality, efficiency, and other values with each other. As we are left with such 'rich' content to look at, a question naturally arises. How to find the most appropriate account that can guide our arrangements of social goods?

Typically, disputes centre on arguing for one set of distributive principles satisfying our requirements of justice and expectations of good outcomes. Such principles are said to be legitimate or attractive within various contexts or social dimensions. For example, a Rawlsian principle may be regarded as generally applied to the cases of distributing jobs, public offices, education and other social distributions which can be identified as distributions of 'primary goods.' The principle of utility is usually seen as a universally helpful guideline. Whatever the definition of 'utility' one may take, we refer to it when carrying out various kinds of distribution, regardless of what kinds of goods we distribute or what kind of contexts the distribution takes place in. In other words, the major task is to figure out the principles. Thinking of how to apply it (them) to different contexts or spheres of distribution is a secondary demand.

The worry with this approach is that we seem to have different expectations about how goods should be distributed in different social contexts. To be more specific, we seem to have different considerations about certain values, assigning different weights or priorities to them when the aim/reason/context of the distribution varies. For example, for public health, we often highlight peoples needs, especially giving priority to the most urgent or vulnerable ones. Yet when it comes to the distribution of public offices, we do not offer a place just because a candidate needs it. Instead, we require our candidates to be qualified for it. Sometimes we think certain resources should not be open for free exchange, but sometimes we object to regulation on the free market. Walzer highlights this idea as follows:

> Every social good, or set of goods constitutes, as it were, a distributive sphere within which only certain criteria and arrangements are appropriate. Money is inappropriate in the sphere of ecclesiastical office; it is an intrusion from another sphere. And piety should make for no advantage in the marketplace, as the marketplace has commonly been understood. (1983:10)

This challenges the previous thought. The proponents of generally applicable principles may ask: do such situations merely show a fact that we are usually inconsistent about what counts as good distributive principles? Won't we be too confident about our 'intuitions' which seem to be too ready to tell what the best principles or criteria are?

I don't think so. The general account can be subject to a more problematic assumption. Seeking the best principle and articulating how to apply it in various cases won't be a legitimate strategy unless there is exactly one (set of) principle(s) applicable to all contexts of distribution. Yet we have little evidence to believe this should be true, given the complex circumstances we are living with. Walzer emphasised this criticism of this traditional methodology of deciding distributive principle.

> There has never been a single criterion, or a single set of interconnected criteria, for all distributions. Desert, qualification, birth and blood, friendship, need, free exchange, political loyalty, democratic decision: each has had its place, along with many others, uneasily coexisting, invoked by competing groups, confused with one another. (Walzer 1983:4)

What alternative do we have? It seems that the aforementioned nature of distributions suggests that we may regard the deciding process of distributive principles as following a bottom -up (from contexts to principle) line of thought. Yet this account might seem to yield a lot of controversial implications. I will attempt to explain this idea a bit more.

First, even though our intuitions about what criteria or principles are appropriate can be wrong, this doesn't mean that they can't be appropriate starting points. The 'bottom-up' strategy does not take on problematic assumptions suggesting that we uncritically trust our intuitive answers to the distributive questions. .

Second, it won't imply that a generalized principle has no applications. A 'bottom-up' thought does not require us to do case-to-case analysis. Rejection of all kinds of generalization may make it impossible to abstract criteria (e.g., need, qualification, freedom) from our common intuitions, which act as our starting points to frame the application of distributive principles. Indeed, even with a 'bottom-up' account, some well-developed accounts (e.g., a Rawlsian principle of 'Fair Equality of

Opportunity') which are usually taken as generally applicable may remain meaningful in particular contexts. Yet they are meaningful due to their potential as good starting points just like many other criteria we abstract from intuitions.

Candidate criteria are submitted to our designing process. Here we may give different weights or priority to certain criteria under different circumstances. This is not merely a matter of adaptation to a practical use. As mentioned, this process is required due to the pluralistic picture we may have in mind about the arrangements of various social goods.

However, the question then is how we decide which criteria we should take according to the contexts we are looking at. If we want different distributive contexts to be guided by different sets of criteria, the deliberation would then be to establish criteria that can be regarded as 'appropriate' to the specific contexts. What kind of features would help us establish the relevant criteria? Walzer says that when we discuss the distribution of goods, what we must keep in mind is the social meaning of the goods; "the meaning of goods that determines their movement."

> Distributive criteria and arrangements are intrinsic not to the good-in-itself but to the social good. If we understand what it is, what it means to those for whom it is a good, we understand how, by whom, and for what reasons it ought to be distributed. (Walzer 1983:9)

The term 'meaning of goods' refers to rich content which is relevant to the distributed goods, the sphere of distribution (e.g., education, public health, public office). In the first place, it makes us perceive goods as 'goods', or valuable things. Education won't become something one is to pursue unless one understands what it means to get himself/herself educated. As for spectators, we will fail to capture what may count as goods without understanding what it means for someone to have them. After noticing the relevant goods to be distributed in a particular sphere, who conceives of them as goods and in what way they are presented as goods, we are a step closer to identifying appropriate distributive criteria. The next task is to offer an account that connects the meaning of goods, as is understood by people pursuing it, to a reasonable way to distribute them. If such an account is possible, what it presents may be described as an 'internal logic' within the sphere under distribution.

4.2 Core and Peripheral criteria within spheres

Walzer thinks that each sphere has its internal logic determining how the relevant goods are distributed, which is independent of the aims external to the sphere. However, real-world deliberation seems to be more complicated. Education serves other purposes, for example, the economy of the country. Public health also affects citizens' access to education. Arrangements of one type of goods are very likely to influence the distribution of other types of goods. This is hardly avoidable.

Ronald Dworkin argues that Walzer overlooks the fact that there is space for interactions between different spheres. Distribution regarding one sphere of distribution may not be wholly separate from another. As he says,

> …if we recognize spheres of justice we also recognize the need for interaction between them**.** The most important way in which wealth influences politics, for example, is by buying not votes but television time. Of course those who favour restricting campaign expenses say that money should not buy office. But their opponents reply that such restrictions would violate rights to property as well as free speech. (1983:4)

Dworkin's example can be interpreted in this way: If buying television time can broadcast one's political opinions and therefore indirectly increase one's chance to gain power and influence, then the social meaning (in Walzer's term) of possessing 'television time' is beyond a pure matter of commercial behaviours. Also, when it is assumed that one can treat the television time he buys as his own property, for instance, using the television time to say anything he likes regardless of its potential influence on the public, the meaning of television time may be understood in a quite different sense. Dworkin's worry about Walzer's ignorance of the complexity of the 'interactions between the spheres' then suggest a possibility that the social meaning of goods in fact includes much beyond what is assumed only relevant to one sphere of justice. It must rely on considerations about other spheres.

Dworkin's challenge presents a difficulty that the assumption of the spherical principle must solve. If the notion of the 'meaning of goods' is understood in a broad sense, it is very likely that many values would be regarded as connected to the distribution. Whatever social goods we distribute, arranging them in certain ways may always satisfy some peoples' needs, impact the overall goods of society, and influence the relations of individuals or social groups. Then one may conclude that it is always legitimate to refer to criteria like needs, social efficiency, equality or fairness, etc., and again we would fail to extract useful guidelines from 'meaning' to decide which values we should focus on.

My suggestion is that we can adopt a more pluralistic model to accommodate the complexity Dworkin is concerned with. It might be right to say implications drawn from 'meaning' would attribute legitimacy to a broad list of criteria. Yet it doesn't entail that the criteria are assigned equal weights. If we focus especially on the meaning of distributing certain goods, or in certain spheres, we may find that criteria are more or less central or relevant to the 'meaning'. Take the example of social investment. Suppose that there is a social program investing in research carried out in various areas. The fund is limited and will be beneficial only if it chooses a few areas to invest in (rather than distribute them widely to cover all areas.) The deliberation starts from the meaning of 'investment in research,' and how investment will influence research in different areas (e.g., how much benefits will be brought by investment in science and technology compared with investment in art and humanity?) Would the researcher's personal career be impacted by the investment?

Among all questions generated by reflecting on the meaning of distribution, some are more relevant to the aim or the expected impacts of our distribution, and others are concerned with their side effects or whether they are aligned with other aims not directly connected with the aim of distribution. For instance, questions like 'How much improvement in research would be brought by the investment in a certain area' are central to the aim of distribution. If we see no evidence that investment would influence research quality in certain areas, we won't invest in them. Questions like 'how much social goods may be brought by development in research in certain areas (as is influenced by the funding)' may also be relevant, since many researches are funded because they are expected to benefit the well-being of people in a notable way. Questions like 'How would the investment satisfy

or frustrate some researcher's expectations or needs and influence their career' are less relevant, though they can still be legitimate concerns.

The candidate criteria can be evaluated in terms of relevance to the meaning of distribution. I would propose the following distinction that may help illustration:

Core criteria criteria that are highly relevant to the social meaning of spheres

Peripheral criteria criteria that are legitimate but not so relevant to the social meaning of spheres

If we take the distribution of public health as another example, the core criteria may be patients' vulnerability and urgency. Whether healthy people can be happier by making them as strong as athletes or prolonging their life expectancy would be peripheral. This is because the aim of arranging our public health resources is to save/heal/prevent people from sickness, diseases or illness instead of promoting all kinds of physical and mental conditions. As James Wilson says, 'The core of public health lies in systematic attempts to reduce health risks, rather than in the provision of public goods (2021:21).'

Our deliberation will start with both kinds of criteria and distinguish them in terms of relevance. Relevance varies in degree, so there may be no exact boundaries between the two notions, still, the distinction can be meaningful. The purpose of distinction is to display a possible ranking of criteria and highlight the ones that are at the centre of our deliberations. This may be a rough model presenting our sensitivity to contexts of distribution, i.e., how we select different criteria, giving special consideration or emphasis as the context of distribution varies.

4.3 The Scope of the Defence by Core Criteria

All I have said before is a methodological ground for establishing an appropriate distributive prin-

ciple regarding the educational context. The question now is: how will it influence our task of defending a particular distributive principle, like the meritocratic principle?

It seems reasonable to conclude that the core criteria will not only be defensible but will also gain priority over peripheral criteria. For instance, if it's the case that addressing people's basic needs for health is a core criterion for distributing medical resources, then distributing according to need will not only be justifiable, but will also be preferred to making healthy people better off, e.g. making them more satisfied with their medical experiences.

One may worry that this gives too much weight to the core criteria as if the peripheral criteria are trivial. In many cases peripheral criteria are non-trivial. Take the criterion of promoting the welfare of disadvantaged people, or promoting social equality. Suppose that Adam comes from a minority group. He did not acquire a good education when he was a child. Due to a lack of skills, expertise, or qualifications, he gets a job that demands a lot of physical labour and the work is poorly paid. After a long time of carrying out intensive physical work, his health deteriorates. He also lacks the ability to engage in discussions of public affairs and is thus unable to give his own voice on issues like providing insurance for manual workers. When we look at Adam's case, we may conclude that his accumulated disadvantages arise from a relative lack of educational opportunities.

From such cases, one may conclude that the distribution of education, as considered with all these follow-on effects, cannot just be viewed as a matter of distributing education itself. We are distributing opportunities, capabilities and resources that will change people's situation in the future distribution, and in other aspects, like wealth, health, political power, and social status. If this is true, it may seem implausible to rely on only a few criteria relevant to the sphere of education itself, like people's talents, interests or ambitions in learning, and overlook those significant impacts on the issue of equality. In short, criteria that are relatively peripheral, in the educational sphere, like broad social equality, nevertheless still seem very important from the perspective of social justice. Plausibly, peripheral criteria could be more important, overall, in some contexts, than core criteria, when it comes to settling on a particular set of distributive choices/outcomes.

However, I think that even though some peripheral criteria can be very important, in this sense, this doesn't blur the boundaries between what is relevant to the internal meaning of distribution, e.g., the aim for distributing education, and what is relevant to the realization of other goals. Besides, the challenge does not deny that core criteria can be used to determine distributive practices, it just questions their scope of application. It doesn't entail that, for example, merit, if regarded as the core criterion in the sphere of education, is only one among many concerns that determines distribution of education and can be replaced by any other criterion deemed relevant. The aforementioned worry only implies that core criteria may sometimes have to compromise with peripheral criteria. For example, if special support should be offered to people from disadvantaged groups, then we need to constrain the reference to merits.

How to decide when peripheral criteria should outweigh core criteria? When there is a social crisis, conflict, or notable inequalities, we may have a morally significant reason to ask meritocracy to compromise. But under what conditions should we judge our society undergoing these matters? I will leave this question open. I submit that meritocratic distribution can be defensible and treated as a default option in 'typical' cases, where we don't have overwhelming peripheral concerns.

4.4 Merit as a core criterion in the sphere of education

So far in section 4, I have discussed three ideas. First, some distributive principles are picked out by our apprehension of the 'internal logic of distributive spheres. This is because of their relevance to the distinctive meaning of different contexts of distribution. Second, this gives rise to a distinction between core and peripheral criteria, as a useful model of our deliberations about distribution within particular contexts. Third, core criteria are justifiable within the relevant distributive sphere and have presumed priority to peripheral criteria, unless in special cases where the peripheral criteria are so important that outweigh the core criteria.

Now we may return to the issue of meritocracy. The discussion so far shows the possibility of defending meritocratic distribution from a new perspective. If merits can be viewed as a core criterion

within the sphere of education, then we may have a defence of meritocratic distribution in this particular context by appealing to the internal logic of the sphere of education. In some cases, the conclusion may be intuitive. Should a school reject give admission to a student who has unusual talent and passion for maths but has a serious illness? Should a department of business reject someone who comes from a poor family simply because he or she may have fewer chances to become CEO in the future? No. It seems wrong for a school to turn away students with higher potential or better performance and instead enrol someone who is just wealthier or healthier so that they can overall bring more benefits to the school or even the whole society.

The basic thought of the internal account of meritocracy (of educational distribution) is to establish the relationship between the meaning of educational goods (which I refer to as the intrinsic aim of education later[6]) and the meritocratic distribution. But before spelling out this formal argument, I will briefly explain why this kind of defence does not collapse to an efficiency-based defence, or why social efficiency is not a candidate core criterion for educational distribution, and thus cannot gain special support from this internal account.

The social efficiency principle is only contingently attached to the meaning of educational goods. If utility is understood in its narrowest terms, like economic benefits to society, then it is unclear whether having more educated people helps to achieve this goal. Admittedly, having more skilful workers or experts may improve social production, but not all kinds of learning or teaching in schools directly promote people's professional skills which are beneficial for social production. In typical education systems, students are encouraged to explore a range of subjects of knowledge (e.g., history, literature, art, theoretical physics, or pure maths) that don't directly lead to practical use or easily account for economic benefits.

If utility is understood in a much broader sense, including concerns like supplying 'the patriotic citizen and soldier and the future state official and administrator and furnished the means for military,

[6] In this dissertation, I assume that the intrinsic aim of education can track what is referred to as the 'social meaning' or 'internal logic' of the sphere of education, in Walzer's terminology, though I admit that the two things may not be exactly the same.

industrial, and political defence and expansion (Dewey 2009: 58)', it is still insufficient for capturing the rich meaning of education to individuals in terms of their own experience and development. Again, as Dewey says:

> When it is measured by tangible external products, and not by the achieving of a distinctively valuable experience, it becomes materialistic. Results in the way of commodities which may be the outgrowth of an efficient personality are, in the strictest sense, by-products of education: by-products which are inevitable and important, but nevertheless by-products. (2009:76)

This is only an initial explanation of why this internal account of meritocracy may be fundamentally different from any efficiency-based defence. If promoting social efficiency is not the intrinsic aim of education, then efficiency is not a candidate for being a core criterion in educational distribution. In the following section, I will examine the aim of education in a more detailed way, and this will further support the brief explanation here (See Section 6.4). Afterwards, I will argue that meritocracy, plausibly formulated, qualifies as a core criterion, and gains support from the internal account.

5. Intrinsic and extrinsic conceptions of merits

The previous section outlined the basic argument for meritocracy. Yet before specifying the relationship between merit and the meaning of educational goods, or the educational aims, a further question arises: Do we have a clear and non-controversial conception of 'merit'? Opponents of meritocracy stress the ambiguity or controversies of the definition of merit. We don't know exactly what *counts* as merits. Are they identified as talents? Are they the achievement of certain skills or knowledge? If the answer is 'yes', then why do we define them in this particular way?

If we do not have a justifiable notion of merit in mind, we won't have a successful justification of meritocracy, because when 'merit' is just an arbitrary selection criterion, the meritocratic principle also becomes an arbitrary requirement, that asks us to create a hierarchy and reward the meritorious according to what we have created. Elizabeth Anderson puts the worries as follows.

> The principle of merit cannot guide us on this question, any more than it can tell us how to structure the division of labour. Meritocratic criteria only tell us how to distribute already specified advantages to people. They do not tell us how to determine what these advantages are. (Anderson 2004:104)

Similarly, Debra Satz argues that

> Merit, therefore, cannot tell us what the order of the queue should be, since different distributions of resources will produce different levels of merit, which in turn will determine who comes to stand first in line. (Satz 2007:630)

What could be a candidate theory grounding a plausible definition of merits? Again, there is a tendency among authors working on this topic to invoke the notion of utility. It is undeniable that in many circumstances, utility and merits are closely related. As for common language use, we tend to combine these two senses - what promotes utility and what is meritorious – into one notion. This leaves an impression that people's merits are necessarily connected to further goods. For example, we would say 'if one is capable of making a considerable amount of money, he/she has merits', or

'if a scientist can predict climate changes accurately with his model, or proposes a theory that explains many puzzles of physics, he is a good scientist.' In these cases, one's merits are identified together with one's abilities to generate other benefits through their excellence.

If merits are conceptually attached to efficiency, this poses a serious obstacle to our objective. It will be impossible for us to defend meritocratic distribution without ensuring that it is at the same time a distribution aimed at promoting or maximising social utility. In other words, the defence of meritocracy will become closely linked to the already-criticised utilitarian defence of meritocracy.

But conceptually we can draw a distinction between (1) senses of merits which serve further aims like generating social utility, and (2) sense of merits that don't advert to the promotion of further goods. We can roughly distinguish the two senses of merits, with a reference to the way we draw a distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic values, i.e., a distinction 'between things which have their value in themselves and things which derive value from some other source' (Korsgaard 1996: 170). We will have two conceptions of merits in the sphere of education as follows:

Intrinsic merits	Characteristics that count as meritorious simply due to their realization of the aims of education.
Extrinsic merits	Characteristics that count as meritorious due to their functions of generating goods that are not relevant to the fulfilment of the aims of education.

One noticeable point is that 'the aims of education' in these definitions should refer to non-instrumental aims or intrinsic aims of education. It is undeniable that we may hold a plural view of educational aims. Some extend to activities outside the sphere of education, like boosting social productivity and economy. I deem these aims as extrinsic, as the value they attach to education is instrumental or derived from other social aims. By contrast, the intrinsic aims are not derived from other social activities. The realization of such aims should be what makes the educational process intrinsically valuable. If intrinsic merits are defined with respect to extrinsic educational aims, it is still be unable to separate educational merits from efficiency.

If this distinction is plausible, the worry will be settled at least at a conceptual level. However, we still have the task of justifying that there are indeed 'intrinsic merits' in education. What exactly are intrinsic merits? If we simply look at the conception, intrinsic merits would be 'merits' when they are desirable, or regarded as good or valuable things concerning the fulfilment of the intrinsic aim of education, rather than aims outside of education. For example, a scientist would be said to have merits in science simply due to the fact that he possesses characteristics which make him excellent in scientific research. It doesn't need to mention how much benefit she brings to human society or whether she is successful in any other aspects. We can only consider whether she is good as a scientist to judge whether she is meritorious in science.

Satz and Anderson worry that the account of educational merits can be arbitrary in many ways. For instance, they can be grounded on job qualifications one is expected to acquire in the future. I think this criticism applies well to the cases of extrinsic merits because the characteristics we expect students to develop will necessarily rely on sources of goods coming from other social aspects, which would be barely non-arbitrarily chosen. However, if we specifically focus on examining the very activity (e.g., education) that we deem valuable for its own sake and construct an intrinsic account, the worry of arbitrariness may be successfully addressed.

This is still a rough idea derived from the conceptual distinction. More details of the analysis are required, as we need to know the content of the conception, and whether or to what extent can they be separated from extrinsic goods. I suppose that we can also start by examining the aim of education, just in the same way as a defence of having a core principle within any other sphere of distribution. Therefore, on this approach, our two tasks – the task of specifying the requirements meritocracy as a core criterion in educational distribution, and the task of constructing an intrinsic conception of merits – will converge. If we have an acceptable analysis of the aim of education, then we will have a well-grounded intrinsic conception of merits, which realize or complete the activity or aim of education in an especially fitting or excellent way. Then we may also establish the connection between meritocratic distribution and the core criteria of the educational sphere.

Before moving on, there is a further clarification to be made. We can have a descriptive account of our educational aims. For example, Raymond Williams gives us a historical review of how British society conceived the aims of public education during different time phases.[7] However, the kind of account I intend to provide in the following discussion is not a purely descriptive one. I will explore what roles education should take and what kind of aim can qualify as intrinsic to education. Some ideas about 'educational aims' are too narrow. They focus on some peripheral functions of education but leave the core function omitted or suppressed. Hence, my approach departs from Walzer's methodology in one important way: the social meaning of the spheres does not fully rely on common beliefs and social conventions. For Walzer, the distributive standard of a sphere is internal to culture so it is to a large extent determined by the current institutions and practices (1994:41). By contrast, my inquiry into the aims of formal education, together with the conception of merit, is critical and normative.

In the following section, I discuss one important philosophical view about educational aims, the Deweyan growth view, which highlights the intrinsic goal of education. It also specifies the reasons why such a goal is intrinsic while weighing other goals over the intrinsic goal can cause formal education to be operated in a narrow and dangerous way. It may be questioned why I focus on this particular view instead of investigating a wide range of theories. The main reason is that the target of the paper is to build a plausible account of meritocracy instead of proposing a systematic theory on how our educational institutions should be designed. Though a detailed analysis of contemporary discussion of the aim of education may be theoretically important, I leave it aside here to avoid being distracted from the main task.

[7] Three aims are highlighted by Williams: a 'democratic educator' role that enables citizens to participate in a democratic society, an 'industrial trainer' role that equips individuals with special skills and prepares them for future professions, and an 'old humanity' role that sustains the nourishment of individual as a cultural or spiritual being. (See Williams 1961:142)

6. Dewey on the aim of formal education

In this section, I discuss Dewey's view on the aim of education. The first two parts explain how Dewey's theory differs from the traditional views of the aim of formal education, which he identifies as problematic. Dewey thinks that individual development or 'growth' should be viewed as the end of education. This requires educators to focus on the student's unique interests, needs, or experiences. The third part discusses another relevant notion that follows the idea of growth, which is, the requirement of continuity. It shows that educators have a critical task: making plans for the learners based on their uniqueness to ensure growth. These key notions help prepare for establishing a new notion of educational merit, and a way of justifying meritocratic distribution in the sphere of education, which I will develop in the following two sections.

At the end of this section, I respond to a potential worry that an individualistic account of educational aims may also seems too narrow. I specify the relationship between individuality and social efficiency within Dewey's theory, explicating how the notion of individual growth evade extreme individualism. Besides, it also explains why highlighting the intrinsic aim (i.e., individual growth) is important given the tension between the full and free development of individuals and the promotion of social efficiency.

6.1 Against traditional views of educational aims

To explicate what view Dewey holds about the aim of education and for what reasons he favours these particular goals, it's helpful to start with the traditional ideas he differs from, explaining why they can be misleading or inappropriate for a modern school system. Three common views are closely examined by Dewey.

The first is the view of 'education as preparation.' The aim of education is to prepare children or teenagers for adulthood. According to this view, 'children are not regarded as social members in full and regular standing. They are looked upon as candidates; they are placed on the waiting list (Dewey

1963:47).' The young are regarded as lacking certain intellectual capabilities and, therefore unable to share the privileges and responsibilities which adults have. Education offers them the relevant capabilities and transforms them into social members qualified for adulthood.[8]

The most obvious drawback is that with the distant and abstract end of 'adulthood', it fails to invoke the motive power of the young learners. Children[9] may be motivated to prepare for goals where they can have foreseen rewards or when they can experience immediate pleasure during the process. Yet 'being qualified as an adult' hardly seems something attractive or rewarding that can stimulate children's willingness to engage in the process of education. It may mean enjoying some privileges of the 'full candidates' of the community but at the same time enforcing numerous responsibilities on an individual.

A common remedy is to use immediate or foreseen rewards to tempt the motivation of the young. Yet we may end up wrongfully replacing the initial goal ('preparing children for adult life') with other irrelevant goals. For example, we may ask the students to engage in competitions, completing tasks and exams so that they can witness their achievements more straightforwardly. This may compensate for the vague goal of probation and make at least some individuals gain an immediate feeling of reward. However, the problem is that it can twist our initial aim. Too often, students are tempted by these additional rewards or exhausted by the given 'tasks', such as performing excellently in the exams or entering the top university as the most significant mission of schooling rather than motivated by the content of learning itself.

The second view is called 'education as unfoldedness.' Unfolding is the process that leads one's potential towards a definite goal—completion or *perfection*. This view is proposed by philosophers

[8] Admittedly, there are other versions of 'preparation' theories. For example, a famous contemporary version of such a view is offered by Michael Oakeshott. He claims that the aim of education is to ensure that 'newcomers to the scene are initiated into the world they are to inhabit. (1989:63)' Yet the kind of 'preparation' view Dewey tries to argue against is only a specific account of preparation view which lies in common thought. See more discussion by Oakeshott, who also distinguishes himself from a preparation view treating education as an 'apprenticeship to adult life' and an 'initiation to into the skills, activities and enterprises which constitute the local world into which he is presently and actually born (1989:78).' This latter view may be very close to what Dewey also criticize here.

[9] In this section, sometimes I discuss the cases of young children that are not typically related to the issue of meritocratic distribution. This is because the main task of this section is to give a sense of the aim of education in general. Hence, I refer to different forms of education regardless of whether a meritocratic distribution is applied.

like Froebel and Hegel. They start from 'the conception of a whole—an absolute—which is 'immanent' in human life' (Dewey 2009:50). It is in the first place enfolded, presented implicitly, waiting for the process of education to gradually manifest, realize, or make it explicit. According to this view, the present condition of the learner is taken as incomplete, and again, transitional. We transform and develop through education, thereby 'moving' away from the current stage.

Nevertheless, Dewey thinks the ideal of *perfection* may be too empty an ideal to rely on. The absolute goal, 'perfection', relies on a ready-made latent and transcendental principle, which may only represent a 'vague sentimental aspiration rather than anything which can be intelligently grasped and stated' (2009:50). Besides, as the unfolding view also regards one's present experience as purely transitional, the view may be seen as a variation of the preparation view. It also denies that the process of education itself should be valuable to the individual. It compels the pupils to pursue something far beyond their reach, therefore failing to generate real motivation to undergo the learning process.

The third stance is 'education as training of faculties.'[10] This is another commonplace view about what education intends to bring about. Promoting our epistemic or intellectual skills through abundant training seems to describe exactly what we usually do when 'learning'. However, Dewey argues that this is a shortcut rather than a direct answer to what counts as the aim of education. It is a mistake to think there's a fixed set of epistemic faculties that are generally useful. The relevant capabilities, skills, and knowledge must be acquired for some further reasons, since 'there are no such readymade powers waiting to be exercised and thereby trained' (2009:54). We don't train ourselves with a general ability to memorize. Rather, we train ourselves to memorize something, like important facts or useful math formulas, given the situations we face in our lives.

This mistake is commonly witnessed regarding the arrangement of traditional institutions. Instead of cautiously examining what materials or contents can be interesting or worthwhile for an individual, we tend to assume that a certain set of subjects is intrinsically desirable. Yet we have reasons to

[10] On this point, Dewey mainly refers to John Locke's theory. See more discussion in *Democracy and Education* (Dewey 2009:52-53).

doubt this. For Dewey, ‘it is not enough that certain materials and methods have proved effective with other individuals at other times. There must be a reason for thinking that they will function in generating an experience that has educative quality with particular individuals at a particular time (1963:45).’ For example, parents may want their children to learn to play the piano at an early age because knowing how to play a musical instrument is often said to be valuable. However, for some young children, practising the piano will deprive them of playtime and may hardly bring any pleasure. Perhaps some sacrifices can turn out to be beneficial in the future so they are necessary. Yet it is obvious that many people just don’t share an interest in piano and may not enjoy playing it even when they grow up.

Some people may point out that we can establish a set of ‘basic skills’, such as basic literacy and numeracy which everyone finds it helpful to possess. Dewey does not deny this. Speaking of a teacher’s planning for the pupil’s development, he admits that the task of recognizing the needs of young children can be easier. Teachers may have no difficulties in identifying materials and activities that connect to children’s experience vitally (1963:75). We can tell that some skills and capabilities are useful or necessary to engage in a range of activities that a child is very likely to encounter in the future. But beyond that point, when they become students at high schools or universities, what counts as ‘basic capabilities’ depends on students’ particular demands. They should refer to skills that are essential for one’s future career, or knowledge that is necessary for further studies.

In short, the ‘preparation’ and ‘unfolding’ view takes the rewarding experience in the remote future as its end. The process of education is a means to it. Both views bear an external goal (i.e., preparing for future adult life or moving towards perfection), the students undergoing the schooling process can hardly find the content of learning meaningful to their present life. By contrast, the ‘training’ view offers clear and achievable goals—cultivating the epistemic abilities of the students. It treats these epistemic goals as intrinsically valuable by themselves. Nevertheless, without figuring out what lives the children have, what situations they face, and accordingly, what they really need and are interested in, these abilities may turn out to be useless or meaningless for the learners. Indeed, we may say all three views fall into the same problem: they are insensitive to the context of learning activities in which the learners are engaged. As a result, they are ineffective in ensuring that the

learners can gain worthwhile experience through the process of learning.

6.2 Education as the growth of experience

In contrast with the traditional views which either establish the goal of education as abstract and vague or presuppose pre-conditional faculties for everyone to cultivate, Dewey characterizes his view as focusing on the development or growth of experience. The basic idea is stated as follows.

> When it is said that education is development, everything depends upon how development is conceived. Our net conclusion is that life is development, and that developing, growing, is life. Translated into its educational equivalents, that means (i) that the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; and that (ii) the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming. (Dewey 2009:44)

The 'growth' view admits that the process of education includes movement towards the future or perfection. Yet the process must be understood as valuable for its own sake. It's unrealistic to expect students who do not enjoy their schooldays at all may suddenly find them rewarding and worthwhile one day only because they can accidentally apply a piece of knowledge that they have learnt in the past to some situations. Students should observe their growth, seeing how their experience is transformed or redirected continuously and appreciate such growth of experience through their education, so that they can recognise the process as truly valuable for them.

This 'growth' view highlights an individualistic aspect of the aim of education, since people may experience differently from what they are taught. Due to one's past experience or their living environment, they may possess different capacities and interests. They may be more or less concerned with certain subjects of knowledge or in need of certain training or skills. The main problem of traditional schools is that they are not centred on an individual's growth or development of experience. Dewey makes the following comments.

> The notion that some subjects and methods and that acquaintance with certain facts and truth possess educational value in and of themselves is the reason why traditional education reduced

> the material of education so largely to a diet of pre-digested materials. According to this notion, it was enough to regulate the quantity and difficulty of the material provided, in a scheme of quantitative grading, from month to month and from year to year. (1963:46)

When deciding the content of education, the traditional schools emphasize knowledge of history, math, geography, and so on, offer training in intellectual skills and capabilities like memorizing and writing, and they value the cultural heritage our ancestors passed to us. However, they overlook the importance of the fact that the meaning of these knowledge or skills to individuals can vary significantly from person to person, and change over time. Materials that satisfy the needs or interests of one student may turn out to be boring or barely useful for the other.

Admittedly, interests and needs are also cultivated. Good teachers know how to lead their students to discover what is interesting and relevant to their lives. But whether their interests will actually be triggered and whether they will find it worthwhile to continuously be engaged with the activity of learning is a personal matter. It is possible and maybe a good thing for most students to notice and appreciate the importance of the subjects they are taught at school, while we should not expect most of them will identify all these subjects as what they want to interact with for a long period.

6.3 The educator's task

We have stressed the necessity to value individual growth and to respect the diversity of it. What kind of task is assigned to educators, then?

Dewey claims that one important criterion to judge whether the growth of experience is directed or constructed in a good way is to see whether it possesses intrinsic continuity (1961:31). Is it a mere aggregation of acts? Admittedly, all kinds of activities offer an individual a chance to gain some experience. However, only some of them provide valuable ones, through which he/she can see progress in his/her life. There are generally two situations leading to discontinuous learning. First, when the process of learning is completely dictated by the teacher, the acts of students merely follow the teacher's assignment of lessons and lack of motivation to think about what is relevant to their own

interests. Second, when the process of learning is only one's spontaneous self-expression, for example, dominated by one's blind desires and impulses.

Although it is mentioned that students' present experiences should not be overlooked and always sacrificed for the future. To gain intrinsically valuable experience at present is still forward-looking, which is to ensure that the experience will be directed and organized in a continuous or systematic way, extending to the future. Dewey notes that a commonplace view about education is that learning should not cease when one leaves school, and such an inclination 'to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling' (2009:45).

Since the acquisition of experience requires forward-looking, the task of educators is to make plans and select the materials that can ensure individuals' development. This does not mean teachers must have a better understanding therefore absolute authority to decide which activities should be included. Or they may abuse their power, forcing the activity of teaching to express the teacher's purpose instead of that of the pupils. This is how traditional schools fail to capture the aspect of individuality. However, progressive schools should also avoid the danger of going to the other extreme, which is to withdraw the support of educators entirely. The educators can carry two important and positive roles during the process of shaping the learners' experience:

> …first, for the teacher to be intelligently aware if the capacities, needs and past experiences of those under instruction, and secondly, to allow the suggestion made to develop into a plan and project by means of the further suggestions contributed and organized into a whole by the members of the group. (Dewey 1963:71)

The traditional schools also possess a 'plan' of organizing the learning activity. As mentioned, it often offers a scheme that every student should follow, acquiring knowledge and skills from basic and simple ones to complex and difficult ones. However, since there is no such pre-existing knowledge and skills whose relevance or value is universal to all, the plan is actually misleading. The right kind of plan should be made on the basis of individuals' experience, including their acquired capacities and adopted interests or needs. The educator's mission is to 'use this knowledge

as his criterion for selection and arrangement of the conditions that influence (the students') present experience', which has the potential to expand their further experience (1963:76). The student involved in the plan should 'constantly regard what is already won not as a fixed possession but as an agency and instrumentality for opening new fields.' (1963:75).

The task of educators, or the requirements of guiding students to achieve continuous, good experience, suggest that we should select appropriate content of education that an individual can adapt himself to. Now we may suppose the distinguishing process of education which sorts out students into different tracks may share the same rationale. A selection of students by different schools, institutions, or courses may also be regarded as a selection of educational materials for them. The question may be that whether this distinguishing process should take 'merit' as its criterion. My answer is that when 'merit' is understood properly, the meritocratic distribution exactly presents the kind of selection which the intrinsic aim of education calls for (See Section 7 and 8).

6.4 Individuality and Social Efficiency

Before moving on to the account of merit, there is one special feature of the growth theory that I want to highlight here, which is the emphasis on the development of individual. As mentioned, it is the individual's growth that is given a central role within the educational process. However, some people may doubt whether we should embrace such an individualistic position. Does it mean we should prioritise individual experiences like helping children who dream of becoming actors or musicians pursue their dreams over other social goals, for example, cultivating future scientists or technicians who will potentially bring huge benefits to our society?

First, given that the main task is to build a conception of intrinsic educational merit (see Section 5) or specify the internal meaning of education, my focus here is to examine the intrinsic aim of education, which is independent of other non-educative aims. I take the Deweyan theory as a plausible account of the intrinsic aim. However, I don't deny the extrinsic aims of education, for instance, promoting social efficiency or fulfilling the national interests like cultivating patriotic citizens and

soldiers may be important as well.

Nevertheless, some people may still worry the formulation of the intrinsic educational aim is still too individualistic. One may point out that individual interests can be shaped by the social environment that he lives in. We can develop our own ambitions according to the idea of bringing benefits to others. For instance, a warm-hearted boy Tom may dream to be a doctor who can save hundreds of lives. He thinks the value of education, for himself, is to apply what he has learned to help others. Besides, sometimes we also think education should help develop one's interest in public goods rather than his own well-being. We may think education is intrinsically valuable when it motivates someone who does not have altruistic interest like Tom to be more concerned with public goods. In other words, the relationship between the extrinsic aim of education (i.e., social efficiency) and the intrinsic aim of education (i.e., individual growth) is closely intertwined with each other.

To respond to this worry, we need a bit more clarification about the relationship between individuality and social efficiency, especially the kind of individuality that Dewey has elaborated on. It is clear that for Dewey, individual experience cannot be independent of what usually counts as 'external' to a person. A theory that stresses individuality in the wrong way is misleading. One common mistake is to think education should reduce external control over an individual as much as possible. Although Dewey agrees that reducing external control may be required to allow students to discover their own interests, simply removing control 'is no guarantee for the production of self-control. It is easy to jump out of the frying pan into the fire. It is easy, in other words, to escape one form of external control only to find oneself in another and more dangerous form of external control' (1963:64). Encouraging an individual-centred educational process should not be identified with letting the individual freely pursue all kinds of desires and impulses, otherwise, there will be no room or need for guidance, arrangement or redirection, which are necessary parts of education.

Besides controls, we should also not think that individual interests can be independent of one's surroundings as if they are inclinations grown from one's inner world. For instance, eighteenth-century philosophers like Rousseau tend to rely on the concept of 'nature' to claim that education should respect the diversity of individual talents and needs. Individuals should be emancipated from

external power as much as possible. Sometimes, proponents of individuality go to extremes and take one's endowments and interests as non-social or even anti-social (2009:76). This kind of individualistic theory demonstrating disconnection with one's environment is what Dewey strongly opposed. Dewey notes that 'The individual in his isolation is nothing; only in and through an absorption of the aims and meaning of organized institutions does he attain true personality' (2009:78). It is largely through the interactions with one's environment, and with the other members of society that a person gains his/her unique experience, that gives rise to his/her personality and interests. Therefore, the growth theory will certainly allow a situation where an individual is or becomes an altruist, taking enhancing social goods as his ambition.

These two points show that the growth theory rejects a kind of narrow individualism that separates individuals from the external social environment or control. However, the growth theory still draws a strict line between the intrinsic goal of achieving individual growth and the extrinsic goal of promoting the welfare of the community. It doesn't make the growth theory collapse into an efficiency-based theory of the educational aim.

Some people may ask why don't we adopt a theory that takes efficiency as the main aim of education while values individual growth at the same time? The answer is that sometimes a theory can appear as valuing the achievement of individuals as its intrinsic aim, but indeed subordinates the free development of individuals to external goals. For example, Dewey notices that during the nineteenth century, German Idealists like Hegel focused on the question of how to achieve a free development of personality *with social discipline* (2009:80). They noticed that private individuals, without some positive organization or some administrative agency, can barely achieve the ideal of 'the complete and harmonious development of all powers' on their own. They must gain their growth under the control of external institutions, such as society or nation.

Nevertheless, idealist philosophers like Hegel, do not really leave sufficient room for the uniqueness and freedom of individual growth, as Dewey notices. The main thought of Hegel is to make the nation an intermediary 'between the realization of private personality on one side and of humanity on the other' (2009:80). Individuals realise their worth or acquire the worth of their activities

through the judgment of national institutions. They must subordinate themselves to the political authority and let their aims and meaning manifest the demands of the state. For example, if they acquire good grades at school, or become patriotic soldiers or productive workers of the state, they are viewed as rational or individuals with worth and agency. The nation not only facilitates the activities of public education but also decides what goals it should serve.

Dewey argues that the problem with such thought is that 'social efficiency' determined by the state authority or ideology is often particularly narrow. In doing so, it blurs the distinction between an individualistic aim of education (i.e., making the learning experiences valuable for everyone) and a national aim (i.e., making the educative process generally beneficial to the nation). The result is that public education does not take the fulfilment of individuals as its end anymore. Instead, it serves the particular interests of the state or the authority. The individual success of education is demonstrated not through the development of their experiences, but the fact that they access decent jobs, good salaries, and high positions. Jeff Jackson thinks that one important reason for Dewey to reject focusing on the external aims (and also the external standards created by these aims, like grades) during the process of education is that students can be easily inclined to mindsets or habits that prevent real growth from happening.

> In Dewey's view, these external aims produce a belief among students that the process of learn ing is naturally an intrinsically insignificant chore done primarily for a reward and that individuals' worth can be determined by the possession of that reward. External aims thus interfere with the main qualities of democratic individualism, in that they can lead students to focus on finding an endpoint to their growth. (Jackson 2018:238)

The external aims, like social efficiency, are in tension with the growth theory which places individuality at its very heart. Yet is there a possibility to conceive 'social efficiency' in a way that can accommodate personal development at the same time? Dewey also makes the following claim.

> In the broadest sense, social efficiency is nothing less than that socialization of mind which is actively concerned in making experiences more communicable; in breaking down the barriers of social stratification which make individuals impervious to the interests of others. (2009:100)

When ‘social efficiency’ is a socialization rather than a subordination of personal interests, in other words, when it allows an individual to take on diverse goods freely and leads an individual to make what is worthwhile to him/her also something valuable that the others can share, the social aspect and individualistic aspect coordinates with each other. Nevertheless, we usually understand ‘social efficiency’ in a different term, especially when what counts as efficient is decided by the state authority or the political institutions. If this is the case, then:

> …culture is opposed to efficiency. Whether called culture or complete development of personality, the outcome is identical with the true meaning of social efficiency whenever attention is given to what is unique in an individual – and he would not be an individual if there were not something incommensurable about him. (2009:100)

When we require personality to give way for the achievement of some general good, or when we fail to understand children’s unique and incommensurable needs and interests which decide the specific direction of development, we cannot regard ‘social efficiency’ as internal to one’s growth and thus being an intrinsic aim of education.

In summary, we can draw three key claims from Dewey’s account of ‘education as growth’. First, the intrinsic value of education should be located in an individual’s growth experience, given their uniqueness, rather than any achievements of remote, abstract external goals (e.g., being ‘qualified’ adult members or reaching a certain level of cleverness). Second, since education needs to ensure the continuity of individual growth, an educator’s task is to discover individuals’ needs and interests and their current capabilities, planning and selecting the materials for their future development. Third, individuality is not shaped independently of social connections. Valuing individual growth is not necessarily incompatible with social efficiency if understood in the broadest terms. However, it is opposed to the kind of theory that identifies the goal of education as promoting external goods, like social utility in a narrow sense.

The following two sections, based on Dewey’s main thought of ‘education as growth’, illustrate an

internal account of meritocracy, including the conception of educational merit and the defence for meritocratic distribution of educational resources.

7. What is Merit?

In this section, I begin with reviewing two commonplace notions of (educational) merits. Both notions may have their grounds in assumptions of the aim of education which are different from the view I have previously outlined. Then I propose an alternative conception of merits, following the Deweyan idea of 'education as growth'.

7.1 Intelligence-based merit

A common way of saying a student is academically meritorious is to suggest that she has outstanding talents or intelligence. When Michael Young imagines the potential influence of meritocracy on educational reform, he expects that there would be a mission of distinguishing between the clever and the ordinary students, 'separating the wheat from the chaff' (1994:62). The state may enforce I.Q. tests, which may be the most accurate and reliable way to track people's talents so that the segregation can be accurately and efficiently taken. Otherwise, the officers would turn to ordinary written exams, or teachers' reports to track their intelligence. Whatever the instrument, the test of cleverness, talents, or potential and the distinguishing process won't cease.

Young also predicts that the egalitarian proponents may turn against such tests, which attribute unequal status to the individuals according to some mythical inborn ableness. This is also witnessed in contemporary literature where some philosophers argue that adopting meritocracy may imply embracing a 'natural aristocracy'. It unjustly favours the more naturally talented people and supports their talents rather than the disadvantaged ones' to be developed into excellent levels (e.g., Satz 2007:630; Arneson 1999:85). Some question the existence of the assumed natural endowments. Are some people actually cleverer than others? What elements constitute cleverness? It seems that we sometimes don't agree on what we mean by asserting that one is talented. However, even though having a clear and comprehensive definition of 'intelligence' is undeniably difficult, Young notes that the notion still carries sensibility in some way. For:

> The test of the tests was empirical: did they work? And the answer was that on the whole, they did. Most of the children who score high on the tests also performed well in the grammar schools. It was really a statistical question, a matter of establishing that high performance in the tests was correlated with high performance in the grammar school, high performance at the university, and high performance in life. (1994:61)

If empirical evidence suggests that there is an indicator that reliably predicts students' future success, it tracks something that we usually call 'intelligence'. The notion of merit Young has in mind may be less obscure if we focus on an academic context. If the assessment of students' knowledge and commands of skills is well-designed, it is likely to establish statistical reliability to a certain degree to predict students' probability of success in future learning. Then what we use as indicators in the measurement, such as mathematical skills, the memorization of historical facts, or language abilities may be identified as what tracks 'intelligence'.

However, Young's intelligence-based merit may only be sensible, or have its wide application in a certain formation of organizing learning materials and assessment. The educative process should keep including roughly the same body of content or subjects and focus on certain sets of academic skills. For example, suppose that in elementary schools, the academic performance of students is assessed by their mathematical and language skills. When in high school, it should still be assessed by students' mathematical and language skills, rather than corporative and communicational skills. The prediction of pupils' success in high school learning can then be successfully made. Otherwise, the prediction seems likely to fail.

Practically, we may manage to unify the measurement of one's abilities so that the abilities we expect one to demonstrate are also connected with academic success in their future studies. However, even so, it is doubtful whether pursuing this sense of 'intelligence' is meaningful anymore, since a child's 'likelihood of success' only depends on how we build the educative and testing system so that prediction can be stably made. Intelligence and success are created by the system rather than discovered by the system.

There may still be room to avoid the circularity of the 'intelligence test'. People may think that the

skills and knowledge we include are not deliberately chosen. We have grounds for picking some abilities and standards as indicators of intelligence, or believing achievement in some areas and succeeding in some tests demonstrates real academic intelligence. Two previously mentioned theories may offer special support for this claim.

First, the preparation view can flesh out what kinds of success the students are expected to achieve at the end of their educative process. Since the learning process serves students' adult lives. A prediction of academic success is in fact a prediction of future success in one's profession or other important non-academic achievements in a later stage. With such a view, academic success is no longer something hollow, as well as the prediction of success. Academic intelligence is connected with one's ability to succeed beyond the schooling stage.

But why should we impose such a remote career goal on these young students, when they may even have no thoughts about what kind of direction she will go into? Why, for example, select primary school children who can comprehend math skills at a junior school level, requiring them to strengthen their abilities, as if they have already made up their minds to be mathematicians, economists or actuaries? A potential to apply their skills and knowledge does not mean a readiness or a preparing attitude to apply the skills and knowledge. Students may turn out to have no intention of entering the routes we expect them to do and find their knowledge and skills of little use to them.

Dewey also recognizes another danger of using the possibility of 'success in future career' as an indicator of academic merits. The evaluation of career success is too often corrupted with a narrow interest in economic success. As Jackson points out,

> Dewey is especially troubled here by the cultivation of the type of individualism that is not democratic, but coheres with the capitalistic conception of individuals as isolated beings who have a worth that is legitimately measured by their possession of money. This kind of individualistic ideology leads students to believe that fixed measures of achievement (e.g., grades, test scores) are indicative of individual quality. (Jackson 2018:251)

The consequence is that individuals can lose their motivation to pursue what especially interests

them, to discover and develop the diversities of personalities, to gain unique experiences that lead to their own growth. They may also lack the ability to criticize the market ideology that imposes such a single-dimensional criterion of success and talent on them.

Second, the 'faculties' view seems to also support the establishment of a 'sensible' unified assessing structure of students' intelligence. If we can tell which intellectual faculties are intrinsically good, representing 'real' intelligence, which everyone should cultivate, then we can claim that success in developing these skills is valuable. We may organize an educational scheme that requires all students to have this 'intrinsically valuable' set of skills and knowledge at every stage, from the basic level to the more advanced.

Nevertheless, if we agree with Dewey's rejection of the 'faculties' view, we must also doubt whether such an arrangement of our educational system is based on some illusory assumptions. Beyond a basic level, there may be no such set of abilities desirable for everyone to promote. Having advanced mathematical skills may demonstrate one's intelligence in maths, but lacking such a skill does not dismiss someones cleverness. Memorizing considerable historical facts with details may be astonishing, but the stored information is valuable only when one draws something meaningful from it. 'There is no such thing as an ability to see or hear or remember in general; there is only the ability to see or hear or remember something (Dewey, 2009:56).' The value of faculties or the knowledge of facts lies in one's activities to engage with the particular situation she faces.

In short, I think Young's 'intelligence-based' merit isn't well-grounded. Admittedly, there may be other accounts specifying how to operate such an assessment. Yet I doubt whether a non-controversial conception of academic intelligence in general can be finally built. I leave this way of formulating the conception of merits here not for its unfairness but for its emptiness or ineffectiveness in realizing the intrinsic aim of education.

7.2 Efficiency-based merit

The intelligence-based notion takes merit as an individual quality. It seems a virtue that is possessed by the individual himself. By contrast, Daniel Markovits is aware that 'merit' is constructed by the system instead of a natural gift. It is strictly applied to a structure or context which gives rise to its use. He says:

> …Virtues almost always depend on context for validation. The athletic skill of a baseball pitcher is like this: obviously an artifact of the game that frames it, unsuited to other games, and worthless if the frame changes too dramatically or disappears altogether…Indeed, today's meritocratic elite strikingly resemble the baseball pitcher. (2020:262)

According to this view, there are almost no pre-existing skills or talents which are valuable independent of some further activities which attribute worthless or usefulness to it. Some personal characteristics are regarded as merits because our society is formulated as a particular kind of 'game' rather than the other. In the past, we adopted the rule of 'aristocracy', where one's birth and family decided his/her social class, wealth, profession, the kind of education she could receive, and so on. Nowadays, we commit ourselves to another game, dominated by the rule of 'meritocracy', where one's contribution to production or social efficiency becomes the most critical feature. 'Merits' are no longer identified with facts about one's birth and family. Instead, it is defined by

> …a particular worker's product—her contribution to output—looks to the difference between total output with and without her labor, where everyone else works in exactly the same way regardless of her participation. This quantity represents the conventional measure of her merit. (Markovits 2020:263)

Then given the close interaction between education and the sector of production, what counts as educational merits cannot simply said to be pure intellectual performance. Certain faculties may be more easily transformed into functions that facilitate production or welfare. For instance, mathematical skills, scientific or technical knowledge are often seen by profit-driven politicians as of crucial importance due to their influence on the health of the nation. The abilities that are usually

concerned and emphasized by humanities and arts, such as critical thinking, transcending local authority, and sympathy are to a large extent underestimated (Nussbaum 2009:55).

Such a notion of efficiency-based merit is criticised by Markovits and other opponents of the meritocratic principle from the standpoint of social equality. Whether one has the willingness or talent to engage in the kind of activities that can contribute to social production may be a matter of luck. Some activities become more productive than others due to mere contingent facts, or artificial arrangements. In short, preferring an efficiency-based merit is unfair. It renders privileges to those who happen to possess the characteristics needed by social production.

Yet my doubt is not that the criteria of merit are artificially made or generate unequal outcomes and are therefore unfair. If we equalize the conception of 'educational merit' with efficiency-based merit, for instance, regarding students with talents in areas that can potentially contribute more to society as meritorious, the conception is too narrow to reflect the individualistic aspect of educational aims. Recall Dewey's criticism of equalizing the educational aim as a narrow sense of promoting social efficiency. By reducing the different needs of individuals to one abstract need of serving the national/social interests, or by identifying only certain talents, abilities or potentials as meritorious and particularly valuable, we lose the individualistic characteristic that Dewey's ideal of progressive schools, or genuine democratic education, aims to promote. A student having special interests and the potential to pursue an area that cannot generate direct or notable benefits for society, for example, writing novels, and little interests and capabilities in maths or science is to be devalued by the system of education which is entirely motivated by social efficiency. Indeed, he or she may even be unaware of his/her potential and feel unsmart or uninterested in schooling.

Similar to Dewey's criticism of traditional schools, the problem of an educational system dominated by 'social efficiency' is that it fails to make the materials of learning a mutual adaptation, thus failing to promote individual growth. As he notes,

> If the pupil left it instead of taking it, if he engaged in physical truancy, or in the mental truancy of mind-wandering and finally built up an emotional revulsion against the subject, he was held

> to be at fault. No question was raised as to whether the trouble might not lie in the subject-matter or in the way in which it was offered. The principle of interaction makes it clear that failure of adaptation of material to needs and capacities of individuals may cause an experience to be non-educative quite as much as failure of an individual to adapt himself to the material. (Dewey 1963:46)

Some people may think that the problem does not lie in the commitment to social efficiency, but a narrow view about what counts for social efficiency. We sometimes define social goods according to their economic or short-term benefits. If we recognize good novels, movies, artwork, etc. are also beneficial to society, and should constitute 'social efficiency', students with interests in the relevant areas may also be encouraged to pursue these areas.

I agree that we can and should reach a more plural view about social benefits. Yet achieving a common awareness of the intrinsic value of literature, movies, and artwork is not easy. It also requires a process of education. Besides, with a strong demand for economic progress, awareness of the intrinsic value of these activities does not mean the government will cease to prioritize those more financially rewarding activities over the others. Individuals interested in literature and art, or something that gains even less notice or popularity, may continue facing a situation in which their interests are not sufficiently supported. This may also be a phenomenon acknowledged by Dewey when he criticizes efficiency-based accounts for an inclination to form the content of education narrowly through pre-determined categories recognized by the current conventions or practices. According to Jacksons interpretation, Dewey's concern is that

> With students being largely seen as entities to fit into predetermined categories, rather than as unique beings each proceeding through unique processes of development, experiences of uncertainty are only further devalued, because students sense that they are to repeat what others have done before them, and any attempt to take up an unusual path carries the risk of falling outside of the educational reward system. (2018:249)

As previously mentioned, for Dewey, 'social efficiency' is not broad enough to refer to unless it is consistent with the idea of individual growth. Only when the uniqueness of individuality is fully

respected and able to fully develop, can efficiency be saved from its narrowness. If so, the fundamental solution is not to reach a more diverse view about social goods, but to allow and encourage diverse routes of individual growth.

To sum up, if we just take what promotes social efficiency as meritorious, then we may require the students to educate themselves to only adapt to the interests of society, otherwise they will be considered defective. Individual development is no longer a process of discovering and fulfilling individual interests or needs, but a mere enforcement of social regulation. Since we have a reason to reject an efficiency-based educational system, we also have a reason to reject educational merits being defined in this way.

7.3 An alternative conception of merit

After showing that the merits are created, like rules of games. Markovits argues that the common concept of merits is a mere 'ideological conceit' (2019:268). According to him, 'merit' is socially constructed to empower production. We use it to select the most efficient workers and reward them with wealth and good positions. Yet the efficiency of the system is in fact mistakenly calculated. Without social stratification brought by selections, or the existence of the meritorious social 'elites', efficiency may even be better achieved. For example, if the technology of medicine is widely shared instead of strictly controlled by a minor group of researchers or doctors, we can receive greater social benefits.

Yet it doesn't follow that the concept of merit is nothing but an illusion. The illusory part of merit is that it fails to carry out the function (e.g., promoting efficiency) that we regard as relevant when designing the system of selection. We suppose that selecting meritorious people will ultimately generate greater benefits for people, but we end up with a situation where we can have more goods without them. If we design the system of distribution or establish the criteria of selection in the right way, for example, by allowing social goods to be more accessible to the public and ensuring the growth of the well-being of the whole population, we may realize the intended goal of meritocracy.

In other words, if we construct the idea of merit according to the right system fulfilling the genuine goals of social activities, then it won't be illusory.

Now suppose that the educational system is designed in the right way, which functions as realizing the genuine educational goals (i.e., promoting individuals' development or growth). The concept of merit we refer to is relevant for achieving these goals and, therefore non-arbitrarily constructed. What should the concept of educational merit look like?

To begin with, recall Dewey's criteria of (good) experience or continuity (See 6.3). During the process of education, students should engage themselves in a plan of development. The plan should connect students' past experiences, personal interests, needs and capacities with the materials provided that support their growth. Dewey emphasizes that educators should adjust the learning materials to students' diverse backgrounds. Yet since education is a mutual-adapting process, whether students can experience growth still depends on whether they can also adapt them to the materials, capitalizing on what has been provided for them.

Despite different plans, students can go further or less on their routes of development. Some may be clearer about interests, or be more willing to pursue them in their future career. They may also have already acquired the basic skills and knowledge in that realm so they can then aim at acquiring more advanced skills and a deeper understanding of the subject. Other students may be less clear about their interests and needs. Or, they may have cultivated a little bit of interest in some areas but still possess limited skills and knowledge.

This common situation suggests that we can sensibly or usefully retain a concept of merits, based on students' identified interests and current abilities. The basic thought is that the merits of students should be evaluated based on two dimensions. First, whether they have a general plan for their development, or in particular, whether they have identified interests in some areas and are willing to further their studies in these areas, called the 'interest' criterion of educational merits. Second, whether they have relevant capabilities to pursue their interests, or in particular, whether their current knowledge and skills enable them to adapt to the materials provided for them to make progress,

called the ‘capability’ criterion of educational merits. Let me specify the two criteria in turn.

First, consider the ‘interest’ criterion. One’s demonstration of interest in some areas is usually regarded as positive because interests motivate them to learn. However, besides acting as a motivating power, I submit that interests should be given a more fundamental role as a criterion of merit than we might usually think. Following the previous discussion of ‘the growth’ view about the aims of education, if one doesn’t have identified interests, how can he perceive learning as worthwhile, or gaining relevant knowledge as his/her growth of life? Without interest, the material provided by the educators is remote from our lives, which

> … was learned in isolation; it was put, as it were, in a water-tight compartment. When the question is asked, then, what has become of it, where has it gone to, the right answer is that it is still there in the special compartment in which it was originally stowed away…it was segregated when it was acquired and hence is so disconnected from the rest of experience that it is not available under the actual conditions of life. (Dewey 1963:47-48)

Suppose that Anna and Bella both have learnt piano for three years. Anna, who was told by her parents that learning a musical instrument will benefit her a lot in the future, actually is not interested at all. She wishes she could never touch the piano again after finishing the course. Bella, by contrast, enjoys playing the piano and decides that she is going to practice regularly or play when her friends come to her house. Anna and Bella both finish the piano course and achieve roughly the same standard.

Is the value of the course the same for both? No. Even though Anna acquires the skill of piano-playing (at a certain level), she is unwilling to use it. She is unable to benefit from the skill personally, or feel pleasure when engaging in the activity. In Dewey’s words, the skill gained is placed in an isolated compartment, disconnected from other aspects of life for Anna. If so, how can Anna’s ability to play the piano be perceived as a merit even for herself?

Some may worry that interests are difficult to track or measure. A young teenager can be passionate about being a football player on one day, and a scientist on another. Even adults experience many

changes in their passion. Consider Korsgaard's example of a college student who merely follows his inclinations, drifting from one place to another.

> Jeremy, a college student, settles down at his desk one evening to study for an examination. Finding himself a little too restless to concentrate, he decides to take a walk in the fresh air first. His walk takes him past a nearby bookstore, where the sight of an enticing title draws him in to look at the book. Before he finds it, however, he meets his friend Neil, who invites him to join some of the other kids at the bar next door for a beer. Jeremy decides to have just one, and he goes with Neil to the bar. While waiting for his beer, however, he finds that the loud noise in the bar gives him a headache, and he decides to return home without having the beer. He is now, however, in too much pain to study. So Jeremy doesn't study for his examination, hardly gets a walk, doesn't buy a book, and doesn't drink his beer. (2009:169)

The very unstable nature of inclinations can hardly lead Jeremy to any effective actions. Blindly pursuing his inclinations, he ends up achieving nothing. One can have different interests at the same time. Having different types of interests may also be good. Yet it is noteworthy that interests are not like blind inclinations. If we view 'interest' as such psychological states, like desires and impulses, rather than a unified will to achieve certain ends or states, they won't guarantee any worthwhile experience to be drawn.

My suggestion is that interests should be regarded as the willingness or determination to engage in some activities at least for a period of time, which ensures that at least some valuable experience can be acquired. Recall Dewey's idea of continuity. To make sure growth can happen, learners require some kind of plan. Their activities or experiences should be organized in a forward-looking way. Similarly, the 'interest' I take as a criterion of merit here is a tendency to be dedicated to some activities, or to subject oneself to a plan for realizing some goals. It doesn't matter if one pursues many different goals and engages herself with different activities at the same time. It matters that one should be able to organize and pursue these goals and activities systematically and continuously.

It should be noted that though interests are identified with relatively stable states, and should aim at a long-term pursuit of some subjects, it doesn't mean people must have already possessed some abilities or made any achievement to prove that they have interests. We can track one's interests by

looking at their past experiences, including whether they have engaged in some relevant activities, for example, reading some books or watching some videos about the subjects they want to explore. We may also check whether one have future plans about furthering their studies, like knowing what particular areas they would like to investigate and how much time they want to spend on studies. In brief, to discern one's interests, we don't require them to have a demonstration of already-have skills or excellent performance in some fields.

Then consider the 'capability' criterion. We typically view the achievement of capabilities as a representation of merits. Students having stronger capabilities are commonly said to be more meritorious. Yet given the previous discussions, capabilities are not by themselves valuable or meaningful within the process of learning unless one has an interest in developing them. If one gets a high mark in a subject, it does not immediately show that the learning process is worthwhile for him. One may endure the process of training for many other reasons, without transforming the content of the materials, the delivered knowledge and skills, into something added to his/her general development of life. Therefore, we may say the relevant capabilities are more or less valuable according to one's interests.

There are also other reasons to prefer less focus on the 'capability' criterion. The development of capabilities takes place in the educative process. A student with a slightly weaker background may also achieve a high level of academic performance when given a chance to access a good teaching or learning environment. For instance, studies show that students coming from public schools in the UK who have generally lower grades than students from private ones in secondary schools can achieve even higher grades in the final examinations at Oxford (Ogg, Zimdars and Health 2009). Similarly, the use of SAT scores also fails to predict students' completion of undergraduate degrees. Indeed, it is the teaching quality of the university that a student attends that can better indicate his/her graduation rate in the future (Bowen 2019:61-65). Such cases suggest that acquired capabilities do not immediately indicate whether a student can capitalize well on the resources. As Anderson points out, when merit is defined in terms of achieved talent, it only prefers early bloomers, but there is no reason to 'lock in the advantages of those who got a head start, by preventing others from doing what they can to catch up' (2004:103).

However, it is hard to deny that capabilities still partly constitute the evaluation of merits. If one is willing to gain in-depth knowledge about a subject, for instance, 'how should humans respond to climate change', his basic knowledge in geography, physics or biology becomes his merits to explore further. Without basic knowledge or skills, it is also impossible for one to capitalize on the resources provided for her. They may hardly follow the educator's instructions or achieve a systematic understanding of an issue.

Therefore, I submit that a student's capability should serve as a secondary criterion when evaluating his academic merit. The key point is that we should be more open-minded and pluralistic about what counts as basic 'capabilities' to pursue an area. Students who haven't had a chance to systematically learn maths or are taught in an unorthodox way may demonstrate lower abilities than others, given that one's academic performance is usually amenable to standard tests. Yet those with strong motivation to learn relevant knowledge may indeed quickly catch up with others, and those who undergo unorthodox training may turn out to bring innovation to the area.

In some sense, my conclusion may appear counterintuitive, as it suggests that a student having little interest in maths but strong mathematical skills does not indeed have a merit in maths, or he may be judged as less meritorious than a student having weaker skills but a strong passion for learning maths. Yet if we accept that the construction of 'academic merit' should follow from the intrinsic goal of education and that the intrinsic goal of education should be based on the growth of an individual, the conclusion may turn out to be compelling.

In short, the alternative conception of (academic) merit can be stated as follows. Given certain subjects, if a student has identified some as their interests (i.e., willing to engage in a continual process of learning) and possesses the relevant capabilities to capitalize on the learning materials provided, she is meritorious. Both the 'interest' part and 'capability' part are to ensure individuals can have genuine development via the educative process, or in other words, to make the process of learning worthwhile for them.

8. Defending meritocratic distribution of formal education

8.1 Meritocracy as a realization of the intrinsic goal of education

In the last session, I defined merit as a conception based on Dewey's 'growth' theory. Merit is what enables an individual to gain growth from the process of education. To simplify, a student's merit is what enables him/her to gain genuine benefits from the resources given to them. If a student is unwilling to capitalize on the resources, e.g., he is uninterested in the content of schooling or prefers to do other things instead of being kept in the process of academic training, then he won't benefit from what is provided for them. On the other hand, if a student wishes to learn, but is still incapable of capitalizing on the resources well enough, for instance, lacking relevant skills and knowledge to absorb the learning materials, then he is also less able to benefit from the process.

Therefore, we have a defence of meritocratic distribution following our conception of educational merit, that is, distributing educational resources according to one's merits ensures that one can genuinely benefit from the resources given to her. Here, 'genuinely benefit' refers to the realization of the intrinsic educational goal as I have proposed, i.e., the development of an individual. Undoubtedly, students can benefit from the education resources in other senses, which are irrelevant to this intrinsic goal, such as making friends with others at school, getting a decent job with their diploma, and getting a feeling of success with their good grades. Yet if the question is, from the intrinsic goal of education, what kind of benefits should the students acquire, then the answer is that they should acquire growth through the process of education itself. They should receive genuine rewards for learning instead of merely attending schools and performing well in the exams.

One may doubt that even with this internal account, meritocracy is only instrumentally valuable, i.e., it is only an approach to realize the intrinsic aim of education. Just like meritocratic distribution may be valuable only because it promotes social efficiency (See the criticism of efficiency-based

defence in Section 2), won't meritocracy be valuable only in the sense that it can be instrumentally helpful to facilitate individual growth?

I don't think the value of meritocracy is only taken to be instrumental here. Distinguishing the merits of students and providing them with appropriate content of education, or sorting them into suitable routes for development necessarily constitutes the aim of education. If the distinguishing process only acts as a means to one's growth, for instance, if it offers a poor but smart student a chance to get the diploma to find a better job which somehow facilitates his growth, the value of the distinguishing process is only instrumental for the student. However, if the process identifies what exactly counts as growth for the student and intends to provide contents that directly ensures his growth, the distinguishing process constitutes the process of development. It is intrinsically valuable as long as development is considered as intrinsically valuable.

This account is also different from a typical version of meritocracy, which is formulated in terms of equal opportunity. Despite various forms of the principle of equal opportunities, the basic idea is to let all students, regardless of their social backgrounds, have an equal chance to compete for educational resources, with the ones possessing the relevant merits to gain the resources. Then the winners of educational resources seem to be the only ones who get the benefits, while the losers are turned away. This scenario is rejected by proponents of democratic equality. For example, Satz makes the following criticism:

> …the language of merit and, indeed, of "opportunity" seems misplaced in primary and at least part of secondary school education. We expect children to go to school and master certain capabilities; it is not enough that they have the opportunities to do so. As Michael Walzer notes, "the goal of the reading teacher is not to produce equal chances, but to achieve equal results. (2007: 630-631)

However, for my internal defence of meritocracy, the selection embodies a concern for the *results* of education, rather than one's *opportunities* to be involved in the process of education. Indeed, what kind of final products one can achieve by going through the educational process is at the centre of the issue. What is highlighted in the previous discussion is that the results of learning are indeed

very different for different individuals. Even if we aim at taking everyone onto the same track of formal education, they end up with experiences more or less worthwhile for themselves. To be sensitive to the results of education, we must ensure that students can perceive their experience of learning as a real benefit for them by taking their individual needs and interests into consideration. When speaking of the specialized school, the stage when formal schooling carries out a selection of meritorious students, Walzer states,

> Some students, certainly, will make better engineers, surgeons, nuclear physicists, and so on, than their fellows will. It remains the task of the specialized schools to find these students, give them some sense of what they can do, and set them on their way…but the differences they discover and enforce should be intrinsic to the work, not to the status of the work. They should have to do with achievement, not with the economic and political rewards of achievement. (1983:211)

In other words, an ideal selection by educational merits should set the students on the tracks that are appropriate for them. Not only those students identified as 'meritorious' by the formal educational system can benefit from the selection, but also those who are unselected, thereby transferring to a different track, for instance, vocational training.

One may also wonder about the relationship between the internal account and other popular theories on the aim of education. For example, is my account opposed to theories of flourishment? Is it reducible to these theories? I am unable to give a detailed analysis in this paper, but here is a brief answer.

Generally speaking, I think we can embrace an internal account either on the basis of the Deweyan view or a flourishing view in a very abstract sense. By 'in a very abstract sense' I mean to describe the general intrinsic aim of education, we can use the term 'growth' or 'development' in a Deweyan sense and the word 'flourishing' in its broadest sense almost interchangeably. But does it mean the internal account of meritocracy contains nothing new? Certainly not. The focus of the flourishing account and the meritocratic account are quite different. A *prima facie* point is that the internal conception of merit defined in terms of one's potential to benefit from education is not the same as

what is often called 'virtues' that constitute flourishing. A more fundamental difference is that the internal meritocratic account is especially about the issue of meritocratic distribution. Flourishment as the end of education usually focuses on the objective, common, overall standards of well-being, such as abilities to self-maintenance, abilities to live in a social and political community, and abilities to self-fulfillment. It calls for curriculums and schools to promote these shared interests of individuals while admitting that there can be limitations of the 'commonality' and that we should leave room for individuals to decide what counts as good for them.[11] By contrast, my internal account, as a meritocratic account, focuses on explaining why and what criterion should be used to differentiate students. The question my proposal tries to address is: if education aims at some kind of common good, which all individuals are expected to share, is a process of distinguishing (especially by merit) inconsistent with education? A similar reply may also apply to the relation between the internal meritocratic account and other theories of education (e.g., autonomy). It is possible for these accounts to yield some implications that a growth theory, which underlies the internal account, also agrees with. Yet it doesn't mean my internal meritocratic account is reducible to these theories unless these theories are interpreted as some meritocratic proposals.

8.2 The 'need' model vs. the 'merit' model

In some sense, my internal account of meritocracy seems close to a distribution based on the criterion of needs. Interest is the main indicator of merit. The meritorious students are those who can benefit the most from the resources. In other words, the resources are provided for these students because they are more valuable to them than others. If so, why not describe the distribution of education based on the criterion of need?

Even if my account of merit, especially its dimension of 'interest', has some common features with the criterion of 'need', it should be understood differently from a typical 'need' model. In particular, it should be different from the stage of compulsory education, where we don't use merit to select or unselect anyone, trying to engaging every child in schools.

[11] See White 2007:22 and Brighouse 2006:44.

.

Consider a typical 'need' model. The arrangement of public health resources is generally represented in this way. It prioritizes the vulnerable or disadvantaged people in the most urgent need. Needs make the vulnerable the most benefited ones from the resources. In the case of education, especially during the higher level (e.g., higher education), it is interests that lead the interested children to be the most benefited ones from schooling. [12] However, we don't draw a parallel between what we call 'needs' in the former case and what we call 'interests' in the latter.

The first reason is that needs arising from vulnerability are not something we aim at to cultivate. Instead, it is the state of health that we aim at. We expect the patients receiving medical treatments to be cured, or in other words, no longer in need of such treatment in the future. By contrast, interests advert to characters that we expect individuals to cultivate. The resources provided for the interested students are expected to encourage them to maintain and further their interests, rather than to terminate or exhaust their demands of learning.

The language of merit, as the characteristics to be cultivated through the educative process, may be necessary to retain. Though students are allowed to differentiate from one another in the process of learning, the aim of the teachers is to attempt to raise the interests and capabilities of students, and the task of students is to adapt to the requirements with their best in the first place. As Walzer notes, even if we intend to provide equal education for everyone, teaching the same body of knowledge, it doesn't mean that students are treated in the very same way in class. Praises are distributed differently, for example (1983:206). If the teacher regards some students uninterested in learning maths as merely 'in no need of' it, then she may take a neutral or indifferent attitude to their performance, rather than lead them to develop interests and abilities through the teaching.

Besides, when we apply a 'need' model, 'needs' may to some extent be assumed. A patient suffering

[12] It may be argued that sometimes we also provide special schools for people with special needs. These people may lack a general interest in learning but need certain skills to make a living. However, if they aren't indeed interested in the content of learning or are self-motivated to learn something, the benefits they gain are merely extrinsic to education. In other words, we may distribute resources to them because of non-educative values that may be brought to them (i.e., referring to peripheral criteria).

from a headache can be conceived as in need of medicine, even though she may actually be unwilling to take it. Walzer notes that to satisfy a democratic ideal of simple equality, students are often regarded as having the same object and degree of need. We may think of our educational system as carrying the function of 'a form of welfare provision, where all children, conceived as future citizens, have the same need to know, and where the ideal of membership is best served if they are all taught the same things (1983:203)', as we usually do in the case of compulsory education. Yet when the need is assumed, we don't actually select which students are in need of education. The task is to include all the students who are assumed as having a demand, in schools, instead of identifying which ones are really interested in or can benefit from schooling.

Nevertheless, the 'interest' aspect in the meritocratic model is not something assumed. Even though a maths teacher may assume that all children can potentially cultivate an interest in maths, and try her best to let the students recognize the importance or charm of maths, whether they indeed find maths appealing varies from person to person. At some point, it is insufficient for the educators to suggest a student may develop interests potentially. They have to check the willingness of the students, whether they are actually prepared to go through the next stage of learning, to decide whether continuing the process of education will be beneficial for them.

8.3 The 'efficiency' aspect of the internal account

There is still a possibility to assume, however, that many people can identify some areas as their interests. Or someone who is uninterested in maths when he is 16 may develop an interest in learning maths at 26. Suppose that schools can provide them with education in these areas, and they have basic knowledge and abilities to pursue their studies, they may all consider schooling as valuable for them. Then one may worry that this internal account of merit can be too weak. It seems to suggest that all these people are meritorious and should be enrolled. Walzer may have a similar worry when he says,

> But interests are at least potentially infinite, and on a certain view of human life, one should

> study as long as one has breath. There is little likelihood that the political community could raise the necessary money for an education of this sort, and no reason to suppose that the people who give up studying are morally required to support those who continue. (1983:208)

The internal account of meritocracy does not imply that all individuals having some kind of merit should be allowed a chance to receive an education. The internal account also embodies a concern for the efficiency of the use of educational resources, given their scarcity in real-world cases. In other words, though this account is distinct from the 'social efficiency' account, it retains an 'efficiency' aspect.

However, what decides the efficient use of resources? An apparent answer is the degree of merit. Though my conception of merit is different from the intelligence-based individual merit (which may describe some people as smarter or more talented in general) it still implies that merit can vary in degree. According to the conception of merit, we can distinguish students having merits of maths, for example, from those who don't have. We can also describe their interests in maths and mathematical skills as a matter of extent. Resources are more or less efficiently used according to students' degree of willingness and capabilities to adapt to them. Here is an example of how we may distribute admission to a course according to the new conception of merit.

Suppose that Ellen wants to register for a Japanese course, but she's still unsure whether she will go on learning it for half a year. If she only learns Japanese for three months and quits the course, she will end up merely knowing how to pronounce a sentence in Japanese, but not knowing the meaning of the sentence. Admittedly, Ellen has some interest in learning Japanese, while the degree of commitment is still too low to guarantee that she will someday acquire the benefits of learning. Therefore, it seems appropriate to give another student Hellen an opportunity, who is more determined to complete the whole course.

Nevertheless, the reference to efficiency is distinctive from a 'social efficiency' view. We don't say providing resources for less interested or capable people generates fewer social benefits, for instance, bringing down the number of efficient engineers and scientists our society may have. Instead, it is

measured according to how many benefits the process of education can generate for a particular individual. If a student can identify stronger interests in activities outside the schools and access other kinds of training to develop relevant skills to pursue those interests, it will be better for them to be kept in the mainstream track of formal education. In short, for my internal defence, the standard of the efficient use of resources does not depend on whether the distribution generates the greatest overall good. Instead, it requires that the provision of educational resources to individuals should efficiently promote real 'growth' in people's lives.

8.4 Conclusion by comparing three models

I think it can be helpful to illustrate the internal defence of meritocracy by comparing the following three models.

The first one is the 'need' model. Think of the distribution of public health resources and compulsory education as representations of this model. The allocation of resources does not refer to any sense of capabilities or interest in having these resources. The patients, disadvantaged or children are not expected to cultivate any characteristics to use or capitalize on the resources. Besides, they are expected to receive benefits individually without necessarily benefiting others (or generating external goods for the whole social system) with the resources.

The second model is a typical 'meritocracy' model, where distribution is made to guarantee that resources are given to those who can efficiently use them *in terms of generating the most overall good for an external body*. In the scenario of employment recruitment, a company chooses someone who can generate more benefit for the employers with their strong capacities and motivations. It doesn't consider the efficiency from the perspective of an individual's interest, i.e., whether the employment will bring any good for the candidate employee herself.

An internal account of meritocracy may be seen as an intermediary model. It is not concerned about how much benefits a candidate student can generate for the school or society. Instead, it focuses on

questioning whether a student, given her capacities and interests, can perceive the process of education as worthwhile for herself. However, it still concerns whether a student can make good use of the resources. She must cultivate relevant characteristics that enable her to take advantage of what has been distributed to her. The internal account of meritocracy thus combines two aspects, first, a concern for individual benefits rather than external goods, and second, a concern for individuals' efficient use of resources rather than pure need of resources.

9. The requirement of social equality

In the previous two sections, I clarified the internal account with Dewey's theory of 'growth' as the intrinsic educational aim, a new conception of educational merit, and the new meritocratic model which distributes educational goods to facilitate individual growth. This account explains why merit is the core criterion of education distribution and is thus defensible. In Section 4.2, I also mention that there can be important peripheral criteria. These are less relevant to our concerns about the internal logic of education distribution (e.g., realising the educative goal) but may be sufficiently valuable to outweigh core criteria in some cases. For example, we may take reducing the racial or gender gap in academic performance as a critical task.

Typically, we take the value of achieving academic excellence and the value of equality as competitive.[13] For traditional accounts of meritocracy, this would mean we need to compromise meritocracy for the requirement of enhancing social equality. Such compromises may also happen when it comes to my account. Still, I think the internal account of meritocracy can better accommodate the requirement of social equality, at least when compared with the typical meritocratic account, which identifies merit mainly as abilities. In other words, with the new conception of merit focusing more on the interests of individuals and discounting the weights attached to acquired skills, we can arrive at a meritocratic ideal that is less in tension with equality.

In this section, I examine the core claims of three important egalitarian proposals, which are based

[13] See Lazenby, H. 'What is equality of opportunity in education?'.

on the principle of equal opportunity, the principle of sufficiency, and the prioritarian principle. Admittedly, I cannot cover these different proposals (and their variations) in full detail. Some generalisations are made. However, I think it is sufficient to show that the internal account can better respond to the requirement of social equality (referring to different ideals of educational equality as argued by the three proposals) than the traditional meritocratic accounts.

9.1 Equality of opportunity

The first kind of egalitarian proposal I want to discuss relies on the spirit of fair equality of opportunity, which requires '…those who are at the same level of talent and ability, and have the same willingness to use them, should have the same prospects of success regardless of their initial place in the social system' (Rawls, 1973:73). The typical meritocratic accounts, which defines merit as a pre-determined list of developed abilities (usually measured by test scores), can be in tension with fair equality of opportunity. Although selection by test scores appears as discriminating against no one on the basis of their social background, some people don't have fair chances like others to develop such abilities. For example, students with parents more willing and capable of investing in learning maths, science or foreign languages are more likely to succeed in the relevant competitions (e.g., a standard test including these subjects). By merely looking at students' scores and ranking, we let the influence of background injustice shape the outcomes.

However, I don't think it entails that the ideal of meritocracy itself is in tension with fair equality of opportunity. It only suggests when we select students strictly based on certain developed abilities (reflected as test scores), the outcome is unjust. Still, certain differences are allowed by fair equality of opportunity to play their role so that people are neither guaranteed the same results nor the same possibilities.[14] We may think some notions of merits can be retained, if they are relatively unaffected by certain facts (like family background). For example, Adam Swift propose the following meritocratic fair equality of opportunity view.

[14] See Weston, P. 'The Concept of Equal Opportunity'. 'People who have equal opportunity by one measure of opportunity will have unequal opportunities by other measures. No two people can have an equal opportunity to attain a specified goal by every measure of opportunity unless they are both guaranteed the result of attaining the goal (1985:845).'

> Someone's chances of getting into a good university, or getting into a university at all, shouldn't depend on whether her parents are able and willing to send her to private school. It should depend on how intelligent she is, and how much effort she's prepared to make when applying her intelligence. (2003: 24)

Swift notices that rich parents investing more in their children's studies makes them more capable of developing academic merits, which unfairly affects children's opportunities to access good universities. But what is unfair is not about the selection by merit, but the fact that children cannot compete fairly with their intelligence and passions. He is indeed demanding a fairer game of measuring students' merits, as Anderson comments, 'Swift appears to think that opportunities for the development of talents and motivation should themselves be allocated on a meritocratic basis. What irks him about private schools is that it is the rich children, rather than the innately talented and highly motivated children (2004:103).'

Though my conception of merit is not the same as Swift's conception (i.e., intelligence + passion), as it values students' willingness to learn much more than their abilities or talents, the internal account still attempts to avoid merit being determined by facts like one's social background. In other words, the internal account can better accommodate the basic thought of fair equality of opportunity than the traditional account of educational merit. Both fair equality of opportunity and the internal account may agree that we should replace the traditional notion of merit with a correct notion of merit as the fair distributive criterion. The proponents of equality of opportunity can argue that one's accumulated knowledge and skills may not be true reflections of merits but just an outcome of inherited advantages and it is unjust to refer to these criteria. The internal account suggests that acquired knowledge and skills cannot count as merits or something valuable for the individual unless he is genuinely willing to pursue them.

9.2 Adequacy View

The second type of claim to consider is the adequacy view. Adequacy views usually seem to be

unconcerned with equality. Unlike the former view, it doesn't regard some students having better opportunities due to parents' investment as always unjust, when all reach a certain academic standard. However, some scholars also combine egalitarian concerns into their principles. They require the minimum standard to be shaped in a certain way so that social inequalities can be restricted to a large degree.

For example, Satz thinks a plausible idea of adequacy should at least include 'civic equality', which is 'actually internal to the idea of educational adequacy for a democratic society (2007:625).' Civic equality possesses a relational or positional element. When someone enjoys much fewer resources or goods than others and thus is excluded from many meaningful social activities, they cannot be regarded as having the same social status as others do. Satz thinks we can refer to this standard to determine whether one's education is adequate. If educational inequalities are so deep that the less-educated are deprived of enjoying equal citizenship, then they can hardly be taken as hitting the adequacy threshold, as she states,

> Although an adequacy standard does not insist on strictly equal opportunities for the development of children's potentials, large inequalities regarding who has a real opportunity for important goods above citizenship's threshold relegate some members of society to second-class citizenship, where they are denied effective access to positions of power and privilege in the society. (2007:637)

Satz notices that a certain level of knowledge and skills is necessary since they ensure that individuals can exercise rights and freedoms (2007:636). Apparently, the internal account can also be consistent with such a modest requirement for adequacy. As mentioned, though Dewey questions the notion of 'valuable knowledge for everyone', the growth theory doesn't deny that there are a few 'basic' skills and knowledge that can be necessary or worthwhile for almost all students, like basic literacy and numeracy, and which may count as an academic threshold for everyone. [15]

However, Satz makes a more ambitious claim about the adequacy standard when she says,

[15] See Section 6.1, page 39.

> …adequacy is not only a function of the bottom of the distribution but also of the top of the distribution. Citizens are not equals when there is a closed intergenerational social elite with disproportionate access to society's positions of political and economic power. While my conception of adequacy does not require that everyone have the level of education necessary to gain entry into the top law schools, it does require that everyone with the potential have access to the skills needed for college. (2007:638)

Similarly, Anderson argues for using adequacy as a criterion. The kind of adequacy standard she has in mind also extends to capabilities for one to have a chance to join the elite. She says,

> 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. (2007:597)

The idea of adequacy (with civic equality) may invoke Markovits's objection to the traditional meritocratic system. The traditional meritocracy demands that only students with better academic performance can enter higher education, which provides them better opportunities to enjoy elite advantages later on. Elite parents therefore pour considerable money and time into their children's studies, so that they can compete out middle-class children to secure their social position. The middle class is then denied the advantages enjoyed by the elite group due to intergenerational snowball inequalities. Markovits thinks that the process seems quite unfair.

Though the internal account may not agree with the notion of educational adequacy that Satz and Anderson propose, as what counts for educational adequacy will largely depend on the individual's special interests and needs, it does not deny its core goal of promoting civic equality among people. We may differentiate two kinds of egalitarian claims here.

The first kind of claim is that individuals should gain relatively equal social advantages (thus possessing equal citizenship) through education. I admit that the internal account may not help make a

positive move on this issue, though it may not make the situation worse than the traditional meritocratic system, either.

The second kind of claim is that students should be treated equally during the process of education. Regardless of their social background and abilities, they should access a certain level of knowledge and skills in all possible fields. Even though poor students may have fewer chances to be bankers or lawyers in the future, they should access to the relevant knowledge as long as they want to. The internal account can better satisfy this idea. The measurement of adequacy by the internal account mainly relies on individuals' interests (though they may need the minimum skills to understand the learning materials) rather than their already-possessed abilities and skills.

Some people may worry that students' interests and willingness to study can also be influenced by their social position. This is true. Yet I think willingness and passion to learn certain materials are still less dependent on one's economic condition compared with developed skills and abilities. Poor students may also have a strong desire to learn though they may be handicapped by their poverty. Admittedly, this claim may gain further support from empirical evidence, or may be defeated. But the intuition is roughly this: rich families can purchase some luxurious experiences to enable their children to develop interests. For example, they can take their children to Africa to explore wild lives so that the children may be motivated to learn more about animals and nature. However, for children's families which cannot afford that kind of trip, parents can bring their children to public museums and zoos, buying them videos and atlas, which may also attract them. Nowadays, lots of information can also be accessed on the internet. Even though pursuing some interests in the long term still needs some kind of support, for instance, one may need money to buy a piano or leisure time to visit public museums, what we require is that they keep some habits of learning, engaging with some relevant activities as best as they can. However, if we require these people to command some levels of skills and abilities, then they have to afford a period of training, which is very likely to cost them more. Therefore, being sensitive to interests and willingness and demanding only a minimum standard of capabilities is very likely to offer more chances to these students.

Second, we may expect our compulsory education to stimulate students' potential and help them

discover their special strengths and interests. Liam Shield (2015) points out that students need sufficient self-realization of their talents to form or revise their conceptions of good, or to determine what is worthwhile for themselves to pursue. As he states,

> The requirement of sufficient self-realization gives us reason to favour sufficient opportunity for talent development in education and this has an important link to the idea of comprehensive schooling, the aim of which is to provide children with a variety of educational challenges in various areas, not just traditional academics…A wide-ranging curriculum would be required to uncover the diverse talents that children have and the design of educational institutions should be guided by the idea of uncovering a range of talents. (2015:60)

I think my internal account will also require comprehensive schooling at the compulsory education stage to ensure one's sufficient self-realization of abilities and interests. This is not only a precondition to make the meritocratic distribution effective at the later stage (since we need to measure students' already-developed interests and decide which routes are suitable for them) but also to reduce the unequal effect on children's academic performances caused by families' different abilities to invest in their studies. However, if we remain the traditional meritocratic pattern of selection, which assesses and classifies students according to their *overall* academic performance, even if we satisfy the condition of sufficient self-realization, we cannot actually respond to their different abilities and interests. To ensure worthwhile development of individuals can be promoted through the selection, changing the way of thinking about merit and meritocracy is also necessary.

I will leave this adequacy theory by concluding that the internal proposal of meritocracy can better accommodate the requirement of adequate development of all individuals, compared with the traditional meritocratic accounts.

9.3 Prioritarian principle

Traditional meritocratic accounts usually accept the following situation: when some students are left behind in the educational system simply because they have less talents to develop their abilities, it isn't unfair. However, the third type of view, the prioritarian principle, thinks that we should

compensate these students with weaker natural abilities than others. For example, Gina Schouten proposes a prioritarian principle of educational justice arguing that educational resources should be regulated in a way that is sensitive to students' differences in natural abilities. It requires compensation to be made in proportion to an individual's natural disadvantage (2012:477).

However, Schouten doesn't think it's always unacceptable to let students distinguish from each other due to their differences. The reason to do this is that given our current social structure, which rewards only the successors with disproportionate resources, the underachievement naturally caused may render one's prospects dim. As she states,

> The crucial premise in that argument is *not* that it is intrinsically unfair for naturally gifted students to do better in school than their peers. Rather, the crucial premise is that unequal academic achievement begets unequal life prospects generally in a highly stratified society like ours. (2012:477)

However, there seems to be a dilemma for applying a prioritarian principle. On the one hand, if helping those naturally disadvantaged students means we should give them a lot of extra resources (e.g., more academic support), preventing them from falling behind, it seems unfair to the others. Suppose that Sam was born with much stronger abilities than Tom. It may be hardly debatable if their teacher decides to help Tom a little bit, for instance, using ten minutes after class to explain some basic notions Tom does not understand in class. However, if the teacher spends much more time supporting Tom so that he can do as well as Sam, this seems unfair. Why divert the resources from those who are more talented?

On the other hand, if teachers are required to support the least advantaged but are not expected to invest disproportionate resources in them, they may, in some sense, change little of the situation. The prioritarian requirement then seems barely valuable. Tom is very likely to remain falling behind. When the two students access the job market, Tom may still be defeated by the more competitive candidate for his low academic achievement. If so, supporting Tom's academic performance does not seem to be very valuable for him, i.e., the relatively low position Tom is placed in due to his natural disadvantage remains the same.

Schouten's principle avoids this dilemma. She specifies *in what way* the prioritarian principle should benefit disadvantaged students. She states,

> By focusing narrowly on academic outcomes, we ignore the fact that what is salient on the outcome side is not a point but a *span* consisting of immediate positive academic outcomes *as well as* the more distal positive life outcomes that are correlated with education…We can understand our prioritarian obligation to naturally disadvantaged students as an obligation to benefit them *generally*, where that benefit *may* take the form of a direct investment in their future prospects that bypasses the mechanism of improved academic outcomes.(2012:478-479)

That is to say, given these disadvantaged students cannot achieve the same external rewards (e.g., jobs, wealth, power, etc.) based on their academic performance, the educator should attempt to offer them something else they can truly benefit from. What can these benefits be? Schouten adopts a 'metric of flourishing' here. This contains two key criteria. First, educators should aim at providing *actually valuable outcomes*, rather than mere *opportunities* for them. Second, educators should aim at providing intrinsically valuable outcomes for the disadvantaged students' life prospects rather than what is only instrumentally necessary for them. For example, they shall let these students have 'enjoyable aesthetic or athletic experiences', though they could develop mature agency without them (2012:479-480).

Like traditional meritocratic accounts, the internal account may not highlight special weight or extra resources to disadvantaged students. However, unlike such accounts, the internal account grasps something that Schouten's priority principle intends to achieve. If education is arranged to bring intrinsic value to everyone based on what they are really interested in and need, it also allows the disadvantaged students to gain valuable outcomes like others which won't be affected by their particular disadvantages, such as their lack of natural abilities to learn certain things.

For example, one merit of the internal account is that particular disadvantage may not be interpreted as inferiority or failure but interpreted as symbols of inappropriate selection of materials. Even though Tom learns maths slower than the others, he may be talented and willing to study playing

the piano. The educator's mission is not to make Tom capable of doing maths like Tom, or as well as possible. The mission is to know what kind of educational content can allow Tom to acquire intrinsically valuable experience. In doing so, we won't grade Tom as a bad student or view him as someone at fault in our educational system. Rather, we should recognize the current learning materials doesn't benefit Tom very much, and we should help him find other promising routes of development.

Thus, the internal can better accommodate the priority view than traditional meritocracy in the following sense: when it is demonstrated that some students have severe difficulties in absorbing the content, the educators should give them special guidance and concerns, including deciding what alternative contents are more accessible for them. An advantage of compensating the disadvantaged student in this way instead of pushing them to make academic achievement overall is that, though these students may still have less chances to succeed in competitions for jobs or social positions, they can at least be guaranteed valuable education. As Johnathan Wolff suggests, disadvantage can be plural in its nature, and so can the remedy to the disadvantage (2007: 26-27). We should not expect disadvantages in learning to be compensated by offering external goods like others, which does not address the problem that one is unable to receive quality experience from the process of education. Instead, we should match the remedy to the particular disadvantage we aim to address (e.g., learning disabilities).

To sum up, though traditional meritocracy is usually thought of as in tension with egalitarianism, the internal account can do much better to satisfy the requirements of social equality. The internal account approves of some core claims made on behalf of social equality. The internal account not only agrees that we should provide equal opportunities for each individual to capitalize on their intelligence and willingness to learn, regardless of their social positions and identities but also respects their diverse education needs. These differences are important to highlight because they determine whether our egalitarian campaigns can bring true benefits to people instead of burdening them by wasting time and resources. It may be through such recognition and responses to individual

differences (rather than treating them all alike) that we approach the ideal of equal respect for everyone. In the next section, I specify this point further.

10. Further discussion

10.1 The practical implication of the Internal Defence

The internal account not only offers a justification for the meritocratic distribution of formal education, but also a constructive account of meritocracy for education. In Section 1.3, I said the new account may help reflect our current practices, but what implications does such an account yield exactly? In the last section, I argue that the internal account is consistent with some critical ideas proposed by egalitarians. But can it call for political actions to address inequalities?

First, the internal account features an emphasis on the intrinsic aim of education. In particular, rather than the promotion of social efficiency, it highlights individual growth – and the diversity of people's approaches to growth – as the essential products of education. Second, it also transforms our common conception of merit. It shifts from identifying merits with talents, capabilities, or intelligence, to identifying merit with what gives rise to growth, like interests, or willingness to capitalize on the resources. These two features lead to a new version of meritocracy. It sorts students into different educational tracks based on differences in their ambitions and interests. In this sense, it is meritocratic. However, such a different treatment does not yield anything about which track is superior to another, or whether one student is more worthy of education than another overall. Therefore, it is non-hierarchical or aligned with unjustified inequalities.

Certainly, having a non-hierarchical ideal of education does not immediately reduce social inequalities, but it may have an influence to undermine the misplaced mindsets that usually reinforce the social structure or legitimatize such inequalities. For example, education usually plays a key role in

turning parents' economic status into children's success at school or turning one's success at school into future success in her career, yet what makes the process possible or seemingly undisputable is the convertibility between these different realms, as allowed or even encouraged by the state or conventions. What justifies the convertibility between academic merits and a decent job is usually vague and more debatable. For instance, affluent Chinese parents often sent their children to international universities with high rankings in the 1980s. They not only intended to buy good education for their children but the education attached high 'symbolic' value by the state at that time. Through 20 years of the 'golden time', these first-wave educational immigrants thrived and took the lead when they returned to their homeland. Hence,

> …international education is primarily part of the production, rather than reproduction, of social inequality…The Chinese state not only initiated international education migration, but also facilitates the convertibility of different forms of capital. The state remains a major provider of symbolic capital. By appropriating particular discourses of human capital, meritocracy, globalization and competitiveness, the state adds political value to internationally acquired degrees in the national context, encourages and assists foreign degree holders to "cash in" their human capital, and at the same time projects itself to be progressive, pragmatic and capable, thus reinforcing its legitimacy in the era global competition and mass communication. (Xiang 2009:514)

Since the discourses of 'human capital' and 'meritocracy' are often what provide legitimacy for connecting one's academic excellence and his social status, undermining such discourses by replacing the old meritocratic ideal with a generally non-hierarchical[16] one helps challenge the legitimacy of the inequalities created or reinforced by the hierarchically-structured schooling system. Although this does not at once lead to arguments against such inequalities, it still acts as an important step to remove the disputable symbolic value that has long been attached to academic success, for example, being more intelligent, more capable, and deserving a superior economic status.

Moreover, the internal account is also a response to Markovitss worry about alienation (see Section 1.1). The new version of meritocracy underscores the intrinsic value of education rather than a mere

[16] My internal account won't grade one student as generally superior to another. It doesn't create a general hierarchy based on the idea of educational merit. It is only hierarchical regarding a particular distribution within the educational system.

division of students. The latter form of meritocracy draws people to endless competitions, with the students struggling to stand out in tests and the parents investing considerable money to help their children compete with the others. The eagerness to succeed in future professions, to access or hold the elite status, 'bends them from earliest childhood through retirement' and makes people 'exploit rather than fulfil themselves and eventually lose authentic ambitions that they might ever fulfil (2020:71).' They may be, as Dewey suggests, filling their minds with knowledge and skills that schools force them to command, but not enjoying the pleasure of learning since they are too exhausted with competition to comprehend what they learned as part of the growing experience of their life.

The internal account offers a remedy to this problem. Even if it is insufficient to reduce the influences of external conditions, for instance, the unequal chances to gain wealth, it requires at least students can get some true rewards for the sake of learning.

One may worry that this sounds too optimistic. Pursuing intrinsic values of education is too unaffordable for individuals who live under a social system that unavoidably classifies them in the end. As Markovits states,

> Where schooling is so competitive and performance in school determines so much, only outliers can afford to ignore education's instrumental functions and focus on its intrinsic worth. Saints (who are indifferent to income and status) and geniuses (who win the meritocratic race even without competing) might pursue meritocratic education for its own sake. But students of only ordinary virtue and ability must keep their eyes trained steadily on the meritocratic prize. (2020:155)

I agree that if the educational system remains unchanged, for example, highly hierarchical and closely combined with external aims (e.g., social efficiency), the internal defence seems a calling for individuals themselves to favour the intrinsic value of education, encouraging them to become 'saints' indifferent about the external rewards of learning, which is unrealistically demanding. Therefore, the internal account must require reforms to take place in our educational systems.

For example, though the distributive pattern of education is still meritocratic, it should comply with true merits (as discussed in Section 7). That is to say, it should be transformed to prize those who value education intrinsically and shape these inclinations (i.e., to guide the students to see education as intrinsically worthwhile for them). Besides the distribution of resources, a more important thing is to adjust the content of education so that they can accord with the goal of individual growth with full respect for individual differences. Raymond Williams points out that 'we speak sometimes as if education were…a settled body of teaching and learning, and as if the only problem it presents to us is that of distribution…', but the content of education is not fixed, and by itself is 'in fact a particular selection, a particular set of emphases and omissions' which can be consciously shaped by the society to a great extent (1961:125). If the content of formal education only represents the interests of the dominant group (e.g., the elite class, political authority, etc.), the rest of the population cannot pursue an individually meaningful education even when the distribution is relatively fair.

There is a possibility that changing the way to think of educational merits may also influence how we value people's various achievements and respect their various interests overall, so that we may be motivated to pursue a non-hierarchical social distribution in other areas (e.g., wealth and professions). The process of education has the potential to cultivate such dispositions. But speaking of the influence on the sphere of education alone, the benefits of such reforms are more predictable. For instance, students may be more motivated to engage in schooling and more encouraged to try different routes. They may also enjoy the outcomes of the educational process not just in terms of their instrumental values (facilitating their job-seeking). Even though the market may not change their preference for some forms of 'educational background', like expertise in certain areas, and the fierce competition for limited resources may not be relieved, the internal account still leaves room for making everyone enjoy at least some valuable outcomes through their schooling. If the students fail the competitions, they won't see the time and energy invested in education as wasteful and worthless for their development.

To conclude, the internal account is an account for explaining why meritocracy is a reasonable or appropriate way to arrange educational resources. However, it doesn't justify all (or even many) of the current practices done in the name of meritocracy today. The problem with the typical account

of meritocracy, either based on individual qualities or social efficiency, tends to lead to a justification of hierarchy. By contrast, the internal account, with the notion of merit built on the aim of respecting and cultivating individuality, illustrates a non-hierarchical idea of meritocracy. Here, meritocracy is not a process of dividing individuals into superior or inferior groups, grading some of them as worthy of or deserving more education than others, but a distinguishing process ensuring that education can be worthwhile for each of them given their diversity. In other words, though the account starts with providing a non-egalitarian reason for justifying meritocracy, its conclusion and practical implications may be accepted for egalitarian reasons.

10.2 Is the internal proposal too idealistic?

At the beginning of the paper, I said it's practically helpful to start from the status quo. With the internal meritocratic account, we can be assured of retaining the selection process within our educational system. We can classify students according to an idea of merit without worrying about the justifiability. This means we do not need to change the distributive pattern of higher education dramatically to respond the challenge posed to typical meritocracy. However, it calls for some kind of reforms as well, including our conventional idea of merit and methods of assessment. One may think that this is still too idealistic. Perhaps the contemporary educational system, which is closely intertwined with other social sectors, can hardly afford such a transformation. Is the internal account practically valuable?

Though the goal of achieving a non-hierarchical and intrinsically valuable educational system is demanding and, therefore, seems idealistic, it is necessary for the pursuit of some more valuable outcomes. As Swift says, idealistic accounts usually carry a "target" role telling 'where we are trying to get to in the long run' (2012:379). This is practically important since some practices may carry notable short-term benefits but are inadequate for facilitating deeper changes in our conventions or beliefs. For example, we can provide more teaching support for poor students, trying to improve their academic results as much as we can. Or maybe we can expect affirmative action to reduce

racial inequalities and promote social solidarity. However, as long as the distribution of social privileges is still limited to a small group of winners, they are insufficient for resolving the unfair structure as a whole, and finally providing lifelong values for these disadvantaged students.

By contrast, for those who expect to address inequalities at a deeper level (e.g., reducing structural or systematic inequalities, or rejecting any possible social hierarchies), the long-term practical goal proposed by the internal account may be sufficiently ambitious. As mentioned, the internal account aims at a non-hierarchical educational system which stops classifying students into superior or inferior groups, ensuring any distinguishing process is made on the basis of providing worthy outcomes to all. It encourages profound reforms and actions that touch injustices at a structural level instead of being satisfied with minor improvements within the current structure.

That is to say, despite possible difficulties, having an ambitious goal is in some sense indispensable for achieving some more valuable outcomes like structural changes. More importantly, I think the idealistic characteristics of the proposal don't render it practically impossible, or even have its realistic concerns.

First, though radical reforms rarely take place in the short term, they can happen gradually, with people's growing realization of some values and lifelong benefits. Actually, educational systems may experience changes all the time. As Williams points out, the British educational system has undergone significant changes over the past few centuries, with different values motivating them. Three different roles of public education--a 'democratic educator' role, an 'industrial trainer' role, and an 'old humanity' role—are highlighted at different times and coexist in our idea of educational aims until today (1961:142). People regarding an educational system stressing intrinsic value as impossible may claim that the industrial goal (i.e., preparing individuals for future professions) is too influential. The government can hardly abandon the economic and political benefits that are brought by enhancing such training and individuals can hardly ignore the personal rewards (e.g., wealth and social status) created by the system as well. Nevertheless, even though disproportionate importance is attached to one role so that the other roles are currently neglected or suppressed, it doesn't mean the attention cannot be shifted again. The democratic and cultural aims may also have

roots in the public mind. What is required is to rebuild individuals' awareness of these goals and to clarify what it means to realize these goals.

Second, for those who want to address structural problems that threaten the ideal of democracy, calling for educational reforms may be more realistic than waiting for the free play of the market to remedy the unappealing outcomes it generates, or expecting the government to continuously intervene in the social distribution. As Dewey notes, even though schools cannot fully escaped from the social conditions where we live, they don't merely mirror these prior conditions. The market ideology may permeate the educational environment, while education also creates the intellectual and emotional disposition to enable such reforms to happen (Jackson 2018:254-255). Raymond Williams also recognizes educational reforms are necessary for moving towards the ambitious goal of democracy. Indeed, if we embrace such an ambitious goal, but stay unconcerned with reforming our public education system, then we render our goal unrealistic.

> Utopian thinking is that which supposes we shall get an educated and participating democracy, industries and services with adequate human communications, and a common culture of high quality, by proclaiming the virtue of those things and leaving our training institutions as they are. It is a question of whether we can grasp the real nature of our society, or whether we persist in social and educational patterns based on a limited ruling class…whether we replace them by the free play of the market, or by a public education designed to express and create the values of an educated democracy and a common culture. (Williams 1961:155)

In short, though achieving the practical goal implied by the internal account may require long-term effort and high costs, it depicts a more desirable educational system which respects people's individuality and aims to benefit them all. Besides, moving towards this idealistic system isn't utopian at all. We may have common beliefs about the non-industrial goals or the intrinsic values of education even though it is currently suppressed by the market ideology. Educational reforms may help cultivate such dispositions and may motivate fundamental structural changes.

11. Conclusion

In this paper, I proposed an 'internal defence' for the meritocratic distribution of educational resources. Unlike the two typical defences of meritocracy (i.e., efficiency-based defence and desert-based defence), this account follows Walzer's methodology. It tries to explain why certain distributive criteria are appropriate according to the social meaning of the goods under distribution. To develop this idea (especially in response to Dworkin's objection), I introduce a distinction between the core and peripheral criteria. Core criteria are criteria that connect to the specific social meaning or internal logic of the sphere. Peripheral criteria are those relatively disconnected to the meaning or are concerns coming from other spheres. However, they may still play an important role in deciding how we arrange the goods. Core criteria can gain special justification from the distinctive internal logic of the sphere, although this does not mean they may still compromise with other non-trivial peripheral concerns.

In Section 6, I reviewed Dewey's theory of education, especially his idea of 'education as growth.' I take this growth theory as offering a plausible account of the intrinsic aim of education, which highlights the free and full development of individuals with unique interests and needs. With Dewey's key ideas, I examine the typical conception of merit. I argue that the two commonplace notions of educational merits—intelligence and efficiency-based merit—are problematic. This is because both notions embrace inappropriate assumptions of the intrinsic aim of education (or overlook the intrinsic aim). Following the Deweyan idea of 'education as growth', I argue for an alternative conception of merit, which includes two dimensions. One is students' identified interests and their willingness to further their studies in these areas (the 'interest' criterion). The other is their relevant capabilities to pursue their interests (the 'capability' criterion). In other words, whether a student is meritorious in some areas depends on whether she has identified the relevant subject as her interest and is willing to participate in a continual process of learning and, at the same time, possesses the relevant capabilities to capitalize on the resources provided.

The defence of meritocratic distribution follows from the conception of educational merit. The meritocratic arrangement of educational goods ensures that one can genuinely benefit from the resources.

It is closely attached to the intrinsic aim of education, that is, the development of an individual. I also compare this new account of meritocracy with two other distributive models. The internal meritocratic model be seen as an intermediatory model between the need model and the efficiency model. It combines two aspects—the benefits for each individual and the efficient use of resources—together.

In Section 9, I considered the important concerns about educational justice from the perspective of social equality by comparing my internal account of meritocracy with some popular egalitarian proposals. I argue that the internal account of meritocracy has the potential to accommodate important egalitarian requirements instead of dismissing them. For example, the internal account of meritocracy can also be used to call for actions that eliminate unjust intergenerational effect on children's educational opportunities or provide the needy or disadvantaged children with adequate and general goods that are truly beneficial to them.

In Section 10, I discussed two further questions: what possible practical implications may flow from the internal account and whether this proposal is too idealistic to guide our practice. I conclude that the proposal is practically significant for achieving a non-hierarchical and intrinsically valuable educational system. Though it may call for long-term efforts to reform the current system, the proposal may not be totally utopian.

Bibliography

Anderson, E. (2007). Fair Opportunity in Education: A Democratic Equality Perspective. *Ethics*, 117(4), 595–622.

Anderson, E. (2004). Rethinking Equality of Opportunity: Comment on Adam Swift's How Not to be a Hypocrite. *Theory and Research in Education*, 2(2), 99–110.

Aristotle. (2020). *Politics* (R. F. Stalley, Ed.; E. Barker, Tran.). Oxford University Press.

Arneson, R. J. (2018). Four Conceptions of Equal Opportunity. *The Economic Journal,* 128(612), 152-173.

Arneson, R. J. (1999). Against Rawlsian Equality of Opportunity. *Philosophical Studies*, 93(1), 77-112.

Bowen, W. G., Bok, D., & Lemann, N. (2019). *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions Twentieth Anniversary Edition*. Princeton University Press.

Brighouse, H., & Swift, A. (2009). Educational Equality versus Educational Adequacy: A Critique of Anderson and Satz. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 26(2), 117-128.

Brighouse, H. (2006). *On education.* Routledge.

Collins, R. (1979). *The credential society: an historical sociology of education and stratification*. Academic Press.

Daniels, N. (1978). Merit and Meritocracy. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 7(3), 206–223.

De-Shalit, A., & Wolff, J. (2007). *Disadvantage*. Oxford University Press.

Dewey, J. (2009). *Democracy and education*. Merchant Books.

Dewey, J. (1963). *Experience and education*. Collier Books.

Dworkin, R. (1983). To each his own. *The New York Review*, 30(6), Retrieved: August 4, 2024, from https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1983/04/14/to-each-his-own/.

Gatley, J. (2021). Intrinsic value and educational value. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 55(4-5), 675-687.

Jackson, J. (2018). Educating Democratic Individuals. In *Equality Beyond Debate: John Dewey's Pragmatic Idea of Democracy* (pp. 236–263). Cambridge University Press.

Korsgaard, C. M. (1983). Two Distinctions in Goodness. *The Philosophical Review*, 92(2), 169-195.

Lazenby, H. (2016). What is equality of opportunity in education?. *Theory and Research in Education*, 14(1), 65-76.

Lippert-Rasmussen, K. (2020). *Making Sense of Affirmative Action*. Oxford University Press.

Markovits, D. (2020). *The meritocracy trap : how America's foundational myth feeds inequality, dismantles the middle class, and devours the elite*. Penguin Books.

Miller, D. (1996). Two Cheers for Meritocracy. *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 4(4), 277-301.

Miller, D. (1992). Distributive Justice: What the People Think. *Ethics*, 102(3), 555–593.

Mulligan, T. (2018). *Justice and the Meritocratic State* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2009). Tagore, Dewey, and the Imminent Demise of Liberal Education. In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education* (pp.52-65). Oxford University Press.

Oakeshott, M., & Fuller, T. (1989). *The voice of liberal learning : Michael Oakeshott on education / edited by Timothy Fuller.* Yale University Press.

Ogg, T., Zimdars, A., & Heath, A. (2009). Schooling effects on degree performance: A comparison

of the predictive validity of aptitude testing and secondary school grades at Oxford University. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(5), 781–807.

Rawls, J. (1973). *A theory of justice.* Oxford University Press.

Rustin, M. (2016). The neoliberal university and its alternatives. *Soundings*, 63(63), 147-176.

Sandel, M. J. (1982). *Liberalism and the limits of justice*. Cambridge University Press.

Satz, D. (2007). Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship. *Ethics*, 117(4), 623-648.

Schouten, G. (2012). Fair Educational Opportunity and the Distribution of Natural Ability: Toward a Prioritarian Principle of Educational Justice. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 46(3), 472-491.

Shields, L. (2015). From Rawlsian autonomy to sufficient opportunity in education. *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, 14(1), 53–66.

Shields, L. (2018). Private School, College Admissions and the Value of Education. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 35(2), 448–461.

Stemplowska, Z., & Swift, A. (2012). Ideal and Nonideal Theory. In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy* (pp.373-388). Oxford University Press.

Swift, A. (2003). *How not to be a hypocrite: school choice for the morally perplexed parent*. Routledge.

Swift, A. (2004). How not to defend private schools. *Think: Philosophy for Everyone*, 2(6), 71-72.

Walzer, M. (1983). *Spheres of justice: a defence of pluralism and equality.* Basic Books.

Walzer, M. (1994). *Thick and thin : moral argument at home and abroad*. University of Notre Dame Press.

Weston, P. (1985). The concept of equal opportunity. *Ethics*, *95*(4), 837-850.

White, J. (2007). Wellbeing and Education: Issues of Culture and Authority. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *41*(1), 17–28.

Williams, R. (1961). Education and British Society, in *The Long Revolution (*Chatto & Windus *ed.)*, pp.125-155.

Wilson, J. (2021). *Philosophy for Public Health and Public Policy: Beyond the Neglectful State*. Oxford University Press.

Wolff, J. (2011). *Ethics and Public Policy: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Second edition). Routledge.

Xiang, B., & Shen, W. (2009). International Student Migration and Social Stratification in China. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 29(5), 513–522.

Young, M. D. (1994). *The rise of the meritocracy*. Transaction.