

Abstract

Everyone should get what they deserve. Few statements concerning justice elicit a comparable intuitive assent when pronounced. At the same time, this assertion constitutes the core of the meritocratic theory of distributive justice which bases the distribution of economic goods among the various members of society on their merits. The present thesis can best be characterized as a critical examination of this theory. In the first part of the text, I will show why most contemporary philosophers take a dismissive stance towards meritocracy. To this end, I will expound on the reflections of several thinkers with diverse political orientations who have made distinctive and significant contributions to the problematization of the meritocratic ideal. I will ask, among other things, what values they believe this ideal conflicts with. The key objections will then, in the second part of the thesis, be confronted with one of the few recent attempts to present a comprehensive defence of the meritocratic theory of distributive justice, made by Thomas Mulligan. In this manner, I hope to suggest an answer to the question of how far the effort to rehabilitate meritocracy today represents a meaningful philosophical enterprise, and to bring attention to some shortcomings of the current debate.