



ELSEVIER

Mathematical Social Sciences 44 (2002) 45–64

mathematical
social
sciences

www.elsevier.com/locate/econbase

Opportunity egalitarianism and income inequality

Vitorocco Peragine*

*Dipartimento di Scienze Economiche, Facolta' di Economia, Universita' di Bari, Via C. Rosalba 53,
70124 Bari, Italy*

Received 1 May 2001; received in revised form 1 November 2001; accepted 1 January 2002

Abstract

In order to study the implications of the opportunity egalitarian theory of justice for the definition of welfare and inequality criteria, in this paper we extend the rank-dependent approach to the measurement of social welfare, suggested by Yaari [J. Econ. Theory 44 (1988)], to the case of income distributions which can be decomposed across homogeneous sub-groups. We then capture (some of) the opportunity egalitarian principles into the formulation of classes of social evaluation functions. Finally, by requiring unanimous agreement among the member of these families, we derive various criteria, generally expressed in forms of inverse stochastic dominance conditions, for unambiguous social rankings of income distributions.

© 2002 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Inequality; Social welfare; Inverse stochastic dominance; Egalitarianism; Opportunity

JEL classification: D31; D63; D71

1. Introduction

There is renewed interest in welfare and normative economics for the science of egalitarianism. The main source of inspiration of this literature is, without doubt, the Rawlsian tradition in political philosophy, initiated by Rawls (1971) and developed by Dworkin (1981a,b), Sen (1985), Cohen (1989), Arneson (1989), Barry (1991), van Parijs (1995) and Roemer (1993, 1998). This philosophical literature gave a strong endorsement to egalitarian goals, but made the point that while it may be reasonable to deny compensation for some welfare deficit, it is nonetheless important to limit the compensatory intervention only to handicaps for which individuals are not deemed

*Tel.: +30-080-504-9051; fax: +39-080-504-9149.

E-mail address: v.peragine@dse.uniba.it

responsible. As Cohen (1989) writes, this literature “[...] *has performed for egalitarianism the considerable service of incorporating within it the most powerful idea in the arsenal of the anti-egalitarian right: the idea of choice and responsibility*” (p. 993).

This is done by suggesting that what matters, for a society to be equitable, is the distribution of the opportunities or chances open to individuals, rather than the distribution of final outcomes: opportunity instead of outcomes is the right ‘currency of egalitarian justice’.

Some first attempts to formalize this philosophical concept have presented the goal of equalizing opportunities as a direct goal. In particular, some contributions addressing the question of ranking social states according to equality of opportunity (see, *inter alia*, Ok, 1997; Kranich, 1996, 1997; Ok and Kranich, 1998) have formulated the following problem: each individual in a society is endowed with a given (abstract) set of opportunities, assumed to be observable and measurable with precision, and the society is represented as a profile of opportunity sets. Therefore, the problem of measuring the degree of opportunity inequality is handled by characterizing inequality measures (or inequality rankings) of multidimensional distributions of individual opportunities¹. This approach is surely correct in principle; however, its informational requirements seem too strong to be met in empirical applications.

Meanwhile, another part of the economic literature (initiated by Bossert, 1995; Fleurbaey, 1995a,b, and reviewed by Fleurbaey and Maniquet, 1999), mainly devoted to the definition of allocation rules rather than social orderings, has presented the problem of allocating (transferable) resources in order to offset the initial unequal distribution of opportunities. The main conceptual contribution of this literature, in my opinion, is a clarification of the relevant and distinct ethical principles involved in the opportunity egalitarianism project. In particular, it has highlighted the fact that the opportunity egalitarian goal is made of two subgoals which are totally distinct and possibly antagonistic. The first subgoal is to neutralize the influence over agents’ outcomes of the characteristics that elicit compensation: society should eliminate inequalities due to factors that are beyond the control of people (call these factors *circumstances*). This is called the principle of compensation (Barry, 1990; Fleurbaey, 1995a). The second subgoal, an expression of the ethics of responsibility, says that society should not indemnify people against outcomes that are consequences of causes that are within their control (call these factors *effort*², for short). This is called the responsibility principle (Barry, 1990; Fleurbaey, 1995a).

The two principles are independent. For an outcome egalitarian policy would satisfy the compensation and violate the responsibility principle, while a *laissez-faire* policy

¹For a survey of this literature, see Peragine (1999).

²In this paper we use indifferently the expressions ‘effort’ or ‘responsibility’. It should be stressed that effort, in the present context, does not have the usual meaning of labor or intensity of labor; it is instead a multidimensional variable representing all the factors for which the individual is deemed responsible by society.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات