

DESERT

# Desert (Distributive Justice, not Physical Geography)

- ◉ What one deserves

But what do you mean when you say:

Tom deserves to win/get the job/be  
punished/be rewarded/be praised.

# Meritocracy

Merit can be based on

- Contribution/accomplishment
- Effort
- Talent
- Birth (No one believes this anymore)

What are the advantages of meritocracy (assume that one's merit is to be based on contribution or accomplishment)?

# John Rawls'

## “Lottery of Life” Argument

P1: We only deserve what we can take credit for.

P2: The fruits of our labour depends on contingencies like our natural gifts and the structure of society.

P3: We cannot take credit for these contingencies.

SC1/P4: If we cannot take credit for these contingencies, we cannot take credit for the fruits of our labour. (P2 - P3)

C: We do not deserve the fruits of our labour.  
(P1, SC1/P4)

# Counter: Surely we can take credit for our effort?

Even if a talented person cannot take credit for the gifts he is born with and the opportunities he is given, surely he can take credit for the *effort* put in developing and exercising those gifts, and in seizing the opportunities he is given. If so, he does deserve the fruits of his labour.

# Rawls' Reply

*“It seems clear that the effort a person is willing to make is influenced by his natural abilities and skills and the alternatives open to him. The better endowed are more likely, other things being equal, to strive conscientiously, and there seems to be no way to discount for their greater good fortune.”*

# Just lucky to be hardworking?

P1: Our effort is determined by our genes and our social circumstances and upbringing.

P2: We can neither take credit for our genes or our social circumstances and upbringing.

P3: We cannot take credit for the product of what we cannot take credit for.

C: We cannot take credit for our effort.  
(P3-SC1/P4)

# Rawls: justice is about mitigating the “luck” factor

One's fortune (or misfortune) in life depends on luck.

Thus, the rich do not deserve their fortune (they are just lucky!), neither do the poor deserve their misfortune (they are just unlucky!).

Therefore, we should compensate the poor for losing out in the “lottery of life”.