Abstract: In the classic article, “On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice,” G.A. Cohen states that “a large part of the fundamental egalitarian aim is to extinguish the effects of brute luck on distribution.” This canonical formulation pinpoints what is distinctive of the luck-egalitarian mandate. But it also indicates that that mandate, so stated, is incomplete. The primary task of the paper is to extend what is explicit within that mandate, and in doing so, to bring it closer to completion. To that end, I defend – in the spirit of Cohen, and by arguments he pioneered – a new, expanded conception of luck-egalitarian compensation. I propose, accordingly, an amendment, seemingly friendly, to Cohen’s statement. But, in fact, my proposed amendment, and its rationale, reveal a major lacuna in the normative underpinnings of Cohen-style egalitarianism. I thereby show that, contrary to what is widely assumed, important foundational work remains to be done for the luck-egalitarian project.

Keywords: distributive justice, luck egalitarianism, expensive tastes, distributive fairness

In the classic article, “On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice,” G.A. Cohen states that “a large part of the fundamental egalitarian aim is to extinguish the effects of brute luck on distribution.” This canonical formulation pinpoints what is distinctive of the luck-egalitarian mandate. But it also indicates that that mandate, so stated, is incomplete. The primary task of this paper is to extend what is explicit within that mandate, and in doing so, to bring it closer to completion. To that end, I shall defend – in the spirit of Cohen, and by arguments he pioneered – a new, expanded conception of luck-egalitarian compensation. I shall propose, accordingly, an amendment, seemingly friendly, to Cohen’s statement. But, in fact, my proposed amendment, and its rationale, will reveal a major lacuna in the normative underpinnings of Cohen-style egalitarianism. I shall thereby show that, contrary to what is widely assumed, important foundational work remains to be done for the luck-egalitarian project.

This paper is organized as follows. In Section I, I shall offer an overview of the luck-egalitarian ideal, generally defined. In Section II, I shall recapitulate Cohen’s rendering of that ideal in its application to the matter of compensating people for their expensive tastes. In Sections III–VI, I shall extend Cohen’s account of compensation for expensive tastes to the category of risky tastes. In Sections III and IV, I shall elaborate two examples of risky tastes: that of extreme skiing and that of loving relationships. I shall claim that the element of luck is built into the pursuit of extreme skiing and loving relationships and that it is in part in virtue of this feature that extreme skiing and loving are valuable human projects. In Sections V and VI, I shall evaluate, in the context of Cohen’s account, the proposition that egalitarians ought to compensate extreme skiers and lovers who fall victim to bad luck in pursuing these projects. I shall claim that luck egalitarians are so obligated, albeit within certain, novel restrictions. In Section VII, I shall claim that the luck-egalitarian aim of extinguishing the effects of brute luck on distribution does not capture what we are doing when we compensate risky tastes. In Section VIII, I shall propose an amendment to the canonically formulated egalitarian ideal, and explain why that amendment issues a deep challenge to Cohen-style egalitarianism.

Unsophisticated egalitarianism favours flat equality of outcome. It claims that a just distribution will eliminate all inequalities in the preferred currency of justice (which might be resources, well-being, or something else, but which I will refer to, for simplicity’s sake, with Cohen’s catch-all “advantage”\(^2\)), regardless of the cause of these inequalities. That claim, however, is subject to a major criticism. This focuses on personal responsibility: it claims that flat equality is inconsistent with people’s taking personal responsibility for determining how their lives go. It claims that individuals should reap the benefits or pay the burdens of their more or less advantageous choices and for their greater or lesser efforts, and that overlooking the role of personal responsibility in effecting redistribution is unfair to those who have worked hard and made wise or prudent choices. For example, if you and I start off in equally advantageous positions but I work diligently and invest wisely while you live fecklessly and if, in consequence, my life becomes more advantaged than yours (filled with greater material comforts or freer of anxiety) it would be unfair to transfer some of my resources to you in order to restore equality between us.

In responding to this criticism, luck egalitarians draw a distinction between brute luck and option luck. Someone’s brute luck consists of the advantages and disadvantages that are outcomes of the natural lottery and of other accidents of fate. Someone’s option luck consists of the advantages and disadvantages that are the outcomes of her (free and informed) choices, such as whether or not to work hard, or pursue high-risk ambitions, or indulge her expensive tastes. Luck egalitarians claim that justice requires that people’s “brute luck” advantages be equalized, while inequalities resulting from people’s choices are just: people should be held responsible for bearing the costs of their choices. Luck egalitarians thus articulate their ideal as the elimination of the effects of brute luck on distribution.

II

That all of a person’s expensive tastes are a matter of her option luck rather than a matter of her brute luck is a controversial claim. Cohen claims that there are two categories of expensive tastes the costs of which are a matter of brute luck and which, therefore, are appropriate objects of egalitarian compensation. In this section, I shall explicate Cohen’s account of compensable expensive tastes. The problem of expensive tastes is a site of contention in egalitarian literature; however, for the purposes of this paper, I shall give Cohen the last word.

People who have expensive tastes are, in the context of luck-egalitarian debate, people who require more resources than people with ordinary tastes to obtain the same level of satisfaction. These might include the taste for fine wines over mediocre wines, or the taste for opera over pop music, and so forth. It is important to note that, in this context, people with expensive tastes are not out to get more satisfaction from wine or music than others, but rather, given the constitution of their palates or the structure of their musical preferences, require more expensive wines or concerts in order to get the same satisfaction that others get from cheaper wine and cheaper music.


Cohen points out that it is not enough simply to know that someone’s tastes are expensive (in this special sense) in order to hold her personally responsible for shouldering the costs of those tastes. We must also ask whether she is responsible for the fact that her tastes are expensive. For example, if someone drinks only bottled water because, through no fault of her own, she is burdened with an unusually sensitive constitution such that she finds the taste of ordinary tap water unbearable, Cohen claims that she can ask that the costs of her drinking bottled water be compensated. In this case, her expensive taste for bottled water is a matter of her bad brute luck: she does not have the same choice as ordinarily constituted people to choose between bottled water and tap water; through no fault of her own, the sacrifice she would have to make to drink tap water is far greater than that of ordinary people.6

Cohen also points out a second category of expensive tastes (alongside that of expensive brute tastes) that he claims are appropriate objects of compensation. These are tastes that are not the product of someone’s brute constitution, but rather are the objects of her considered value judgments. Someone’s expensive taste for playing the violin is a plausible example of this kind of expensive judgmental taste. Her primary reasons for this preference are facts about what she considers valuable or worthwhile in life: artistic expression, the mastery of a skill, the richness of classical music, and so forth. While she might get as much brute satisfaction out of some other pursuit that does not burden her with the high costs of the purchase and upkeep of a good violin, forsaking music in favour of one of those activities would violate her judgment about what sort of activities are most worth pursuing, and of what constitutes a valuable life.

The justification that Cohen gives for compensating expensive judgmental tastes is more complex than his justification for compensating expensive brute tastes. Unlike expensive brute tastes (such as having a constitution that cannot tolerate tap water), expensive judgmental tastes, by definition, express the value judgments of their bearers. Thus, on the face of it, it appears bizarre, or even incoherent, for someone with an expensive judgmental taste to claim that having that taste is a matter of her bad brute luck: that would be tantamount to simultaneously endorsing and disclaiming the same taste. Ronald Dworkin makes this point in denying people compensation for their expensive judgmental tastes. Dworkin claims that in order to request compensation for some condition or taste, one must repudiate it, or regard it as a handicap, which he defines as a

condition or taste that a person would prefer to be without. But, he claims, it would be incoherent for someone to repudiate her judgmental tastes in this way.\(^7\)

In response to Dworkin, Cohen points out that there is a difference between endorsing the object of one’s judgmental taste, and endorsing its cost.\(^8\) In the preceding example of the violinist, the fact that pursuing the violin is expensive plays no role in the violinist’s endorsement of that taste. Rather, the costs of playing the violin are extrinsic to the activity (we can imagine a possible world in which good violins come extremely cheap) and furthermore, are extrinsic to the value of the activity: the fact that violins are expensive plays no part in the violinist’s judgment that playing the violin is a uniquely worthwhile pursuit. The violinist can thus endorse her taste for playing the violin while disclaiming the costs of that taste. She can claim that the fact that playing the violin is expensive (that is, more expensive than other people’s valued pursuits) is a matter of her bad brute luck and, therefore, an appropriate object of compensation.

Cohen would deny someone compensation for an expensive judgmental taste, however, when the reason for her judgment is the fact that the taste is expensive.\(^9\) Imagine someone who aspired to play the violin because violins are expensive. She might be motivated by the view that only expensive pursuits are worthwhile, or appropriate to the social status to which she aspires, and so forth. In asking for compensation, this violinist would be subject to Dworkin’s charge of incoherence: she could not claim that the high cost of pursuing the violin is a matter of her bad luck because the cost is the object of her value judgment. If pursuing the violin were cheaper, she would lose her taste for it.

In summary, Cohen claims that a person is entitled to compensation for her expensive judgmental taste when her taste reflects her value judgment about what is worthwhile in life, with the important qualification that the cost of her taste is not itself the object of that judgment.

III

Cohen’s account of compensation for expensive judgmental tastes can be extended to the category of potentially expensive judgmental risky tastes (which, for simplicity’s sake, I shall refer to as ‘risky tastes’ from now on). Risky tastes are the tastes a person has for activities that carry a high risk factor: pursuing a risky taste subjects a person to an above-average likelihood that she

\(^7\) Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, p. 290.

\(^8\) Cohen, “Expensive Taste Rides Again,” p. 11.

will incur some high costs (which could be monetary or otherwise), with at least some of the factors that will determine her success standing outside of her control. High-stakes gambling is a paradigm example of a risky taste. High-risk sports, such as extreme skiing, are another. The likelihood of serious injury carrying high medical costs is notably higher for athletes in extreme skiing and other high-risk sports than it is for athletes in safer sports, and for non-athletes. In determining whether athletes in high-risk sports should be compensated for the costs of their medical bills (and/or for the costs of other losses, such as the loss of well-being for those who must live with permanent injuries), one would ask, in the spirit of Cohen, whether these athletes pursued their sports because of the risk or in spite of it, for the sake of some other values or objectives available through these sports, such as the perfection of a skill or the mastery of a challenge. Serious athletes are entitled to compensation under a Cohen-like scheme; reckless thrill-seekers are not.

Risky tastes, however, present a more complex case for Cohen’s account than ordinary examples of expensive tastes. It is implausible to claim that the value of the risk in dangerous sports can always be separated out from the other values present in these sports in the same way that the value of the high cost of ordinary expensive tastes can be separated from the other (that is, the valuable) features of those tastes, for example in the way that the cost of playing the violin can be distinguished from the musical value in playing the violin. Unlike the cost of playing the violin, the risk of extreme skiing is intrinsic to the sport: the nature of extreme skiing would be radically changed if the element of risk were eliminated. Given the pride of place that risk has in the sport, and given the wide range of safer athletic options available, it is reasonable to conclude that most athletes who pursue extreme skiing will indeed value the element of risk for its own sake. But this attitude toward risk is fully compatible with, though independent of, these athletes’ commitment to the other values in extreme skiing, and to their regarding high achievement in extreme skiing as a form of human excellence to which they aspire. (Just as there are safer sports available to the risk-averse, there are less demanding high-risk activities available to thrill-seekers uninterested in athletic excellence). Rather, the enjoyment of the thrill of risk and the serious-minded pursuit of excellence in a risky sport is the most likely combination of attitudes in athletes involved in dangerous sports.

10 I will treat the risk of some event occurring as the probability of that event occurring multiplied by the potential harm. For present purposes, nothing hangs on the choice between characterizing risk this way rather than simply as the probability of an event occurring. I will also assume an epistemic understanding of probability as what is relevant in the context of determining what to do or expect.
In response to that claim, Cohen could say that athletes who are injured in their pursuit of dangerous sports should be compensated only to the degree that they value those activities independently of their risks. We can think of the comprehensive value of extreme skiing as the sum of its various constituent values: the value of the risk, plus the value of the pursuit of athletic excellence, plus the value of being surrounded by untouched natural beauty, and so forth. We can (in principle) determine the appropriate amount of compensation for injuries suffered in skiing and other dangerous sports by subtracting the value of the risk from the comprehensive value of these sports, and compensating injured athletes to the extent that they value their sports for reasons other than the risks those sports entail.

That response, however, does not fully capture the value of the risk inherent in dangerous sports. The response appeals to a phenomenology of athletic value that regards the complete value of a sport as the sum of its constituent values. On this account, we can subtract the value of the risk in skiing from the comprehensive value of skiing, without affecting any of the other constituent values. But this provides an incomplete picture. The constituent values that make up complex sports do not only exist discretely, they also function holistically. The inter-relation between the different constituent values changes the weightings that are attached to those values. The element of risk in dangerous sports is a case in point: the risk interacts with and enhances at least some of the other values present in those sports.

Let me illustrate that claim through an example. Consider, again, extreme skiing and ski mountaineering. This sport involves climbing difficult mountains and skiing down them: often (of necessity) by way of steep, narrow chutes, in potentially hazardous, often untried terrain.\textsuperscript{11} The criterion of “extreme skiing” was first codified by one of its pioneers as follows: “If you fall, you die.”\textsuperscript{12} The high risk factor in extreme skiing is a combination of three things: the highly skilled nature of the task, the uncertainty of success, and the potentially devastating consequences of failure. But it is this same combination of features that makes extreme skiing a meaningful challenge. The dangers of the sport can be negotiated through careful planning, the exercise of skill, and the virtues of prudence and courage, which, together, make up athletic excellence in extreme skiing. The development and exercise of these attributes – and the achievement of this form of athletic excellence – are worthy human goals, and one need not enjoy risk for its own sake in order to appreciate or aspire toward them. But their worth

\textsuperscript{11} Nick Paumgarten, “Dangerous Game” in \textit{The New Yorker} (April 18, 2005) p. 100.
\textsuperscript{12} Paumgarten, “Dangerous Game,” p. 105, quoting the American steep-skiing pioneer Chris Landry.
nonetheless depends upon their being exercised against background conditions of genuine risk. The value of athletic excellence in extreme skiing is intrinsically bound up with its element of risk.

To bring out the difference between the two types of value risk brings to extreme skiing (and to other dangerous sports), consider the following two quotes. The first is in an extreme skiing guidebook, written by the notorious extreme skier and ski mountaineer, Andrew McLean:

[Extreme skiing] is more fun than running with scissors, sticking paperclips into electrical sockets or taping firecrackers to a cat’s tail.13

That quote speaks to value of the thrill or “buzz” of the risk in extreme skiing. It is one feature valued for its own sake by athletes who pursue risky sports, and it can probably be abstracted away from other values in these sports in a way that is congenial to Cohen’s schema. But now consider a second quote, which describes McLean’s approach to extreme skiing:

[H]e descends carefully. He is not a hot dog. What he’s after is an elusive blend of anxiety and exhilaration – a level of difficulty that requires physical and analytical prowess, as well as self discipline and imagination. He also wants to be first. It’s the adventurer’s injunction: do it before anyone else does, or at least do it differently.14

The value of risk for its own sake is not exhaustive of the value that the fact of risk brings to dangerous sports. The primary values and aims of those sports are physical and analytical prowess, self-discipline, and imagination, as well as discovery and exploration. None of these aims appeals to the value of risk for its own sake (and holding these aims is fully compatible with disvaluing risk for its own sake), but their meaningful exercise depends especially upon conditions of risk. In this respect, risk has constitutive value in dangerous sports.

IV

The relevant category of risky tastes is not limited to the comparatively narrow range of cases provided by extreme skiing and other dangerous sports. Rather, it is a pervasive feature of our ethical lives. To see this, consider another case of a risky

taste: the ‘taste’ for loving relationships. Committing to a loving relationship is an inherently risky activity. It leaves one vulnerable to the pain of rejection and heartbreak and, even when achieving one’s object, it leaves one’s well-being dependent on the continued well-being of one’s beloved. There is no way to insulate loving from its attendant risks: vulnerability and dependence are constitutive features of loving. Removing these contingencies from loving relationships (or providing an ideal of love that abstracts them away) would change fundamentally the character of these relationships and the value that these relationships have for us: certainly, their value for us would diminish. The contingencies of loving relationships are thus not merely one intrinsically valuable feature of love; indeed they might not be intrinsically valuable features of love at all. Few lovers pursue relationships because relationships are an avenue through which they can expose themselves to risk. Their contingencies are, however, essential to the value of loving relationships: they are features in virtue of which loving becomes a valuable human project.

Let me elaborate some of those claims by sketching out in greater depth the role that vulnerability plays in loving relationships. First, vulnerability provides the grounds for the care or concern for each other’s well-being that lovers express toward one another. This concern may take the form of sensitivity to one another’s needs, giving priority to one another’s well-being, and so forth. Engaged concern for the well-being of one’s beloved is a core constituent of loving another human being; it is one of the primary forms in which we express our love. Its possibility, however, is predicated on lovers being vulnerable to potential harms: we have no reason to express (or even feel) concern for someone who is invulnerable. Furthermore, not the least of these potential harms are the harms that lovers might cause to one another, whether by infidelity or indifference and so forth. In this respect, vulnerability also opens up the space for trust in loving relationships; without vulnerability, the need for trust would not arise. These features of care, concern, and trust are all integral features of loving relationships between human beings.

V

The category of risky tastes, exemplified in the particular cases of extreme skiing and loving relationships, presents a challenge to Cohen’s framework for dealing with expensive judgmental tastes (including risky tastes). In recapitulation, Cohen claims that people can be held responsible for the fact that their judgmental tastes are expensive, and therefore be held responsible for bearing the
costs of those tastes, when they value those tastes *because* they are expensive. Likewise, somebody can be held responsible for the fact that her taste is risky when she values that taste *because* it is risky.

The ‘because’ on which Cohen’s distinction turns, however, is ambiguous. It might mean *for the sake of* or it might mean *if not for*. Consideration of the cases of extreme skiing and loving relationships reveals this ambiguity. It is true of both extreme skiers and lovers that they do not pursue these projects (merely) *for the sake of* the risks involved. In this respect, the risks taken by extreme skiers and lovers are disanalogous with the risks taken by the gambler and the reckless thrill-seeker. But if the account that I have offered of these activities is accurate, it is also true that extreme skiers and lovers would not pursue these projects *if not for* the element of risk involved. As demonstrated above, the character of these activities would be altered and the value of these activities would be diminished without the element of risk. It is, therefore, uncertain whether or not Cohen would grant lovers and extreme skiers compensation for the losses they incur through these activities. While they would be entitled to compensation on the first interpretation of ‘because’ (on which only people who pursue risky tastes *for the sake of* the risks would be denied compensation), they would be denied it on the second interpretation of ‘because’ (on which people who would not pursue risky tastes *if not for* the risks would also be denied compensation).

The source of this ambiguity can be diagnosed as follows. Cohen’s account of compensation for expensive tastes relies on the dichotomy between brute luck and option luck. Brute luck is the element of chance to which each person’s life is subject. As noted earlier, examples of brute luck include outcomes of the natural lottery and other accidents of fate. Brute luck is transformed into option luck when a person chooses to expose herself to a given risk by taking a deliberate gamble. But, as the examples of extreme skiing and loving relationships demonstrate, there is a third way in which luck influences human life. This is in the element of chance, or contingency that is built into our pursuit of some of our projects and that gives these projects the value that they have for us. We cannot coherently will its elimination because, without this kind of luck, the character of these projects would change, and their value for us would diminish. But it is also the case that we do not expose ourselves to chance in this way as a deliberate gamble. In this important respect, this exposure to luck distinguishes itself from exposure to option luck.

The brute luck/option luck dichotomy is thus more accurately construed as a trichotomy. Its branches consist in the following: first, option luck, second, brute luck in its familiar, raw sense, and third, brute luck that has constitutive value within our human projects, but is not enthroned as the *end* of these projects. I shall call this third kind of luck constitutive brute luck.
On this construal, the victims of bad luck in its third sense become eligible for compensation under Cohen’s scheme. A person’s exposure to bad luck in pursuing a risky project does not constitute the “deliberate gamble” required to preclude her receiving compensation. Compensation for risky tastes, however, raises special complications. Let me turn to the case for compensation and its associated complications now.

VI

Both the case for compensation for risky tastes and the potential pitfalls of compensating risky tastes can be articulated in the egalitarian language of equal respect and concern. The case for compensation for risky tastes is as follows. To refrain from awarding compensation for these tastes would be to effectively treat the cases of misfortune in love and high-risk sports the same way that we treat misfortune suffered by those engaged in reckless behaviour, or straight-up gambling. This is insensitive to the (not merely thrill-seeking) value these lovers and athletes seek in their pursuits, sensitivity to which is purportedly built into Cohen’s scheme. It also is insensitive to the objective value we might recognize in these pursuits as worthy or valuable human projects.

On the other hand, awarding these lovers and athletes compensation runs the risk of neglecting the fact that riskiness is intrinsic to the value of these activities. There is something disrespectful or insulting in offering compensation in at least some of these cases for the loss of a good that cannot be restored or replaced. Trying to make up for someone’s loss of a loved one (or of her athletic project to injury) can amount to a denial of the particular, incommensurable value of the person and relationship that have been lost. Moreover, cherishing one’s beloved is integral to the project of loving, and feelings of sadness or regret are the affective expression of cherishing when its object has been lost.

In ascertaining the appropriate measures of compensation for those who incur losses in pursuing risky tastes, it is helpful to recall ordinary expensive judgmental tastes. In the case of the violinist, our aim is not to provide her with some overall level of well-being (because this could be done by cheaper means), but rather, to help her achieve a specific functioning on which she places great importance, and in which we might also recognize objective value. Thus, when we give the violinist compensation for the costs of her violin, we are giving her the equivalent of a gift certificate rather than a blank check. We would have grounds for complaint if she chose to forgo the purchase of a violin, and spent that money on (other) luxury goods instead. The nature of the compensation is
dictated by the end in virtue of which it is awarded. In this case, the end is to honour a person’s deep commitment to playing the violin.

In the case of the lover who has lost her partner, it would be insensitive and, because of the category of the reckless into which she would effectively be lumped, it would be disrespectful to leave her to deal with her situation on her own. It would be insulting, however, to try to make up for her loss by simply replacing her partner with a substitute or by offering to increase her well-being in some other domain, for example, that of hedonic enjoyment. Suffering the loss of a loved one (or a broken heart) is not a reason to give someone six months sipping Margueritas on the beach to numb the pain, nor a year’s worth of free movie passes (say for lesser heartbreaks). But it would be appropriate to help facilitate her taking measures to deal with her loss and to alleviate the worst of her suffering, for example, by providing her a short vacation if that will give her the distance and space for reflection, or counseling if needed.

A similar diagnosis can be made for those who suffer injury in extreme skiing. It is appropriate to subsidize the costs of their medical expenses, but not to compensate these athletes for the loss of welfare that is concomitant with having their athletic ambitions derailed.

It is worth noticing that, in this context, the language of compensation is infelicitous. The word “compensation” denotes making up for some loss. In this respect, the motivation behind awarding compensation is contrary to the motivation behind redistributing resources to help those who have suffered losses in pursuing risky projects (or, for that matter, for providing instruments to aspiring violinists). The motivation in these cases is to help people to cope, themselves, with the losses they experience, and to alleviate some of the heaviest burdens accompanying those losses, while still respecting the incommensurable value of what has been lost, and the cherishing of the object of that loss. The aim is emphatically not restitution as such, which is what compensation normally implies.

VII

The examples of risky tastes provided do not merely put pressure on Cohen’s account of compensation. They also put pressure on the luck-egalitarian ideal, generally defined. As stated at the beginning of this paper, a fundamental aim of luck egalitarianism is commonly articulated by its advocates and critics alike as the elimination of the effects of brute luck, understood in contrast with choice or option luck, on distribution. That is, luck egalitarianism, canonically
formulated, commands an equal distribution of the benefits and burdens of brute luck among the members of a community (for example, through a system of compensation).

It should be evident by now, however, that the luck-neutralization slogan is suspect with regard to at least one type of brute-luck induced distributive inequalities, namely, those resulting from differential brute luck suffered in the pursuit of risky projects. I have so far defended two main conclusions. First, the element of luck or contingency is integral to some of our human projects, and furthermore, is integral to the way in which we value these projects. Second, equalizing the burdens of bad luck that result from the pursuit of these projects would fail to defer appropriately to the projects’ objective value (to which the pursuers are responding); it would also fail to respect appropriately the pursuers. These conclusions jointly provide decisive reason to reject the ideal of interpersonal luck neutralization with regard to constitutive brute luck: egalitarians should not seek to extinguish the influence of constitutive luck on people’s unequal fates. They should, instead (and as I have also argued) endorse the more limited redistributive aims of helping people to cope, themselves, with the effects of bad constitutive luck, and alleviating the worst of the suffering it causes.

VIII

The preceding proposal indicates, in the first instance, that the luck-neutralization slogan requires a modest amendment. The amended slogan says: “a large part of the fundamental egalitarian aim is to extinguish the effects of raw brute luck (that is, brute luck that lacks significant constitutive value in human projects) on distribution; another part of the fundamental egalitarian aim is to mitigate (in the appropriate way, and to the appropriate extent) certain effects of constitutive brute luck on distribution.” Despite its obvious defects as a slogan, this alternative outperforms the original: it makes explicit what the canonical slogan obscures, namely, the distinct motivating egalitarian impulses for redistributing the benefits and burdens of distinct types of brute luck.

15 One might object that the concern for equality defeats these considerations, such that either paternalistically prohibiting certain risky projects, or paternalistically redistributing the burdens incurred through those projects to the end of re-establishing full equality, is justified. But I believe, and argue elsewhere, that considerations of autonomy, which luck egalitarians have decisive reason to heed with respect to valuable risky projects, foreclose these paternalistic options. (I owe this objection to an anonymous referee).
The implications of so amending canonical formulations of the luck-egalitarian ideal are more radical than they first appear. I defended an extension of Cohen’s justification for compensating ordinary expensive tastes into the domain of risky tastes; the amendment correspondingly introduces an alternative target, short of full equality, for luck-egalitarian redistribution of the unequal burdens that result from people’s pursuit of those tastes. This looks like something Cohen-style egalitarians can costlessly accept. But, in fact, the proposed amendment, and its justifying rationale, challenge the way in which Cohen, and Cohen-style egalitarians, demarcate the luck-egalitarian conception of distributive justice.

Consider the following remarks, by Cohen:

We can, for expository purposes, present... a dialectical story of how luck egalitarianism arises. The luck egalitarian begins by being revolted by what she considers to be the injustice of actual social inequality. It comes, she protests, from the sheer luck of inheritance and circumstance: it has nothing to do with people’s choices.

... Possessed of the premise that luck has caused enormous unjust inequality, the traditional egalitarian proposes, rather rashly, and in the name of fairness: plain, ordinary equality. But now a responsibility objection is pressed against her: why should those, like the grasshopper and the ant, with exactly the same initial advantages, and who merely chose differently, be forced back to equality if an inequality ensues? Why should one person pay for another's truly optional choices? Since the question appeals to the very conception of fairness that inspired her initial protest against inequality, the egalitarian who rides under the banner of fairness cannot... ignore the objection that the question formulates. So, in deference to fairness, the relevant egalitarian says that she's against inequalities in the absence of appropriately differential responsibility... [S]he's against inequalities if and only if they're a matter of [non-option] luck.\footnote{G.A. Cohen, “Luck and Equality,” first published in 2006 as “Luck and Equality: A Reply to Hurley,” reprinted in \textit{On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice, and Other Essays in Political Philosophy}, Michael Otsuka (ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 120–121. (Italics preserved from the original).}

Fairness, on the luck-egalitarian conception, commands redistributing people’s unequal burdens only if, and to extent that, they do not reflect people’s choices. But the unequal burdens arising from differential constitutive luck do reflect people’s choices: the riskiness of risky projects directly informs the value judgments on the basis of which people choose their pursuit. The unequal burdens people thereby incur are therefore not unfair by the lights of the luck egalitarian.

This reveals a basic incompatibility between the canonical luck-egalitarian ideal and my extension of luck-egalitarian reasoning to support redistribution to alleviate burdens of bad constitutive luck. Since I believe the latter reasoning to be sound, I also believe that the desiderate means of resolving the stated
incompatibility is to extend the conceptual demarcation of luck-egalitarian justice beyond that of distributive fairness. That is, I believe we should reject distributive fairness as providing the sole normative basis for luck-egalitarian redistribution. I shall not, however, articulate and defend what I believe to be the second normative pillar of luck-egalitarian justice, here. I shall pursue that task elsewhere.\footnote{Unpublished manuscript, on file with the author.}

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have claimed that luck has constitutive value across a range of human projects (of which extreme skiing and loving relationships are just two examples); it is a feature in virtue of which those projects acquire the value that they have for us. For this reason, the same luck-egalitarian reasoning that supports compensating the costs of certain judgmental expensive tastes also supports compensating – by appropriate measures, and to the appropriate, sub-equalizing extent – the victims of bad constitutive luck. I thus proposed amending the canonical luck-egalitarian view as follows: one fundamental aim of distributive justice is to extinguish the effects of raw brute luck on distribution; a second aim is to mitigate certain effects of constitutive brute luck on distribution. This amended view appears only to require extending the borders of luck-egalitarian compensation to a modest degree. But, in fact, it has radical implications for the luck-egalitarian conception of distributive justice: it demands that we identify a new normative foundation for luck egalitarianism, which supplements the work of distributive fairness.

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