

Kristin Voigt, “Appeals to Individual Responsibility for Health: Reconsidering the Luck Egalitarian Perspective”

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- the notion of individual responsibility has been important in recent debates over the distribution of healthcare resources
- it is controversial how much responsibility individuals should take for healthcare costs attributed to their own choices
- individuals should be encouraged to take greater responsibility for their health
- luck egalitarianism which emphasizes the role of individual responsibility in fair distributions is a key concept
- this article considers three kinds of appeals to responsibility:
 - individual responsibility in rationing decisions
 - incentives for taking individual responsibility
 - appeals to individual responsibility connected to concerns about fairness and reciprocity
- goals:
 - raise concerns about the ways the idea of personal responsibility has been used in debates about health policy
 - * individual responsibility as rationing criterion has already been widely criticized
 - * response to health incentives has been ambiguous
 - * reciprocity-based appeals have received little attention
 - * particularly concerned with considerations of equality

- reevaluate the policy implications of the luck egalitarian approach
 - * luck egalitarianism can provide a more nuanced position on individual responsibility for health than assumed by many critics
 - * luck egalitarians are likely to be critical of appeals that other egalitarian theories would find unproblematic

Luck Egalitarianism and Health

- recent theory of equality, different versions developed by Dworkin, Jerry Cohen, and Arneson
- implications of theory for health examined by Segall
- definition for this article: luck egalitarianism stipulates that inequalities are fair if and only if they are the result of choices for which agents can reasonably be held responsible; inequalities resulting from brute luck are unfair
- three salient aspects for health: responsibility, measurement of equality, scope of unfair inequality
- measurement of inequality:
 - need to decide how to compare individuals' positions
 - could compare in terms of resources
 - could compare in terms of welfare
- scope of unfair inequality:
 - more expansive approach than many other accounts of justice
 - inequalities can be unfair irrespective of their source or causal history: natural/biological inequalities can be just as unfair as ones resulting from social factors
 - whether inequality is controllable does not matter: inequality can be unfair even if there is nothing to do about it

Option Luck versus Brute Luck: Individual Responsibility as a Rationing Criterion

- harshness objection: luck egalitarians might appear too harsh in treating people who got into bad situations because of their own choices
- defense: luck egalitarians are not committed to taking the presence of choice as a sufficient condition for the justification of inequalities

- idea of “reasonable avoidability” as response
- background factors can undermine responsibility for choices
- choices can contribute to the fulfillment of social duties, and costs need not be borne by the individual

Health Promotion and Individual Luck: Incentivizing Individuals to Take Responsibility for Their Health

- incentives can improve individual health outcomes
- claim: incentive policies are structurally similar to the use of responsibility as a rationing device
- providing incentives for behavior change means that if behavior change does not occur the individual will not get the incentive
- this is structurally similar to holding them responsible for their behavior
- luck egalitarianism might not have the theoretical resources to support incentive schemes
- incentives can give rise to more unfair inequalities:
 - access to incentives may not be equal
 - unequal uptake of incentives may exacerbate social inequalities in health

Fair Reciprocity and Responsibility for Health

- reciprocity: individuals can expect to receive treatment for their health needs, but, in return they are expected to avoid unnecessary health risk and do what they can to make sure that treatments they receive are effective
- this means the responsible use of resources, helping one another effectively
- negative sanctions / positive incentives need not be involved
- people who do not live up to the required standards are free riding

The Language of Individual Responsibility

- the language of individual responsibility might have an effect on individuals' well-being and health
- there might be a tension between luck egalitarian and anti-egalitarian, conservative notions of individual responsibility
- emphasizing the importance of individual behavior could help address feelings of resignation and fatalism among disadvantaged groups
- this could enhance individuals' well-being and improve their health behaviors and outcomes
- but appeals of individual responsibility cannot easily acknowledge unequal ability to adopt healthy behavior
- they risk trivializing structural constraints on individuals
- this could contribute to a sense of personal failure and bad feelings

Conclusion

- appeals to individual responsibility have become common in philosophical discussions, policy documents, and public debate about the fair distribution of healthcare resources
- this article distinguishes three kinds of appeals:
 - individual responsibility as a rationing criterion
 - promotion of incentives to encourage healthier behavior
 - individual responsibility as fair reciprocity
- consider these arguments in light of recent developments in the literature around luck egalitarianism
- the recent literature emphasizes that individuals need not be denied assistance in their needs if they result from their own choices
- luck egalitarianism can provide insight into why the appeals are problematic from the perspective of equality
- use of incentives raises concerns about unequal access
- reciprocity-based accounts need to spell out what can be expected from individuals given their unequal ability to contribute
- there are also concerns about the language of individual responsibility which might have negative effects