Conclusion

The starting point of this thesis was the goal that has enticed many contemporary egalitarians – that of incorporating choice and responsibility into an egalitarian distributional scheme. Inspired, perhaps, by Rawls’ concern that distribution will be unjustly distorted by the outcomes of the natural and social lotteries, these egalitarians have sought to protect people from the unequal impact of bad luck. But to avoid accusations of indulgence, they have added the imperative that people be held responsible for the costs that they bring upon themselves. It is unjust for some to have to subsidise the costs that result from the choices of others.

The central challenge facing this enterprise is that of finding a defensible basis for distinguishing between responsibility and luck. In perhaps its ‘purest’ form the ‘cut’ is grounded in metaphysics. Luck is opposed to ‘genuine’ choice. ‘Genuine’ choice is the embodiment of free agency. It enjoys a distinct metaphysical status – it is not determined - and accordingly is the converse of luck. And because they are the embodiment of free agency, people are ‘really’ responsible for their genuine choices. This cut is able to distinguish the religious believer who has ‘genuinely’ chosen his religious preferences, and is thereby responsible for the cost of fulfilling them, from another who has had his commitments ingrained into him through a puritanical upbringing, who is not.

There is an elegance to this cut that alternatives are unable to match. If the boundary between luck and responsibility is not based on a fundamental metaphysical distinction, it becomes instead largely a normative matter. Luck is derivative. It is whatever it is that people are not held responsible for. This immediately introduces the difficult challenge of establishing why the particular normative basis for the cut employed should be thought superior to others. But it also risks losing the intuitive power of the concepts of both luck and responsibility. What constitutes luck intuitively seems to be a fact about the world, not something stipulated by philosophers. And if responsibility is not a matter of what people are genuinely responsible for, not based on the genuine expression of agency, then it also loses appeal. It ceases to be a question of what people are ‘really’ responsible for, and becomes instead a political matter of what it is appropriate to ask people to bear responsibility for. An extra justificatory burden arises: to explain why it is appealing to base distribution on luck and responsibility when neither concept holds the intuitive significance they enjoy when based on metaphysics.

Although the stars may be aligned for the genuine choice/chance cut, so that the basis for distinguishing chance and choice, and the appeal of basing distribution on responsibility and
luck are one and the same, there is a profound difficulty inherent to the notion of ‘genuine’ choice that undermines its suitability for grounding consequential responsibility. The essential problem is that of reconciling the requirement for a choice to be independent of an agent’s (potentially inherited) character, so that it is not determined, with the requirement that the choice be intelligibly attributable to ‘him’, and thereby suitable for grounding responsibility.

Although situations arise in which it is plausible that people make choices that are not determined by their pre-existing character – moments of motivational deadlock which an undetermined ‘effort of will’ is required to break – these choices can only plausibly ground responsibility for decisions that do not have a significant ongoing impact. In order to maintain coherent, continuing, identities each of us has a strong interest in changes to our personality interconnecting appropriately with our ongoing values, projects, etc. ‘Genuine’ choices, which are, by definition, made in the absence of any decisive consideration, cannot plausibly ground responsibility for such changes.

One way to respond is to switch around the way responsibility is thought of so that instead of arguing that people are only consequentially responsible where genuine choice is present, we take the starting assumption that people are responsible for the costs of the life they lead, and exempt them only where there are justifications for doing so. This approach, which is suggested by everyday ethical practice, is justified on grounds of fairness. It is fair for each person to bear the cost of the life they lead, rather than impose costs on others. The responsibility here is not a matter of what people are ‘really’ responsible for, but is rather a kind of role-responsibility, whereby people are presumed to be responsible for the costs of their life plans in so far as they are able to play the role of guardian of those costs.

But for luck-egalitarianism this presumption of responsibility for the costs of personality can only be that – a presumption. A distribution concerned to protect people from unequal bad luck cannot plausibly hold them consequentially responsible for their personality as a whole. Doing so asks people to bear responsibility for the costs of parts of their personality which, if expensive, put them at a relative disadvantage, but which they did not choose and yet are unable to shed.

Rather than distinguish between those preference that are and are not the responsibility of their bearers according to whether they are chosen, luck-egalitarians have turned to the notion of identification. If someone identifies with a preference then this suggests that he would not want to be without it, and this should, the argument runs, inform our judgements of his responsibility for the cost of that preference. The relevance of identification to
responsibility comes across strongly in cases such as the devout Catholic who identifies with his religious commitments, seeing them as an important part of who he is. The presence of identification with those commitments seems more pertinent to his responsibility for them than the question of whether he was raised as a Catholic or explicitly chose to be one. By the same token, the presence of disidentification – where someone sees a preference as alien, also looks relevant to responsibility. It intuitively seems reasonable to drop the presumption of responsibility for the costs of those preferences that a person wishes he did not have, but is unable to shed.

There is, though, disagreement about what treatment identification should provoke. One camp holds that people ought to bear responsibility for the costs of the preferences they identify with, the other that they should not. The former justifies itself by appealing to fairness. Where a person identifies with a preference, he would not want to be without it, so it would not be fair for him to ask others to subsidise it. The latter takes identification to indicate the importance of the preference to its bearer, providing a reason for the political community to want to ensure he has an equal opportunity to fulfil it.

This disagreement mirrors an important divergence within luck-egalitarian thought in favour of one or the other of its two driving commitments. One route is primarily concerned with protecting people from the unfairness of subsidising the costs of the lives of others. When assessing what the limits should be to the claims that we can make on the resources of others, identification provides the boundary. It is not unfair to ask people to pick up the costs of the preferences with which they identify, but it is unfair for them to ask others to provide subsidy. The other route prioritises the drive to protect people from the unequal impact of bad brute luck. It is bad luck if the preferences with which someone most identifies happen to be expensive, meaning that luck-egalitarians should be minded to compensate.

My argument has been that the means to adjudicate between these two approaches is to pay attention to the basis for the ascription of responsibility in order to understand what it involves, what it is about it that makes it suitable for grounding judgements of responsibility and what the appropriate judgements should be. Doing so gives an answer to the question of how luck-egalitarian responsibility ought to be understood, and also that of why, when the cut is not based on the distinct metaphysical status of ‘genuine’ choice, it is appealing to put luck and responsibility at the centre of distributive justice.

I have argued that to carry sufficient weight to ground judgements of consequential responsibility, identification must be understood as a matter of approval rather than mere acknowledgement. This avoids cases in which a person resignedly accepts a preference as
part of who he is simply because he is too depressed to do otherwise. But the approval cannot be fleeting or whimsical. In these cases, identification does not indicate anything very significant about the agent’s relationship with the preference. Moreover, identification cannot plausibly be a purely first person matter because people identify with preferences for perverse reasons, such as the anorexic who identifies strongly with her distorted preferences for very low body-weight.

For identification to plausibly determine judgements of consequential responsibility, it must be understood as approval that is rooted in stable parts of an agent’s personality, rather than whimsical. And as the anorexic case illustrates, responsibility requires not just that a person identifies with a preference, but also that the personality that the identification is rooted in is authentic. Authenticity, just like identification, cannot plausibly be a first person matter – a question of whether a person is satisfied with the formation of his personality. Those who suffer from abuse may have been indoctrinated to welcome the process, for example. To plausibly play a central role in judgements of responsibility, identification and authenticity require a less subjective reading. This can be provided by an understanding of the notions in terms of the metaphysical matter of the structure of the person and its mechanisms of change.

Identification, I suggest, should be thought of as approval that is rooted in central parts of the self. These central parts of the self can be understood as self-governing policies that play an ongoing co-ordinating role in an agent’s personality over time. They gain their authority in virtue of their coherence with other self-governing policies, but also in virtue of their authentic formation. The process by which they are authentically formed is one in which the agent is guided by his judgement, passively holding himself open to the outcome of an evaluative process, rather than explicitly directing it.

Of course, this picture of the structure of the self and its mechanisms of authentic change is subject to disagreement and controversy. I have suggested, however, that it is independently plausible, and emerges from the same approximate, if not well-specified, understanding of the self as that employed by those egalitarians who have looked at the basis for luck-egalitarian responsibility. And if we think of the self in this way, there are important implications for the use of identification as the grounds for judgements of consequential responsibility.

With regards to the argument that it is fair to ask people to bear the cost of the preferences they identify with, this is supported if identification is taken to indicate that a preference is genuinely its bearer’s own, thereby avoiding the unfairness of holding someone responsible
for a preference that is alien. But whilst the presence of identification may prevent this particular unfairness, what it does not do is provide any direct justification for cost-internalisation. There is nothing inherent to identification with a preference that means its bearer should be held responsible for its cost. Identification indicates the significance of a preference to its bearer, but this does not entail that he ought to bear the cost himself. On the contrary, the process by which a person typically settles on the preferences with which he identifies the most is passive, so the outcome can be considered a matter of luck. If these preferences are expensive, then, he will be worse off than others through no fault of his own.

This has two important implications. It means that if it is to be considered unfair for those whose most central preferences are expensive to be provided with subsidy provided by others, then this unfairness cannot be based on the chance/choice distinction. That distinction suggests that it is not unfair for people to be asked to subsidise others if that subsidy is to compensate for the unequal effects of bad brute luck. Of course, other considerations can be brought to bear to argue that subsidy for those whose most central tastes are expensive is not fair, but this argument cannot be derived from the principle that distribution ought to be guided by the distinction between choice and chance unless the two are understood in a highly artificial form.

The second implication, which is the other side of the same coin, is that luck-egalitarians ought to provide compensation for expensive central tastes. This argument is enhanced by the concern that holding people consequentially responsible for the preferences they identify with not only leaves some worse off than others as a result of bad luck, but also threatens the authentic development of the person, which is itself a pre-requisite for consequential responsibility. Strict demands for cost-internalisation can prevent full and open assessment of value and stunt the development of the capacity to evaluate options.

Of course, those with expensive central tastes could try to force themselves out of these tastes. They are not normally entirely a matter of luck, such that there is nothing a person can do to alter them. People could therefore be asked to change their expensive central tastes in order not to impose costs on others. Doing so, however, would involve denying or altering those parts of their person that are central to their identity. My argument is that demands for people to bear the costs of their life-plans should be tempered so as not to undermine the integrity of the person. People ought not, standardly, to be held responsible for the tastes that they most identify with.

I say ‘standardly’ because, as the openness of such tastes to deliberate manipulation suggests, there will be times when people develop tastes that they identify with strongly that
they do not reach passively, and/or which they could have avoided without threatening the integrity of their person. In these cases the default presumption of responsibility for costs stands.

Paying attention to the structure of the self and its mechanisms of change suggests a cut that allows each person an equal opportunity to develop and fulfil the tastes that are integral to their personality. It maintains the drive to protect people from the unfairness of picking up the costs of the lives of others by asking each person bear responsibility for the costs of the parts of their personality when they are able to regulate and change them without undermining the integrity of their personality. But in recognition of their significance to the person, and that their cost is standardly a matter of luck, argues for compensation for the tastes that a person most identifies with, that are integral to his personality.

It is important to note that, where compensation is offered for central tastes, it is not standardly on the grounds that the cost of these tastes is ‘really’ a matter of luck, in the sense of being completely beyond their bearers’ control. Rather, it is a matter of whether the agent can control the costs of the life he leads without undermining his integrity as a person. What is considered luck is adjusted to incorporate a conviction of the importance of safeguarding the integrity of the person.

As with any cut not based on ‘genuine’ choice, luck and responsibility do not have the ‘purity’ of being based on a fundamental metaphysical distinction. The dividing line is inevitably to some extent normative – a matter of where it is attractive to draw the line rather than where it metaphysically ‘is’. But equal opportunity for integrity draws the line both with reference to the role of luck in the authentic development of the person and also by employing the normative claim that it is attractive to limit the demand for each person to bear responsibility for the cost of their life in order to respect the integrity of the person. This, I have suggested, is the path that follows from the move away from tying responsibility to genuine choice and towards a recognition of the importance to responsibility of the place and role of a preference in the structure of the self. Equal opportunity for integrity represents a reading of luck-egalitarianism that is both more metaphysically defensible and more in tune with its fundamental principles than the alternatives so-far proposed.

**Back to the Beginning**

Let me finish by asking where these conclusions leave us with regards to the questions with which the thesis started. Luck-egalitarianism was presented as an attempt to capture a powerful insight offered by Rawls, whilst remedying a significant alleged oversight. The
insight was that it is unjust for people to have unequal life chances as a result of the outcomes of the natural and social lotteries. The oversight was Rawls’ alleged failure to link the redistribution that serves to counter-balance the outcomes of these lotteries to responsibility. This left his theory open to conservative accusations of indulgence towards those who recklessly squander their resources. Luck-egalitarians sought to capture the insight that people ought not to be worse off than others as a result of bad brute luck whilst also rebutting the conservative attack by harnessing the power of linking distribution to choice and responsibility.

In taking this route, luck-egalitarianism ran straight into problems that dissuaded Rawls from putting choice and responsibility at the centre of distributive justice. Primary amongst these was his concern that even the choices a person makes and effort he expends, which are thought to be the paradigms of ‘genuine’ agency, are likely to be unduly influenced by the social and natural lotteries. Upbringing can determine willingness to exert effort, for example. Secondly, even if it was the case that some choices were ‘genuine’, and free from undue influence, it would be impracticable to pick these choices out from those that are not. Thirdly, Rawls was reluctant, reflecting a concern of many contemporary liberal egalitarians, to base justice on controversial metaphysical premises.

This thesis has examined and proposed luck-egalitarian solutions to these problems. Take first Rawls’ concern that choice and efforts might be unduly influenced by upbringing and natural inheritance. The most direct response to this is to rest responsibility on ‘genuine’ choice, which is by definition made independently of inherited character. Equal opportunity for integrity, however, recognises the unsuitability of ‘genuine’ choice for consequential responsibility, and instead acknowledges the influence of inheritance on choices. However, it argues that this inheritance has a stronger influence on some parts of the self, those tastes that play an integral role in an agent’s personality (judgemental tastes), than others, brute tastes. Accordingly, people are protected from the bad luck of the cost of their judgemental tastes, but are held responsible for their brute tastes (and judgmental tastes that they deliberately, inauthentically, develop), where they have a greater room to manoeuvre.

This response has a significance to Rawls’ concerns about leaving political philosophy beholden to metaphysics. This understanding of choice does not invoke the metaphysical controversy of ‘genuine’ choice, which posits that choice enjoys a special metaphysical status,
outside of the determined realm. Rather it is a more metaphysically minimal understanding of choice – a question of being able to avoid or change a preference.  

The account of the authentic development of judgemental tastes, which emphasises the passivity of the process, does involve a degree of metaphysical controversy, but the metaphysical claims invoked - about the structure of the person and its mechanisms of change - are of a different order to those surrounding ‘genuine’ choice. The controversy of the claims does not lie in anything as extravagant as a special metaphysical status, but rather in the organisation and inter-relation of the components of the self, understood in standard terms of beliefs, desires, intentions and the like. The controversy here is not of the same order as that which seems to avert Rawls from giving metaphysics a prominent role in distributive justice.

Granted, the metaphysical minimalism does not extend as far as that employed in Dworkin’s purely first person readings of identification and authenticity, but I have argued that these non-metaphysical readings lack the weight to convincingly ground luck-egalitarian responsibility. A distributional ideal that is inspired by the chance/choice distinction cannot avoid metaphysics, but nor does it necessitate the embracing of metaphysical extravagance.

Finally, in terms of Rawls’ concern that it is impracticable to separate out the choices and efforts for which a person is responsible from those that he is not, it is true that implementing a responsibility-sensitive distribution faces significant epistemological and practical challenges. Distinguishing whether people are responsible for the level of resources they own is an extremely difficult task, let alone making a parallel distinction amongst the elements of personality.

As the discussion of the applicability of practices of accommodation and hypothetical insurance demonstrated, imperfect practical solutions might be available. I discussed two responses to the imperfections of these solutions. One, which I advocated as appropriate for equal opportunity for integrity, was to argue that if the distinction between chance and choice argues for a particular distribution of resources, then any practical failure to realise that distribution is to that extent unjust. The other was Dworkin's argument that the demands of justice should be adjusted to take account of what is realisable. If an imperfect realisation is the best that can be achieved, then this is not unjust. Justice is achieved when a distribution is reached that is the best that people can reasonably hope for – rather than an abstract, unachievable, ideal

1 Rawls would also be concerned that some people will, as a result of inheritance or upbringing, be better, in the sense of more effective, choosers than others. The concern that this will lead to unjust inequalities is dealt with by luck-egalitarians in the same way as other talents.
But there is a third response, which befits Rawls. Rather than accept that distribution should be responsibility-sensitive, but that this cannot be accurately realised, Rawls would argue that we should turn away from giving responsibility-sensitivity a central role in distribution altogether.

Ironically, perhaps, the arguments here listed to suggest that luck-egalitarianism can circumvent Rawls’ arguments against responsibility-sensitivity might in fact be taken to justify his stance. The move away from basing responsibility on genuine choice and the recognition that choice is in fact pervaded by the influence of the natural and social lotteries could be taken to justify Rawls’ own rejection of placing choice and responsibility at the heart of distribution in order to prevent inheritance unjustly influencing distribution. And if responsibility cannot plausibly be based on genuine choice - the basis on which some argue that responsibility-sensitivity derives its intuitive appeal - then the power of the conservative argument that Rawls’ account is undermined by its failure to incorporate responsibility into distribution is stripped away. The motivating impulse of luck-egalitarianism is undermined. And if, further, this is combined with the problem that even less potent readings of responsibility encounter damaging problems with implementation, then this provides a further reason not to give responsibility centre stage. On this line of argument, the investigation of this thesis actually serves to vindicate Rawls, rather than support the alternative, luck-egalitarian approach.

This possibility takes us back to the fundamental question of the importance of the distinction between luck and responsibility to distributive justice. Should the difficulties of realising a luck-egalitarian distribution lead us to turn our back on that distinction, as Rawls suggests, or does it still have a significance, when understood in the form of equal opportunity for integrity, that argues against doing so?

Liberal egalitarians’ motivation to put the chance/choice distinction at the heart of their theories can be traced back to the Kantian project of purging our moral judgements of ourselves or others, and the determination of what we deserve, of the influence of either good or bad luck. Fulfilling that project at the political level, I have argued, is implausible. But to step away from antecedent accounts of responsibility and luck and instead use a purely constructed account – so that luck and responsibility are defined independently of what people are ‘really’ responsible for or what is ‘really’ a matter of luck, carries a heavy cost. The notions of luck and responsibility are stripped of their intuitive power, meaning that – if that power is not to be imported legitimately – a new appeal for these notions has to be
established. And, critically, taking this step amounts to turning away from the promise of freeing life chances from the arbitrariness of the natural and social lotteries.

Rather than abandon this project though, I have argued that a distributive ideal can be constructed that acknowledges that the impact of luck on choice cannot be expunged, but nevertheless mitigates the unequal results of the natural and social lotteries on distribution. Equality of opportunity for integrity does not rely on a metaphysically controversial antecedent account of what people are ‘really’ responsible for, but rather takes as a starting point the requirement for people to bear the costs of their life plans, and then seeks to protect people from the luck of their unequal ability to meet these demands without undermining the integrity of their person. The powerful appeal of protecting people from the unequal impact of bad brute luck is thus maintained, even as the significance of choice and ‘real’ responsibility is diminished.

This represents a major departure for those who want to harness the apparent power of choice and responsibility in accounts of just distribution. However, this, I have argued is where we are led if we explore fully the basis, and motivation, for drawing the line between the goals of protecting people from having to bear the costs of the lives of others and protecting the person from the unequal impact of bad brute luck.

The limitations on the extent to which people can rightly be asked to bear responsibility for the costs of the lives they lead ought to be of interest by all those inspired by the goal of a distribution free from arbitrariness. But the relevance of the metaphysics of the person to responsibility-sensitivity spreads further. Any account of justice that makes people’s holdings sensitive to their choices will have to deal with the problem that doing so universally will disproportionately burden those whose integral tastes happen to be expensive, and moreover will threaten the authentic development of the person. This represents a major challenge to contemporary intuitions and practices around responsibility.