distributive economic justice. Most interesting, in my view, was his distinction of human from natural rights. Talk of natural rights in the eighteenth century, the heyday of natural rights, presupposed the idea of a created hierarchy and of fixed natural kinds (p. 187). Talk of human rights is not committed to these presuppositions and human rights can be usefully distinguished from natural rights on that very basis. But Edmundson's proposed rectification of names does not end there. We may find, he suggests, that basic rights (e.g. the right not to be tortured) may require us to go beyond the category of the distinctively human as well.

This book by Edmundson is a very good one in my opinion. It combines a readable and pertinent view of rights history with a careful and useful survey of the main conceptual and normative issues raised by rights. And it draws conclusions from this survey. Beyond that it raises challenging questions about the future of rights. As I've already indicated, I especially commend here chapters 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12.

The book is also a model text for students. The style is accessible and engaging, the analysis and arguments are sophisticated, and the text itself is clearly written and uncluttered by notes. (All the citations in the text are simply followed by page numbers; inclusive but short bibliographical notes for each chapter are gathered at the end of the book, followed by an alphabetical list of full bibliographical references.) It is certainly a book that could be recommended to the student clientele that Edmundson had primarily in mind.

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Brian Barry, *Why Social Justice Matters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), pp. vii + 311.

For quite some time, Brian Barry has been an avid and eloquent supporter of equality in pursuit of justice. This work is no different. Here, Barry attempts to provide a 'systematic critique and programme' that follows from his version of an egalitarian conception of social justice (p. viii). Many will find this work more political than philosophical. Page after page is dedicated to a furious tirade against those in power. Those who would initially support Barry's conception will leave the book feeling motivated to seek change. However, those who initially disagree (e.g. classical liberals) will not be similarly motivated. These opponents will focus on the aspects of Barry's work that make it seem more like a furious political rant and less like a rigorous philosophical argument.

A large portion of Barry's book is dedicated to criticizing the misunderstandings associated with two popular concepts: 'equality of opportunity' and 'personal responsibility'. With the former, Barry attempts to show 'that equal opportunity can be achieved only in a society that keeps the range of inequality within narrow bounds' (p. viii). Over time, wealth and social connections will be amassed by some individuals who began as equals yet who competed successfully for resources. The problem becomes apparent when these

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resources are passed on to future generations. Rich children benefit from their parents' past success. Poor children, however, are harmed by their parents' failures. The children (rich vs. poor) are no longer on a level playing field. The cumulative effect of unchecked competition, Barry would maintain, has led to a diversity in starting positions and therefore to an elimination of equal opportunity. In order to preserve 'equality of opportunity', Barry argues that there would have to be massive and constant redistribution of resources.

With 'personal responsibility', Barry tries to undermine the notion that 'inequalities are attributed to the different choices made by different people: those who do well have made choices that reflect their personal merits, while those who do badly have made choices that reflect their personal defects' (p. viii). Take the children in the previous example. If their unequal outcomes are largely determined by their radically unequal starting positions, then personal responsibility only plays a role insomuch as they chose these positions. As Barry maintains, and rightly so, it seems ridiculous to hold people responsible for outcomes that are largely determined without their choice.

When he is proposing a possible solution to our current social justice ills, an interesting tension arises in Barry's work. The tension arises between his identification of the 'currency' of social injustice (positional goods) and his proposed solution (a basic income). Barry writes, 'The essence of a positional good is that what matters is not how much you have but how much you have compared to other people' (p. 176). Thus, how 'well-off' you are, is related to what your peers possess. If you have more Ω (where Ω = money, social connections, educational resources, etc.) than your peers, you are richer in Ω. Those who are richer in Ω could use this inequality to purchase further goods. They could use their larger amounts of Ω to ensure that their favoured political candidate gains office, their children go to better schools, their families have larger inheritances, etc. If the initial difference in Ω was due to an injustice (i.e. a failure of equal opportunity or the natural lottery), then we can see how injustice has a 'snowballing' effect.

An extreme solution, one that Barry does not advance, is to level the various positional goods. This, however, presents us with a familiar problem. As Robert Nozick famously argues in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, liberty upsets patterns. This 'levelling' would require a constant intervention that would ensure that free transfers of Ω do not lead to an unjust accumulation. For example, if a person had a father who has greater than average social connections, the state would have to prevent that father from sharing those connections with his son. Thus, the state would have to police moments when a father introduces his son to close friends, in order to ensure that there is only a just accumulation of social capital. To be sure, this example is extreme. It reminds me of the dystopia presented in Kurt Vonnegut's *Harrison Bergeron*. What is important is that even in a society which ensures that every person's life chances are *only* determined by what he chooses, this may, in fact, not be the best of all possible worlds. There may be other worthwhile values that we do not wish to sacrifice on the altar of egalitarian justice.

Barry, however, actually advances an incremental solution. He writes: 'The natural extension of universal provision of public services is to provide everyone with an individual unconditional income – a basic income – that would enable

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them to get by, and letting them build on themselves' (p. 209). The basic income would increase the liberty of the poor to reject unsavoury jobs. It would also 'automatically keep everybody out of poverty, while the rates of income tax required to fund it would inevitably reduce inequality' (p. 213). Barry's solution avoids the counter-intuitive nature of the extreme solution, while at the same time chipping away at social injustice.

This incremental solution feels too incremental. There would still be vast inequalities, and it is the inequality, itself, that Barry identifies as the cause of most problems for the poor. Barry persuasively argues that differentials in positional goods allow the rich to have better personal health due to higher self-esteem, better access to more fulfilling jobs due to a wealth of social connections, and greater ability to capture the government and use it to secure their own interests. The problems seem to remain untouched by merely providing the poor with a basic income. We feel the need to do more, but therein lies the tension. The more we do, the closer we are to the extreme position and the unsavoury value trade-off(s) that it engenders.

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T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1998), pp. 420.

Much has already been written about Scanlon's *What We Owe to Each Other* (*WWO*). Most of the secondary literature has been very critical, but this only speaks to the book's greatness. Its rich discussions cannot be ignored or views easily refuted. In this review, I hope to provide some guidance to the insights of *WWO*, and also to direct attention to the passages that are generating the most interesting debates.

The key for understanding *WWO* lies immediately in its Introduction, where the goal of the inquiry and the suitable metaethical framework for pursuing it are set up. *WWO* is primarily about moral wrongness. According to Scanlon, we all understand the *meaning* of wrongness claims. In making such claims we are taking certain acts to be such that by doing them we would 'violate important standards of conduct' and would thus be 'open to serious criticism' (p. 10). The philosophical question then is: what would the essence of the property of wrongness, denoted by our term, have to be like in order for it to explain why it is so important that we do not do these acts and why we resent it so strongly when others do them? It is this question that the contractualism of *WWO* attempts to answer (p. 12).

Part 1 is largely stage-setting. If wrong acts violate important standards of conduct, then there must be good reasons for avoiding them. In chapter 1, Scanlon provides his general account of practical reasons for the later purpose of describing the reasons related to wrongness. For him, 'a reason' is the basic normative notion. Claims about reasons for judgement-sensitive attitudes (beliefs, intentions, etc.) cannot be analysed further, but only elucidated

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