

Mansbridge Clip 4 Transcript

JANE MANSBRIDGE: Rawls then talks about the natural lottery, meaning that we're all born into these social positions and we didn't do very much to deserve that. And then he makes this very contested statement that Allyn pointed out, that even the willingness to make an effort and to try can be the result of favorable social circumstances and possibly favorable genes. We know some people are born more optimistic, and some other people are born more pessimistic, and the optimistic people often keep trying even when bad things happen, and there may be something in their genetic makeup that helps them do that.

Or they've come from a family where if they make a mistake, the family doesn't get mad. The family says, well, you made a good effort, John, or a good effort, Wei. Good for you. Yes, you failed this time, but look to the next time. And then another family says, well, that's the way it is. I failed all my life, and I see no reason why you shouldn't fail, too.

[LAUGHTER]

I mean, seriously, I have been depressed, and I know what it is to kind of feel there's just no point in trying, both genetically, because I think I'm prone to depression, but also I've gone through periods in which things seem to be turning against me. So it makes sense to say that this will-- even the willingness to make an effort can come from your social circumstances and even your genes.

But where's where's..? There you are. Yes, OK. But say you're the opposite, you want to argue against me. Rightly, I think.

[LAUGHTER]

I think rightly, rightly, rightly, correctly, yeah. It's a good point.

STUDENT: No, I think I have in my mind a very different-- I don't know, I think that effort is not only matter like in those conditions. You could be like a rich. Then you have everything, so you don't need to work that much harder. On the other hand, you can a poor that don't have anything and they want to succeed, so they're going to put in a lot of effort. So I think it is also very difficult to measure effort and to say, OK, if you're born intelligent, and with a good social condition, you're going to succeed.

JANE MANSBRIDGE: Basically, we all know that in our lives, don't we? I mean, there is a point even when you're low where you say, OK, Jenny, finish it, and then you can feel justifiably proud of yourself that you did that, because you put in that extra effort. You're saying you don't want to take away all moral deservingness from making an effort. We know rich people who don't, and we know poor people who do, and we admire the poor people who do. I think that's a very good point, and this is one of the most controversial aspects of Rawls for that reason.