

Life is not Fair

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH (#9.1)

Philip O'Carroll Dec 2018 phil3068@hotmail.com www.philipocarroll.com Share at will Responses welcome

No human society has ever brought **equality** to its people. Some rights, yes: equality, never. There are differences between people, both intrinsic and circumstantial, which entail that we each have a different set of opportunities.

In some very un-sharing societies, a privileged class leaves the others so grimly deprived, that the underdogs finally revolt against the regime.¹ Alas, the new order may be little better, but desperate people may come to feel they have nothing to lose by destroying the status quo.

There are societies in which wealth and opportunity are better shared. Australia is a **highly redistributive** country. Income tax is the single greatest source of government revenue. In 2014, the top 1% of taxpayers paid more income taxes than the bottom **90 percent** combined.² But some people still demand **total equality**.

Some people feel a strong passion for **fairness** or **equality** or **equity** or **social justice** even in a country where there is a high level of sharing. Some people have chronic **envy**. This may drive some to **activism**, even **violence**. Envy has for millennia been called a **vice** – and wisely so.

Some people make a **god** of equality, as the key to happiness. But it is a **false god**. It will always disappoint. Equality is not the human condition.

It is a perennial fact of life that some people are more creative, bold, productive or energetic than others – if free to invest their own labour and money. No matter how unhappy we are that there is inequality, schemes to force *equal*

outcomes for all have always resulted in economic decline. The most murderous governments in the century past are revolutionary socialist states that slaughtered millions of their own people in pursuit of equal outcomes for all.³

Inequality? Many people feel cheated by what are in fact **“acts of God”**.⁴ Why is my sibling more attractive than me (according to the current fashions of our culture)? Healthier? More gifted? More intelligent? The nearest you will come to seeing an equal start to the game of life is with identical twins – a rare phenomenon. Inequality is the natural order.

And beyond DNA, there are many circumstantial inequalities. Why wasn't I born into a better country? Why was I born to a mentally disturbed parent? Or worse, why was I not loved? My resentment may even move me to a mentality of **revenge** – to hurt those who seem more fortunate. But if my activism is driven by the urge to avenge these *acts of God*, I will never achieve a happier world or a happier me.

I am not saying that people who start out with disadvantages have no hope of a better life.⁵ But some people carry a vengeful attitude, arising out of a sense of **having been short-changed**. This attitude will bring them no benefit. We cannot escape the universal fact that, in many unavoidable ways, **life is not fair**.

I know from working with little children for 40+ years, that even some of them already feel cheated by life – because they see other children who are better loved. No politics will

act of God used here means *misfortunes which cannot justly be blamed on anybody in particular*.

⁵ Remarkably, some very “fortunate” people are possessed by envy, focussing on what they **lack**. And some “less fortunate” people focus on what they **have**. Chronically envious people do not contribute the talents they do have to the human commonwealth. Envy is a negative way of life.

¹ For example, the French Revolution 1789-1799.

² www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=income+tax+distribution+by+income+level

³ Stalin's Russia, Mao's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia, etc.

⁴ We have to live within reality, and merely hating it will not make the world a better place. The old legal phrase

fix that. If I become resentful in my childhood about the advantages that other children have over me, my **infantile rage** against “unfairness” may become the source of my political outlook.

Rationality involves learning from **past** mistakes, honestly weighing the **consequences** of action, and executing the best option **available**, which is often not the one that you passionately **feel** like executing. Rationality is an **adult** virtue.

The enraged-child part of us cannot tolerate those who disagree with our political dogma. We want **total control**, to ensure we can “make life fair”. This will never be achieved. The eventual end-game of such politics is oppression by a cruel authoritarian regime.

What can we say about fairness? Is there any point in pursuing it? Of course there is, but only in those areas where it is **possible** to make a difference **for the better**. Just worsening conditions for any who seem more fortunate will not make the world a better place.

The best societies subsidise income, education, health and other services to provide a high minimum standard of living – short of wrecking the productive economy which makes such strong redistribution possible.

Consider the old-age pension. We take care to create **rules that apply equally** to every needy retiree. Inevitably, the real needs of each pensioner will vary from one to another. But we will never be able to fine-tune the sharing of wealth so that the amount of each pension is **absolutely fair**. The nearest we can get to **feeling that it is fair** is to provide **a specific number of dollars equally**, by simple rules.

So yes, we can try to be fair, but see how **humble** our efforts through government action really are in comparison to the “God-given” advantages and disadvantages in human lives. Some people fantasise that by establishing

enough **laws and rules and taxes and benefits**, and a **massive and costly bureaucracy** to enforce it all, we can **erase** the natural diversity or natural “injustices” to which all life on earth is subject. Sadly, pursuing this path towards the utopian dream of absolute equality is painfully self-defeating.

More equal opportunity, without creating greater harm, is progress. That’s why governments should fund schools. This is a form of **sharing** which is a boon to the human race. But robotic one-size-fits-all socialism is a curse. For example, we would do better for lower-income children if we let their parents freely exercise their judgement and choose the school for their child. Better schools, costing no more to operate, would soon evolve.

Neurotic envy-politics hates open competition, because it reveals **personal differences** in ability – in this case, in educators. Thus it prefers to dictate an officially “zoned” school for each child. In reality, **freedom of choice wherever possible** generates **progress** which eventually improves the standard of living for **all** citizens. This evolutionary process is a law of nature.⁶

Some government services, like state-run schooling, have exclusively higher levels of taxpayer funding – money which will not follow the child if parents want to change to another school operator. This forces children of lower-income families to remain in state-run schools. This denial of parent choice only **reduces** opportunity for less advantaged children.

Yes, let’s pursue more equal opportunity where possible – but rationally, so that we do not hold back progress. We do not achieve a better world by hating our fellow humans for the many inequalities that are natural to all human life, but by **embracing advancement for humanity wherever there is a constructive opportunity**.
POC

⁶ Some people childishly reject brilliant new ideas that do not instantly fulfil their dream of absolute equality for everyone **simultaneously** – preferring to sulk in an inferior system. All progress originates from the creativity

of human **individuals** who are **free** to innovate, and citizens who are **free** to **embrace** that innovation – which will **spread** if and when it is tried and found to be better than what went before.