

significant intellectual abilities would clearly be extremely costly both for freedom and efficiency. (And the same could be said of the alternative egalitarian strategy for dealing with unequal natural endowments, namely reorganising society, not so that everybody ended up with the same abilities, but rather so that unequal abilities no longer commanded unequal rewards. This reorganisation involved here would also clearly incur high economic and social costs.)

However, we need not here come to any decision about whether or not these costs are indeed too high. More important for our argument is the point that anybody who is genuinely worried about Big Brother in connection with arrangements designed to ensure equality of achievement ought probably to give up on equality of opportunity too. Ensuring equality of opportunity might not be quite as difficult as ensuring equality of achievement. But there would not be much in it. Consider the sources of unequal environmental opportunity. Children have different diets, different geographical situations, different amounts of reading matter available, different opportunities for mental stimulation . . . The list is clearly a long one. But if equality of opportunity is our aim, then differences in all these things will have to be taken into account and something done about them.

My point is not that steps in this direction would necessarily be absurd, but simply that they too would clearly cost a lot of social engineering. So if the undesirability of 1984 should stop us compensating for genetic inequalities, then surely it should stop us compensating for environmental inequalities too. That is, if our disinclination to engage in social engineering enables us to stomach inherited differences, then surely it should persuade us to swallow environmentally caused differences as well. What this then means is that even if hereditarianism is false, and all differences in intellectual abilities are environmentally caused, there will still be a range of unequal abilities in any reasonable society: even if all men start equal, without some provident hand to ensure they run in

similar conditions, they are surely going to finish different.

Some people are perhaps persuaded by the thought that since environmental influences are due to us (to society?), then surely we (society?) can undo those influences. (And perhaps this then leads to the further thought that environmental differences are our [society's?]' fault, and therefore require remedying in a way genetic differences do not.) But these intuitions are full of holes. Whether we can or cannot undo something is independent of whether it resulted from human action in the first place. And even things which are the result of human action are not necessarily things for which those humans should be held responsible (as when those results are unintended and unforeseeable).

Let me now sum up. I have argued that the heritability of intellectual abilities does not automatically imply that inequalities in such abilities are justified: compensatory education could well counteract any differences in innate capacities. So if you think compensatory education is worth it you could have an equal society even if differences are inherited. Of course compensatory education would be extremely costly in other ways. But this argument tells as much against compensation for unequal environments as it does against compensation for unequal genes. So if you do reject compensatory education you wouldn't aspire to an equal society even if hereditarianism were false and all differences environmentally caused. Which is what I wanted to prove: that either way the question of whether or not individual differences are due to genes is quite irrelevant to any aspirations we may have to an equal society.

References

- (1) Block N J, Dworkin G, eds. *The IQ controversy*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.
- (2) Jensen A R. *Genetics and education*. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

Correction

In Michael Green's commentary, 'Confidentially speaking'; in the March issue, the sentence beginning . . . 'If someone is pursuing a claim for personal injury . . .' in the third paragraph on page 23 should read: 'If someone is pursuing a claim for personal injury alleged to have been caused while he was looking after a patient in hospital, his solicitors are entitled to see in-patient notes, even though the doctor in charge had not consented.'