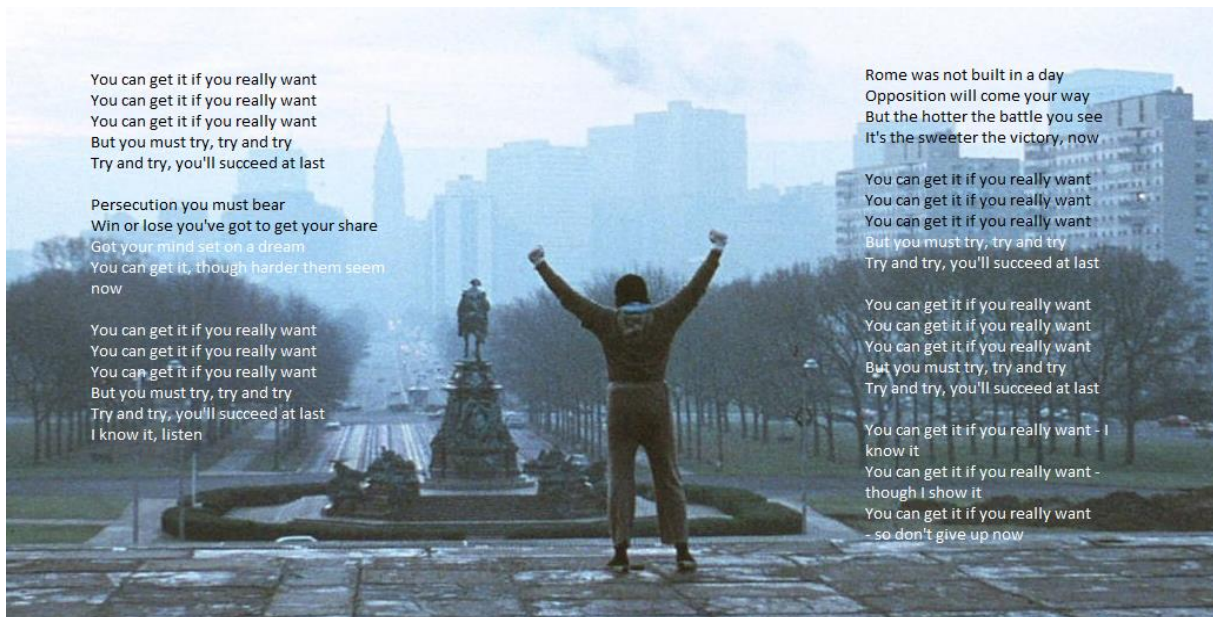


A defence of and improvement on Roemer's view on effort



You can get it if you really want
You can get it if you really want
You can get it if you really want
But you must try, try and try
Try and try, you'll succeed at last

Persecution you must bear
Win or lose you've got to get your share
Got your mind set on a dream
You can get it, though harder them seem
now

You can get it if you really want
You can get it if you really want
You can get it if you really want
But you must try, try and try
Try and try, you'll succeed at last
I know it, listen

Rome was not built in a day
Opposition will come your way
But the hotter the battle you see
It's the sweeter the victory, now

You can get it if you really want
You can get it if you really want
You can get it if you really want
But you must try, try and try
Try and try, you'll succeed at last

You can get it if you really want
You can get it if you really want
You can get it if you really want
But you must try, try and try
Try and try, you'll succeed at last

You can get it if you really want - I
know it
You can get it if you really want -
though I show it
You can get it if you really want
- so don't give up now

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Title	A defence of and improvement on Roemer's view on effort
Version	Final version
Date	Monday 8 June 2015
Word count	15.958 in main text, 18.470 including footnotes, references, etc.

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1. Introduction: the effort debate

Whether political philosophers like it or not, the public regards effort as a base for desert (McLeod, 2013; Swift, 2014: 42). The use of effort as a measure to judge and be judged by seems infeasible. Hence, social justice and effort are linked in the eyes of the public. The idea that those who exert more effort deserve more than others manifests itself in many areas, such as in a large number of popular motivational quotes¹ and religious texts². It is assumed that every person, irrespective of any other abilities and circumstances, possesses the ability to exert some form of effort, which they are also expected and required to actually exert, at least as a prerequisite for receiving resources from society. The Dutch government, for example, expects effort from handicapped veterans in their reintegration process as a precondition for compensation and assistance (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2011: 30). Dutch social security claimants are expected to show effort in return for receiving basic social security (Rijksoverheid, 2015). Those who fail to make an effort — with the exception of underage children or the mentally ill — become outcasts of society, get labelled ‘lazy’ and are condemned³. These examples show how deep the popular embrace of effort as a desert base is anchored in society. Conventional and widely supported as it is, this view may not be the alpha and omega of views on effort. This is where political philosophy makes its entry, quester for truth and clarity (Swift, 2014: 3) and fierce opponent of the conventional view on effort.

Dominant contemporary political philosophy rejects effort as a base for desert. Rawls and Nozick, two of the most prominent twentieth-century political philosophers (Swift, 2014: 11, 31; Estlund, 2012: 3), both condemn the use of effort as a desert base, although for very different reasons⁴. Effort as a base for desert is assessed as either impractical and morally arbitrary (Rawls, 2009: 329; Cohen, 2011: 11; Swift: 41, 43) or irrelevant⁵ (Nozick, 1974: 160-164; Swift, 40). The two

¹. e.g. “What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure.”; “People pretend not to like grapes when the vines are too high for them to reach.”; “Walls don't fall without effort.”; “No one ever drowned in sweat.”; “Determination, effort and practice are rewarded with success.”; “About the only thing that comes to us without effort is old age.” (“Quotes About Effort”, 2015), etc. etc.

². e.g. In Christianity: “And whatsoever ye do, do [it] heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Colossians 3:22 King James Bible); in Buddhism: “And what, monks, is right effort? (...) He generates desire, endeavours, activates persistence, upholds and exerts his intent for the sake of the arising of skilful qualities that have not yet arisen. He generates desire, endeavours, activates persistence, upholds and exerts his intent for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, and culmination of skilful qualities that have arisen” (Bhikku, 1996).

³. e.g. Sloth, i.e. laziness, is a deadly sin: “The desire of the slothful killed him; for his hands refuse to labour” (Proverbs 21:25 King James Bible); Mitt Romney’s famous ‘47%’ quote: “There are 47 percent of the people who will vote for the president no matter what...who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims. [...] These are people who pay no income tax. [...] and so my job is not to worry about those people. I'll never convince them that they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives.” (Romney, 2012).

⁴. See Cohen (2011: 9-11); Dworkin (2000: 112-119) and Swift (2014: 40-43).

⁵. This thesis ignores the Nozickian view on effort in what follows, partly due to limits in time and scope and partly due to the nature of Nozick’s central message, which delegitimises many ideas on equality and justice pertaining to the debate on effort, unless one attacks the central message itself. Nozick’s view on effort here only serves as an example for the philosophical rejection of the conventional view on effort.

major theorists on social justice strongly oppose the conventional belief that rewarding effort is just (Swift, 2014: 41). The public is not convinced by their arguments: the conventional view, which was already articulated in ancient sources⁶, has not been shaken in the forty years since Rawls and Nozick formulated their theories. There seems to be a serious rift between philosophy and the public where the debate on effort is concerned.

Both sides in the effort debate have their weak points. Although the conventional view, where effort is a base for desert, connects to our basic intuition about justice (Knight, 2011: 153), it is incoherent and flawed (see chapter 3). On the other hand, the philosophical rejection of effort as a base for desert is dogmatic and belied by human activity all around the world (see chapter 4). However, as will be made clear, it is more developed and based on stronger arguments than the conventional view. A developed argument that defends the use of effort as a desert base should integrate the strong aspects of both views. The main aim of this thesis is to construct such an argument. The essential part of such an argument consists of a conception of effort that could both serve as a desert base and be based on arguments instead of intuitions. It should attack both the conventional view and Rawls's rejection of effort as a base for desert in order to be supported. Note that this thesis is *not* about desert, but about effort and its possible use as a base for desert⁷. I wish to defend my position in the effort debate. The Roemerian (1998) view on effort will be used as a starting point for the construction and defence of this position. Yet, the Roemerian view should be improved on before I can support it. These improvements will increase the defensibility of Roemer's view on effort vis-à-vis the other two views. However, before launching into a detailed discussion, I would first like to focus on the concept of effort itself.

⁶. See footnote 2.

⁷. In this thesis a desert base means nothing more than 'a human activity which deserves reward'. With the use of this definition I assume automatically that (1) some human actions deserve praise and others deserve disapproval, depending on many factors such as the situation or intentions of actors and (2) people have the ability to make judgements about the desirability of human actions.

2. What is effort?

2.1. Two kinds of effort

The word 'effort' refers to many different complex concepts. Effort can both refer to a determined (or intended) attempt and to the result of that attempt (The New Oxford American Dictionary, 2005). Effort is also seen as a means towards a goal: in order to achieve something (i.e. results, achievements, advantages or success), effort, in the form of physical or mental activity, is needed (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015). All these usages of effort can be found in everyday language, but for this thesis they are not specific enough. I therefore make a distinction between *effort as an ability* (i.e. ability effort) and *effort as an activity* (i.e. activity effort). *Effort as a result* is excluded from this thesis, for reasons that will be discussed at the end of this section. A person can possess the ability to make an effort but not transform it into activity, which leads to the absence of activity. Activity effort, or *ac*, appears in either physical or mental form. Hence, without any physical or mental activity there can be no *ac*. By definition, it follows that ability effort, or *ab*, is a condition for *ac*: without *ab* it is impossible to exert *ac*. Conversely, *ab* can exist without *ac*, although it may well be impossible to find out whether a person possesses *ab* when he never transforms it into *ac*. Apart from this practical objection there is no reason to reject that *ab* is independent of *ac*. Note that *ab* is *possessed* by persons and *ac* is *exerted* by persons. The desired goals of a person should also be taken into account. Can a person possess or exert any kind of effort without having a desired goal? A person who lacks any desire to reach goals can still possess *ab*, but they will not transform it into *ac* without a desired goal because *ac* is an attempt to achieve an end.

Now the meaning of and interrelationship between the two kinds of effort has been established, I would like to discuss the measurement of effort. Some form of effort quantification is needed if we assume that effort is a desert base: deciding what a person deserves on the basis of the effort he possesses or exerts is impossible without a measure of effort. In order to measure effort I assume the following assumptions to be true:

1. Effort can be measured in values that correspond with different levels of possession or exertion (e.g. 5 *ac*, which is more than 3 *ac*).
2. Effort can be measured as an interval variable (Bryman, 2008: 321): the distance between the levels is identical across the range (e.g. the distance between 5 *ac* and 4 *ac* is the same as the distance between 4 *ac* and 3 *ac*).

3. Effort values are nonnegative, i.e. larger than zero⁸ (Roemer, 1998: 7).
4. Effort values are one-dimensional (Roemer, 1998: 7) in analogy of Marx's (1976: 293-294) objectification of labour. They are composed of one, given variable (e.g. *ab* is expressed in *ab* values, that are given and are not a function of different factors). In this thesis I assume that we can know *ab* and *ac* of a person: these values are expressed in numbers, which correspond to different levels of effort. There is no direct relation between this measure and reality, which shall be discussed in chapter 6.3.

These assumptions solve many practical problems⁹. Under these assumptions a person with an *ab* of 0 has no *ab* whatsoever. A person with an *ab* of 10 has less *ab* than a person with an *ab* of 20. The level of *ab* is the maximum effort one *could* transform into *ac* (within a limited time). For example, a person with an *ab* of 10 would only be able to exert half the *ac* that a person with an *ab* of 20 could. Note that the *ac* of a person can never exceed his *ab*. In this absolute measure *ab* and *ac* are measured the same: an *ab* of 6 is equal to an *ac* of 6.

Yet, there is no undisputed measure of *ac*. What should be measured? The total amount of *ac* a person exerts, or the relative transformation of his *ab* into *ac*? I call the first measure *absolute ac*, which measures the absolute level of exertion a person delivers in the form of physical or mental activity in order to achieve a desired goal (Roemer, 1998: 11-12). The second measure is named *relative ac* (or *rac*) and measures a person's physical or mental activity in order to achieve a desired goal relative to the degree of his maximum ability of exertion (Roemer, 1998: 11-12). A person's *rac* is his degree of effort. Absolute *ac* is measured in levels of activity, independent of ability effort. Note again that a person's absolute *ac* can never exceed that person's *ab*. *Rac* is measured in *ab*: it is dependent on *ab* and expressed in a percentage of transformed *ab*. Hence, the *rac* of a person with an *ab* of 10 and an *ac* of 5 is 50%¹⁰.

At the start of this section we saw that effort can also refer to result (i.e. achievements, advantage or success) in ordinary language. Yet this kind of effort is excluded from this thesis. Result and effort have a very complex relation. Effort is not a condition for result: some results, such as stumbling upon a gold nugget, hardly require any effort. The amount of *ac* exerted has no clear relation to the result: a brilliant painter could paint a masterpiece with little activity while the result of this little *ac* can be huge. Or, vice versa, a dyslexic student could exert a large amount of *ac* while the result of this *ac* is rather small. Result is a function of many factors, such as talent and luck. Effort

⁸. Negative effort does not exist: both negative *ab* and negative *ac* cannot exist due to the *ab* and *ac* definitions.

⁹. Also see chapter 6.3.

¹⁰. $rac = \frac{ac}{ab}$ (also see chapter 2.3).

can be one of its factors, but this is not necessary nor sufficient in many cases. Another problem is that *ac* is an *attempt* towards a desired goal: it *can* be successful, but it *can* also fail. By this reasoning, the measurement of result in relation to effort is also problematic: it is expressed in social situations (e.g. respect) or material commodities (e.g. prizes). These cannot serve as a measure of effort because they are polluted with other functions of those situations or commodities. A salary is not just the result of successful *ac* (in this case working), but also an exchange and a means of payment, just like harvested fruit is not only the result of successful *ac*, but also serves as nutrition and as ingredients for other products. This ‘pollution’ in the expression of result and the complex relation between effort and result are to blame for the exclusion of result (i.e. achievements, advantages or success) as a separate kind of effort in this thesis.

The distinction between *ac* and *ab* on the one hand and between absolute *ac* and *rac* on the other, raises vital questions that are useful for the discussion whether effort should be a base for desert. If effort is a desert base, what kind of effort should be rewarded: only *ab*, only *ac* or both¹¹? And should we opt for the absolute or relative measure of *ac*? These questions, and their relation to the effort debate, will be discussed in chapters 3 to 5, which consist of a presentation of three views on effort (the conventional, the extreme and the Roemerian). Yet the final question, about absolute and relative effort, cannot be answered without providing a context in which to choose between absolute and relative effort as a measure. This context is shaped in the following section of this chapter.

2.2. Effort and the choice-circumstance distinction

The introduction of relative effort as a measure of *ac*, i.e. *ac* expressed in percentages of the maximum possible effort (i.e. *ab*), adds another layer to the debate on effort and forces us to rethink the relationship between *ab* and *ac*. *rac* compensates for differences between people in their ability to make an effort. *rac* relates to what I earlier called ‘different forms of effort’ (see chapter 1): the idea that not everyone is able to exert an equal amount of *ac* due to differences between people’s *ab* levels. The degree of effort should measure how hard one *tries* to achieve a desired goal within their options, expressed in a percentage of their maximum possible effort (i.e. *ab*). In contrast, absolute effort only measures how much *ac* is exerted, irrespective of one’s *ab*. The choice between absolute *ac* and *rac* depends on the position one takes on distributive justice and responsibility (Knight &

¹¹. Also see chapters 3-5 and Table 1.

Stemplowska, 2011: 1), one of the large debates in political philosophy. How are these topics related?

In order to answer that question we first need to form a clear distinction between the two effort measures. If we assume that *ac* is a base for desert and choose absolute effort as a measure, this would mean that people should be judged on the basis of the level of *ac* they *choose* to exert. What else than their own choice could keep a person from exerting vast amounts of *ac* from the perspective of absolute effort? The level of a person's *ab* plays no role here: this only concerns the choice to transform *ab* into *ac*; there are no other factors in play. Of course, a person's absolute *ac* cannot exceed his level of *ab*, but this limitation is not relevant here. What matters, and matters only, is the total amount of *ac* exerted. A person who exerts more *ac* (i.e. exerting a higher level of mental or physical activity in order to achieve a desired end) is more deserving than another person who exerts less *ac*. In other words: this approach is blind to differences in *ab* between people. If *ac* is selected as a desert base, it rewards people on the basis of their choice to exert *ac*. If we, on the other hand, assume that *ac* should be a base for desert and choose *rac* as a measure, it would mean that people should be judged on the basis of the degree of *ac* they *choose* to exert, with respect to their *ab*. The *ab* limits the *ac* one can exert, and — unlike in the absolute *ac* case — this is taken into consideration: what counts is the section of *ab* that is transformed in *ac*.

If we assume from this point on that a person cannot alter his level of *ab*¹², there now remain two very different measures of *ac*: absolute *ac*, which focuses on choice, and *rac*, which focuses on choice adjusted for differences in ability beyond a person's control, i.e. circumstances. Choice and circumstances, and the distinction between them, drive us to the realm of the luck egalitarianism school of thought (e.g. Cohen, 2011; Knight & Stemplowska, 2011; Roemer, 1998). Luck egalitarianism tries to construct principles of social justice that integrate personal responsibility and egalitarianism (Arneson, 2011: 25). This school of thought originates from the critiques of Dworkin on Rawls, who favours resource equality above welfare equality (Dworkin, 2000: 13-14, 65; Gosepath, 2011). Dworkin (2000: 113-114) argues that Rawls (e.g. 2009: 101, 329) does not place enough emphasis on the fact that people often make deliberate choices that influence their economic and social position. Dworkin (2000: 73-74) introduces two kinds of luck: option luck, which is 'a matter of how deliberate and calculated gambles turn out', and brute luck, which is about 'how risks fall out that are not (...) deliberate gambles.' Dworkin (2000: 65-83) supports equality of resources, and distinguishes between a person's ambitions and his endowments (Dworkin, 2000: 286; Knight &

¹². The *ab* assumption should be understood as follows: a person's *ab* level is determined by forces beyond the control of this person. He cannot change his personal *ab* level by any action of his own.

Stemplowska, 2011: 7). Dworkin (2000: 73-78) argues that an unequal distribution of resources is only allowed when it follows from deliberate choices. Dworkin makes a 'cut' between preferences and endowments (Cohen, 2011: 25-29): people are responsible for their preferences and ambitions¹³, which cannot be equalised, but should be compensated for shortfalls in their endowments (Dworkin, 2000: 73-83; Goosepath, 2011). Cohen (2011: 4, 13-33) argues that Dworkin misplaced his cut and suggests a cut between choice and circumstance, because many preferences and ambitions are not freely chosen. Note that both Dworkin and Cohen believe that these cuts are possible to make: this is one of the central theorems of luck egalitarianism (Knight & Stemplowska, 2011: 5). According to Cohen, people should be held responsible for their genuine choices, and not for circumstances, which includes unfree choices (Cohen, 2011: 29-32). Hence, Cohen (2011: 32) moves the debate into the realm of the discussion about free will: when are choices really free? This very complex debate goes beyond the scope of this thesis, because it is not necessary for our discussion on effort as a desert base. Cohen (2011: 4), in opposition to both Rawls and Dworkin, advocates equality of access to advantage, because egalitarianism cannot function without a conception of equality of welfare. In his version of luck egalitarianism welfare and resources are integrated into equality of access to advantage, which promotes compensation for exploitation and brute luck: circumstances should not influence distributions (Cohen, 2011: 5).

The concepts of circumstance and choice are, as showed in the previous paragraph, central to luck-egalitarian theories. Circumstances are all the aspects that influence a person's abilities and situation outcomes, over which he has no control (Cohen, 2011: 5; Knight & Stemplowska, 2011: 4; Roemer, 1998: 6-7). A circumstance is a fact that cannot be altered by a person, such as his genes, place of birth, parents or culture¹⁴. A choice is the process in which a rational person chooses an alternative between different options (e.g. Roemer: 6, 15-16). The existence of such a process has two conditions. First, there needs to be more than one alternative to choose between. It is quite possible that that a person's circumstances influence the range of possible alternatives. But whenever he is left with more than one alternative after this preselection due to circumstances, a choice remains¹⁵. Hence, a choice is made in every case where circumstances leave room for more than one alternative. Secondly, we assume that people have the ability to choose between different alternatives on the basis of their preferences and other thoughts (O'Conner, 2014). Yet, in most

¹³. Dworkin (2000) makes an exclusion for cravings and addictions, because people would not chose these preferences again.

¹⁴. Of course there can be much debate about to what extent certain facts are beyond a person's control, but this falls outside of the scope of this thesis.

¹⁵. Also see chapter 6.1.

situations it is hard, if not impossible, to draw a line between the realms of choice and circumstance, because both realms have influenced the situation during its creating process¹⁶.

The choice-circumstance distinction of luck egalitarians is valuable for the debate on effort, at least under the assumption that a person is responsible for his choices and not for his circumstances. Which part of a person's *ab* or *ac* is an effect of his circumstances (*Ci*) and which part is the product of his choices (*Ch*)? There are two extreme responses to this question. The first rejects the role of choice completely and supports the idea that all the effort (*ab* and *ac*) a person exerts or possesses is the product of his circumstances. In this view, effort can only serve as base for desert when the possession of a particular set of *Ci* (of which the owner has not had any effect on obtaining them) should be rewarded. This idea of rewarding mere circumstances is rejected by both Rawls (2009: 329) and the public (Roemer, 1998: 1; Swift, 2014: 41). A denial of the existence of choice in the realm of effort is often combined with the rejection of *ab* and *ac* as a base for desert. *ab* is determined by *Ci*¹⁷, but *ac* is likewise solely determined by *Ci* in this view. This is a rather obscure¹⁸ socialist or egalitarian view (Cohen, 2011: 11), which Roemer (1998: 6-7) calls the deterministic view. Rawls is sometimes presented as representative of this view (Cohen, 2011: 11-13; Swift, 2014: 43), which will be discussed in chapter 4.

The other extreme response to the choice-circumstance distinction rejects circumstances as irrelevant for deliberation about effort. In this view effort can serve as a base for desert when the choice to possess *ab* or exert *ac* should be rewarded. *ab* can be influenced by choice in this view. This conflicts with the assumption that a person's *ab* cannot be altered by this person, i.e. is a circumstance. A view that regards the role of circumstances in human life entirely as irrelevant is absurd¹⁹. Under the *ab* assumption, we should reject *ab* as a base for desert because *Ch* plays no role here: *ab* is a function of *Ci*. In the case of *ac*, this is different. In this view the amount of *ac* a person exerts is purely a function of his *Ch*, and could serve as a base for desert. Both extreme responses to the choice-circumstance distinction have major flaws and are not (fully) adopted by any of the views on effort I will review in the following chapters. Nevertheless, these extreme responses are important to limit the discussion. Parts of these extreme responses are, as we will see, adopted by the conventional, extreme and Roemerian view on effort.

¹⁶. This issue is more fully discussed in chapter 6.1.

¹⁷. See footnote 12.

¹⁸. I have not found a single scholar who advocates this view.

¹⁹. As was the case with footnote 18, I have not found a single scholar who advocates this view. If it was true that circumstances were always irrelevant in life, and everything depended on choice, I ask myself why everyone wouldn't choose to be born without handicaps.

2.3. The effort model

The two previous sections of this chapter can be rendered into a basic model of effort. The model simplifies and explains how the choice-circumstance distinction is connected to the distinction between ability effort and activity effort. First, I restate the assumptions that were made earlier in this chapter.

$$\begin{aligned}
 ab, ac, Ci, Ch &= \text{interval variables} \\
 ab, ac, Ci, Ch &= \geq 0 \\
 Ci, Ch &\text{ are composed of one, given variable} \\
 ac &\neq > ab \\
 ab &= Ci \text{ (} ab \text{ assumption)}
 \end{aligned}$$

These assumptions form the foundation for the basic effort model, as we have seen in the last two sections. ab , ac , Ci and Ch are interval variables, which means that the distance between the levels is identical across the range. The same four variables only have values in nonnegative numbers, for the sake of both a realistic application and mathematical purposes. Ci and Ch are composed of one given variable. Imagine that every possible set of Ci and every possible set of Ch is labelled with a certain value²⁰. This value is assumed to be knowable in this thesis. A person's ac can never exceed his ab : he cannot exert more ac than his ability allows. The ab assumption holds that a person's ab is determined beyond his control: he cannot change it. Under these assumptions the model can be constructed.

$$(1) ab = Ci$$

Ability effort ab under the ab assumption is a function of circumstances Ci : a person cannot alter his ab level, because this is based on this person's Ci .

$$(2) ac = d(Ci) + e(Ch)$$

Activity effort ac is a function of both circumstances Ci and choices Ch . The distribution between these two factors is based on a chosen conception of the choice-circumstance distinction: the sum of d and e should be equal to one. If the relative weight of d increases ($\Delta d + \nabla e = 1$), the influence of Ci on ac will also increase. If the relative weight of e increases ($\nabla d + \Delta e = 1$), the influence of Ch on ac will also increase. Assume, as an example of (2), that the influence of Ci and Ch on ac is equal. (2) appears in the following form: $ac = 0.5(Ci) + 0.5(Ch)$. When d is larger than e , Ci is believed to

²⁰. e.g. A person with an average height, low intelligence, etc. (many more aspects could be added) is valued with a Ci of "5", while a short person with a high intelligence, etc. is valued Ci of "4". Or a person that chooses a out of possibilities a, b, c, d , etc. is valued with a Ch of "8" while a person that chooses b out of the same possibilities is valued with a Ch of "13".

have more influence on ac than Ch . When d is smaller than e Ci is believed to have less influence on ac than Ch .

$$(3) rac = \frac{d(Ci) + e(Ch)}{Ci}$$

Since the absolute ac measure is equal to ac^{21} , the last part of the basic model explains how relative activity effort rac should be measured. rac measures the degree of effort: how much of the maximum potential of ac (which equals ab , since $ac \neq > ab$) is actually transformed into ac ? This model can be used in judgements of people on the basis of their possessed or exerted effort, which is illustrated by the following example.

Example of the basic effort level

Assume that ac is a base for desert. Person A has a Ci of 20 because he was born into a privileged family. His Ch is 8 because he likes to work, but not too hard. Person B has a Ci of 8, because he was born into a disadvantaged family. His Ch is 6 because he likes to put effort in the activities he performs. In this example we choose that Ci should be twice as important as Ch in determining ac . This is the chosen conception of the choice-circumstance distinction.

$$(1) ab_{person A} = 20, ab_{person B} = 8$$

$$(2) ac_{person A} = \frac{2}{3}20 + \frac{1}{3}8, ac_{person B} = \frac{2}{3}8 + \frac{1}{3}6$$

$$(3) rac_{person A} = \frac{16}{20}, rac_{person B} = \frac{7\frac{1}{3}}{8}$$

Person A has an absolute ac of 16 and a rac of 80%. Person B has an absolute ac of $7\frac{1}{3}$ and a rac of $91\frac{2}{3}\%$. When the absolute ac measure is chosen, Person A deserves more than Person B (16 versus $7\frac{1}{3}$). When the rac measure is chosen, Person A deserves less than Person B (80% versus $91\frac{2}{3}\%$).

²¹. The absolute ac is nothing more than the total *amount* of ac that is exerted. It is the value of ac in its pure form.

3. The conventional view on effort

The model constructed in the previous chapter provides enough basis to continue with the presentation of three different views on effort. I start with the conventional view on effort, that is based on ‘popular opinion’. Here, popular opinion is an aggregate of individual views, expressed by a significant proportion of a community (Davison, 2015). Popular opinion does not have to meet any academic or philosophical standard: it is just a representation of the ideas held by a significant part of the population. Yet, the academic world should not ignore it, because a debate between the academic sphere and the public sphere is vital for progress (Swift, 1999). People have opinions about effort, its meaning, and its connection to other concepts that are meaningful for them. In the introduction we have seen that the popular beliefs about effort contrast with those of philosophers: the public embraces effort as a major base for desert, while the most influential scholars reject effort as desert base. This effort debate is recognized among the scholars. Rawls (2009: 328) admits that ‘common sense’ favours distributions on the base of desert, of which effort could be one manifestation. Knight (2011: 153) defends the use of the desert in the justice and equality debate with the claim that desert approximates our intuitions about justice. Roemer (1998: 7-8) mentions the existence of a ‘common’ or ‘conventional’ view that favours equal resources for all persons and sees effort as a choice. Swift (2014: 40-42) has the most elaborate description of this conventional view²². According to Swift the conventional view on effort hold that “those who can do (and do do) things others are willing to pay for deserve to be better off than those who don’t.” Whether or not the origin of these activities are an effect of factors beyond a person’s control is not relevant in the conventional view (Swift, 2014: 41). Hence, the naturally gifted sprinter who deploys this talent deserves more than the average person, because he is more talented. The scholars’ suspicions of popular beliefs are backed by empirical evidence (Marshall et al, 1999; Miller, 1992).

Yet, in order to assess the merits of the conventional view on effort more clarity is needed. Which set of beliefs together form the conventional view? Swift’s (2014: 41-43) description of the conventional view is chosen as a starting point, but shall be adjusted in order to approximate the popular beliefs on effort in Western culture even more. People ascribe many different matters to the concept of effort²³. Effort is an achievement, a condition for compassion and compensation, an ability that everyone possesses in at least some form and a praiseworthy activity all together; the

²². Strictly speaking Swift’s conventional view is based upon the public’s vision on desert, of which effort is the form he discusses explicitly (Swift, 2014: 41-42). Since this thesis is not about desert in general, but about the effort debate and whether effort should be a desert base (see chapter 1), this is not problematic. Also see footnote 7.

²³. Remember the many different definitions dictionaries give in order to define effort (see chapter 2.1).

public's conception of effort is very broad and therefore incoherent. All these different interpretations of effort are part of the public's conception of effort. This thesis's construction of the conventional view on effort tries to approximate the popular opinion on effort as much as possible. Yet, it is impossible to prove that this is the right interpretation of popular beliefs of effort, because not all members of the public hold the same beliefs and data on popular effort views is scarce (Marshall et al, 1999: 351). The main conclusion and base of the conventional view is that effort is a suitable desert base (e.g. McLeod, 2013). The conventional view on effort will be sketched with the help of the distinguished kinds of effort from the last chapter.

The conventional view on *ab* starts with the notion that nobody has an *ab* value of 0. Every person, even children or severely disabled people, has the ability to exert a minimum of effort. The dominance of this view can be found everywhere around us: remember the two examples of how Dutch society treats veterans and social security claimants, or education systems where toddlers are being tested (Zeeman, 2013). *ab* is often regarded as something what can be developed by choice, as is the case in self-disciplining. This notion is opposite of the *ab* assumption, although this tension can be lifted easily: all the surplus *ab* a person develops on top of his initial *ab* was already possessed by this person in the abilities distribution, although it was unmanifested until it was developed. Hence, *ab* is the maximum ability a person could develop. The conventional view accepts the idea that circumstances could affect a person's *ab*. It may be true that anyone possesses some form of *ab*, yet the size of this ability depends on circumstances. Thus, conventionalism favours *rac* over absolute *ac*, as I will show later in this chapter. A reflection of this conventional belief can be found in the observation that society does not expect to find the same level of *ab* by a surgeon and his terminal patient. The conventional view rejects *ab* as a base for desert, because there should be no reward for unmanifested, yet present effort²⁴. *ab* is unmanifested, yet present effort: it *could* be developed into *ac*, but without this transformation it is worth nothing according to the conventional view.

The exertion of *ac* is in the conventional view a praiseworthy activity and seen as a precondition for most achievements. The public regards (the exertion of) *ac* as a virtue, and reflections of this view can be found at multiple places in cultural expressions. From Aristotle (Johnson & Reath, 2012: 88) and the Holy Bible (e.g. Proverbs 13:4; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9 King James Bible) to the fairy tale of Cinderella (Perrault, 2010), numerous motivational quotes ('Quotes on Effort', 2015; 'Effort Quotes', 2015) and MTV Made (e.g. MTV Website, 2015): making an

²⁴. Swift (2014: 40-41) incorporated this part of the conventional view implicitly in his description of it (italics added): "(...) the idea [the conventional view] that those whose productive *activities* can command a high price in the market deserve the money others are willing to pay them" and "(...) it [the conventional view] is sympathetic to the idea that those who can do (*and do do*) things others are willing to pay for deserve to be better off than those who don't (...)." According to Swift an activity is needed for desert.

effort, independently of its result, is praiseworthy and deserves reward. Hence, the claim that the conventional belief regards *ac* as a base for desert is defensible, and comes closer to actual public morals than Swift's (2014: 40-42) description of the conventional view, where the focus is on results. *ac* is also regarded as a condition for achievement, as stated not only in multiple motivational quotes²⁵, but also in scientific articles (e.g. Carbonaro, 2005; Tester & Campbell, 2007: 673).

The conventional view accepts both measures of *ac*. Absolute *ac* is accepted because all effort requires physical and mental exertion, and this is, as we have seen, a praiseworthy activity. Yet, *rac* is also accepted by conventionalism and relates to what I called earlier 'different forms of effort' (see chapter 1). The public accepts that not everyone is able to make an equal amount of absolute *ac*, due to differences in circumstance. However, this view is coupled with the conviction that everyone has to try to make an effort, and that everyone is able to try within their abilities. How hard one tries is independent of circumstance in the conventional view: people are expected to try as hard as possible and circumstances cannot be used as an excuse²⁶. Combining conventionalism with absolute *ac* appears as contradictory: conventionalism accepts the role of circumstance in the realm of *ab*, so why would it reject its implication in the realm of *ac*? Conventionalism favours *rac* as a measure, because this does justice to the effect that circumstances have on a person's *ab*.

An important question is whether the transformation of *ab* into *ac* depends (more) on choice or (more) on circumstances in the conventional view. The conventional view is inclined to value choice more than circumstance: *ac* is more a function of choice than of circumstance, as we have seen above. It is true that conventionalism supports the *ab* assumption and the *rac* measure. Yet, although the degree of effort does account for the influence of circumstances, thereafter it is all choice what matters: choice is, according to conventionalism, circumstance-free²⁷ in the relative measure. Conventionalism expects, and believes that the ability of transforming *ab* into *ac* is equally distributed among persons. In other words: solely choice determines the *rac* a person exerts. This last analysis answers two major questions. First, it is clear that the conventional view argues that choice and circumstance are distinguishable. Conventionalism accepts that circumstance plays its part in the distribution of *ab*. Yet, after this phase it is mainly choice that matters, which shows that choice and circumstance are two distinctive concepts in conventionalism. Second, the conventional

²⁵ e.g. : "All growth depends upon activity. There is no development physically or intellectually without effort, and effort means work." or "No one succeeds without effort. Those who succeed owe their success to perseverance" ("Effort Quotes", 2015).

²⁶ Examples of this have been discussed in chapter 1 (mainly taken from the Dutch government).

²⁷ Because the *rac* measure relates every person's *ac* (a function of both choice and circumstance) to *ab* (a function of circumstance) one could conclude that the effect of circumstance is disabled in the *rac* measure. When the *rac* of two persons are compared (in the same conception of the choice-circumstance distinction) the only possible difference can be found in the *e(Ch)* part of the *ac* formula (3). Also see chapter 2.3.

view denies that circumstances can influence the exerted amount of *ac*: it claims that relative effort is circumstance-free. Conventionalism tends to believe that the *rac* measure is adjusted for circumstance, and that every person has – within the borders of their circumstances – the same ability of transforming *ab* into *ac*. In sum, effort is more about choice than circumstance in the conventional view.

The conventional effort model

$$(1) ab = Ci$$

$$(2) ac = d(Ci) + e(Ch)$$

$$(3) rac = \frac{d(Ci) + e(Ch)}{Ci}$$

$$(4) \text{conventional input} = e > d$$

Person A has a *Ci* of 4 and a *Ch* of 3. The conventional input (4) prescribes that *Ch* determines *ac* more than *Ci*, for example *e* is 0.6 and *d* is 0.4. This is the chosen conception of the choice-circumstance distinction. Person A has an *ab* of 4 and an *ac* of 3.4. The *rac* of Person A is then 85%.

Note that increasing the relative weight of *e* in (*e + d*) decreases the *rac* in cases where a person has an *ac* lower than his *ab*. Increasing the relative weight of *d* in (*e + d*) increases the *rac* in cases where a person has an *ac* lower than his *ab*.

In its most absolute form the conventional input for *d* is 0. In this case circumstances play no role whatsoever in (2):

$$(2) ac = Ch$$

$$(3) rac = \frac{Ch}{Ci}$$

In this case Person A has an *ac* of 3 and a *rac* of 75%.

4. The extreme view and Rawls

The ‘extreme’²⁸ view on effort is the opposite of the conventional view on effort (Swift, 2014: 42). Swift’s (2014: 42-44) extreme view puts much more emphasis on circumstance than the conventional view. It stipulates that effort cannot be a desert base because effort is (mostly) an effect of circumstance (Swift, 2014: 42). The extreme view rejects judgements on the basis of circumstances. Thereby, choice and circumstance cannot be disentangled because they influence each other heavily. Hence, it is impossible to know whether a person’s *ac* was an effect of choice or circumstance. Swift (2014: 43) argues that Rawls is sometimes presented as an exponent of this extreme view, yet Rawls never posed a view on effort explicitly. However, a set of bits and pieces, found in his justice theory, reveal the contours of Rawls’s stance on responsibility, desert and effort. Cohen (2011: 9-13) and Swift (2014: 43-44) have used these contours to develop a view that *might* reflected Rawls’s thoughts on these subjects. Rawls is notorious for his ambiguous statements about responsibility, desert and effort (Swift, 2014: 43; Cohen, 2011: 9-13). Since Rawls is not alive any more, there is no easy solution to these ambiguities. Rawls cannot be fitted into the extreme view without harming his actual position²⁹. For example, Rawls does not make a distinction between choice and circumstance, which is a key point of the extreme view. In order to overcome these problems I have divided this chapter into a section about the thoughts of Rawls that are relevant to this thesis and a section about the extreme view on effort.

4.1. Rawls on effort

The extreme view is based on Rawls’s theory and the conception of his theory (e.g. Cohen, 2011: 11-12; Swift, 2014: 43-44). In the chapter’s introduction, we saw that the extreme view is often presented as Rawls’s view (Cohen, 2011: 11-12; Swift, 2014: 43-44). The extreme view and Rawls’s ideas are not the same, mainly because effort is *not* a main theme in the work of Rawls. His theory of justice defends a methodology and a set of principles about distributive justice. The whole realm of desert, responsibility and effort is mainly ignored by Rawls. Some passages of Rawls’s theory are dragged into the choice-circumstance debate by others, such as Cohen (2011: 11-12) or Nozick (1974:

²⁸. Swift (2014: 41) has named this view ‘extreme’, which is a misleading term due to the connotation of the word ‘extreme’. He chose it because this view is extreme for most people, who support the conventional view (the conventional view is based upon public opinion). This thesis adopts Swift’s categorization of the effort views in conventional, extreme and mixed (Roemerian in this thesis). Also see chapter 1.

²⁹. e.g. I believe that Cohen (2011: 11) is right and Nozick (1974: 213-216) is wrong in their review of Rawls’s true standpoint on these topics, but this may be more a matter of taste than of truth. Roemer (1998: 30) also has an interpretation of the Rawlsian view, but his focus there is to contrast Rawls’s difference principle and his equality of opportunity. These discussion lies outside of the topic of this thesis, and will not be discussed in further detail here.

174, 213-216). Rawls (2009: 329) rejects rewarding effort: this is impracticable and conflicts with his principles of justice. It is this idea of Rawls that luck egalitarians have transformed into ‘Rawls’s’ rejection of the existence of the choice-circumstance distinction (Knight & Stemplowska, 2011: 5; Arneson, 2011: 28). The discussion of this interpretation of Rawls’s view has no relevance for this thesis. However, the remarks that Rawls *himself* made about effort are important contributions to the effort debate.

The most clear and outspoken remark of Rawls (2009: 329) on effort is his rejection of effort as a desert base: “the effort a person is willing to make is influenced by his natural abilities and skills and the alternatives open to him. The better endowed are more likely, other things equal, to strive conscientiously, and there seems to be no way to discount for their greater good fortune. The idea of rewarding desert is impracticable.” Rawls (2009: 137) rejects judgements that are based on endowment, because these are morally arbitrary. According to Rawls, this is the case when we reward effort, because the possession of *ab* and the exertion of *ac* is (partly) based on natural abilities and skills, or in this thesis: circumstance. Judgements on the basis of the *ab* distribution would be avoided in the original position (Rawls, 2009: 64-69). Yet, on another occasion Rawls gives more room to people’s choices and responsibilities: he argues that people have some responsibility in manifesting their abilities in order to reach desired goals (Rawls, 2013: 186; Cohen, 2011: 10). This conflicts with his more clear rejection of effort as a base for desert, since this suggests that people could be judged by the effort they make. The difference between these passages is the root of the confusion on Rawls’s view on effort.

Rawls (2009: 329) claims two theorems that are important for this thesis and for the extreme view on effort. First, Rawls rejects — in the eyes of Cohen (2011: 11-12) and Swift (2014: 43-44) — the possibility of a distinction between circumstance and choice. It is impracticable to make a clear ‘cut’ between a person’s abilities and a person’s alternatives: it is impossible to know which part of effort is the effect of abilities (in our terminology *ab*, a function of circumstance) and which is the effect of alternatives (in our terminology the choice factor in *ac*). The second claim of Rawls is more complex. Rawls (2009: 329) argues that the relationship between *ab* and *ac* is *progressive*: the more *ab* a person possesses, the more *ac* he will exert, both in relative and absolute terms. A person possessing a high *ab* level is more likely to transform his *ab* into *ac*. In other words, *ab*, a circumstance, determines (a large part of) *ac*. Assume that Rawls’s first claim was rejected — i.e. choice could be distinguished from circumstance³⁰ — in order to shift the discussion into the realm of

³⁰. Or, if we reject Cohen’s (2011: 11-12) interpretation of Rawls (2009: 329), abilities could be distinguished from alternatives in judgements about effort.

rac and absolute *ac*. Rawls obviously rejects the absolute *ac* measure because this measure is poisoned; it rewards a person with the ability to exert a high amount of effort while this same person received this ability beyond his control. This is morally arbitrary, and is therefore rejected by Rawls. Yet, Rawls also rejects the *rac* measure, because the degree of *ac* exerted also depends on the abilities of a person. This progressive relation between *ab* and *ac* causes pollution in the *rac* measure: it is not circumstance-free. The interesting point here is that Rawls rejects *ac* as a base for desert on two grounds: the more general objection that rewarding effort is impracticable and the more specific objection that *ac* is a progressive reflection of *ab*. The first objection is the main topic of chapter 6.1, and the second will be discussed in chapter 6.2.

4.2 The extreme view on effort

Rawls is a source of inspiration for the extreme view, which rejects effort as a desert base (Swift, 2014: 42). Does this conviction apply to both kinds of effort? The extreme view, which rejects all judgements on people on the basis of circumstance, i.e. matters beyond their control, as morally arbitrarily, would certainly reject *ab* as a desert base. Under the *ab* assumption, *ab* is distributed among people beyond their control (Swift, 2014: 42-44). Hence, *ab* is rejected as a base for desert because the distribution of *ab* is a circumstance and people should not be judged on the basis of circumstances. In the extreme view the amount of *ab* a person possesses is irrelevant, because it is determined by circumstance. *ac* is viewed differently in the extreme view: it is a function of both choice and circumstance. The extreme view sees *ac* as an activity whose existence depends on the abilities of the actor, and therefore claims that *ac* is more an effect of circumstance than of choice. Both measures of *ac* are rejected. The absolute *ac* measure is rejected because this measure ignores the influence of circumstance, which is a major one according to the extreme view. The *rac* measure is rejected by the extreme view, because it supports the progressive relationship between *ab* and *ac*. According to the extreme view, the *rac* measure fails to account fully for the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac*.

Hence, the key points of the extreme view are very explicit, and are based on Rawls's remarks about effort. Effort cannot serve as a base for desert because both *ab* and *ac* are, at least partly, an effect of circumstances. Choice and circumstances cannot be distinguished because they influence each other heavily³¹, as expressed in the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac*. The adoption of this relation causes the rejection of the *rac* measure because it is not circumstance-free.

³¹. Note the contrast with the conventional view, where the influence of circumstance stops after the distribution of *ab*.

The only route that could yield an embrace of effort as a desert base — and thereby secure the support of the extreme view — is a measure of ac that is circumstance-free.

The extreme effort model

$$(1) ab = Ci$$

$$(2) ac = d(Ci) + e(Ch)$$

$$(3) rac = \frac{d(Ci) + e(Ch)}{Ci}$$

$$(4) \text{conventional input} = e < d$$

Person A has a Ci of 4 and a Ch of 3. The conventional input (4) prescribes that Ch determines ac more than Ci , for example e is 0.3 and d is 0.7. This is the chosen conception of the choice-circumstance distinction. Person A has an ab of 4 and an ac of 3.7. The rac of Person A is $92\frac{1}{4}\%$.

Note that increasing the relative weight of e in $(e + d)$ decreases the rac in cases where a person has an ac lower than his ab . Increasing the relative weight of d in $(e + d)$ increases the rac in cases where a person has an ac lower than his ab .

In its most absolute form the extreme input for e is 0. In this case choice plays no role whatsoever in (2):

$$(2) ac = Ci$$

$$(3) rac = \frac{Ci}{Ci} = 1$$

In this case Person A has an ac of 4 and a rac of 100%. In its most absolute form the extreme view rejects choice entirely: only circumstances matter. Hence, the rac is always 1, because ab and ac are equal.

5. The Roemerian view on effort

The conventional view on effort, that accepts *ac* as desert base, is incompatible with the extreme view on effort, that rejects effort as base for desert. This incompatibility of both views is undermined by Roemer (1998) and his view on effort. The classic effort debate between the public who regards effort as an important base for desert and the extreme view that rejects effort as a desert base is revived by Roemer's view on effort. Roemer (1998: 1, 15-16) developed a theory of equality of opportunity that wants to 'level-the-playing-field' to an extent where only differences in exerted *rac* between persons are a just ground for different outcomes between persons. All other differences are labelled as circumstance, and should not be held against (or for) people. Hence, Roemer is an exponent of the luck egalitarian tradition (e.g. Roemer, 1998: 21), that tries to integrate responsibility into Rawls's theory of justice (Knight & Stemplowska, 2011: 4). Equality of opportunity is a reflection of Cohen's equality of access to advantage³² (Roemer, 1998: 21), and Roemer rejects Dworkin on the same grounds as Cohen (Roemer, 1998: 19). Roemer's position should be interpreted as an exponent of the 'mixed' view on effort (Swift, 2014: 41). Roemer places effort, other than Cohen (2011), Dworkin (2000) and Rawls (2009), in the centre of his theory. Roemer developed an effort theory that relies both on circumstance and choice. The Roemerian view on effort could be paraphrased into a single argument: effort only should be a desert base when it is free of the effects of circumstance³³, which is, at least theoretically, possible. Roemer presents this idea in his theory of equality of opportunity, which I shall discuss in the next paragraphs. Roemer's (1998: 3-4) view on effort is far more economically and mathematically³⁴ stated than the other two views on effort; this means that Roemer relies more on controversial assumptions and hypothetical models, which raises questions about the value of his ideas in practice. These questions shall be discussed in chapter 6.3. This chapter will cover respectively Roemer's theory of equality of opportunity, the Roemerian view on effort, Roemer's take on how to measure effort and choice-circumstance distinction and an appraisal of the value of Roemer's effort view.

Roemer's stance on effort is, as we shall see, a logical outcome of his broader theory about equality of opportunity. Roemer (1998: 1) argues that there are two major conceptions of this theory in Western democracies. This first is the non-discrimination principle, which is similar to the

³². Therefore, I assume that Roemer's (1998) definitions of circumstance and choice are not different than those of Cohen (2011) and chapter 2.2 of this thesis.

³³. Also see footnote 27.

³⁴. Roemer's mathematical conversion of his philosophical theory is largely ignored, because it holds no relevance for this thesis: here, we mainly discuss whether or not effort should be a desert base in the first place. Roemer (1998: 3-4) admits that he focusses more on the economic aspects of this debate and the philosophical aspects may be underexposed. This thesis tries to shed more light on the philosophical aspects.

argument Rawls (2009: 101) formulated in his second principle of justice: social and economic inequalities should be attached to offices and positions that are open to all. Whether people are qualified for a certain position or office should depend on whether a person possesses relevant abilities for that position or office. All persons who possess these relevant abilities should be permitted into the pool of possible candidates, and should be judged only on their performance of these relevant attributes. Roemer condemns, just as Rawls, situations where people are discriminated for other reasons than their performance on relevant abilities. Yet, this conception of equality of opportunity is too limited according to Roemer (1998: 1, 4), and he advocates the levelling-the-playing-field conception³⁵. Roemer (1998: 2) distinguishes first between the output (i.e. results) and the input (i.e. resources, such as talent), and then separates internal resources, such as genes or social environment, and external resources, which can be supplied, such as trainers and education. The *levelling conception* advocates that shortfalls in internal resources should be compensated in external resources. Yet, after this compensation people should be held accountable for the achievement (or non-achievement) of the advantage that is desired. In the levelling conception there is always a 'before', where levelling is required, and an 'after', where the extent of levelling is sufficient whereby people are on their own. Different conceptions within the levelling conception place the moment where the 'before' ends and the after 'begins' at different places. Different moments of placing this division correspond with different conditions that should be met in order to close the 'before' and start the 'after'. Roemer (1998: 2-3) does not choose a location of such a place but tries to provide a framework which can be used to do this. His aim is to formulate a theory of equality of opportunity that is pluralistic and could be used in discussions about this question. Yet, this framework is not flawless, as we shall see. Roemer (1998: 5) argues that circumstances that affect a person's ability to achieve (or access) the desired advantage should certainly be levelled off, because people should not be held accountable for circumstances, for the same reasons as Rawls discusses (2009: 137). Equality of resources, where all persons receive the same amount of resources, is rejected by Roemer (1998: 6) because this solution does not account for differences in the degree people use resources efficiently. Combining this with the idea that people should be held accountable at some point Roemer formulates the main problem he tries to solve: when are people unable to process resources efficiently, i.e. due to their circumstances, and when are people able to do so but *choose* to not do so, i.e. due to their choice? Roemer (1998: 6) argues that differences in achievement (i.e. result, advantage, success) due to circumstance should be levelled off, and differences due to choice should not. Roemer (1998: 7) assumes then we could

³⁵. I shall call this conception the *levelling conception*.

know this, by which he supports the possibility of the existence of the choice-circumstance distinction.

Roemer (1998: 7-9) converts the ideas discussed in the previous paragraph into a model, that I have used as inspiration for the basic model of effort. The different circumstances that determine abilities are represented as different vectors and differences between people in their circumstances are expressed as different values on those vectors. The population can be divided into types, whereby each type represents a certain combination of values on the vectors. Within a type the circumstances are equal, so all the differences in outcome between people within a type are an effect of choice. People within a type should receive equal resources (Roemer, 1998: 7-8). Each type has a different distribution of effort³⁶, due to the circumstances, i.e. vector values, of the type (Roemer, 1998: 7, 11). Effort is, as I shall discuss in the next paragraph, the method by which access to an advantage can become a real advantage. Translated to the definitions I use this is mainly *ac*, although *ab* is a condition for *ac*. Roemer (1998: 11-12) has coined the term relative effort, which he sees as circumstance-free *ac*. The position a person occupies on the relative distribution of effort within his type is his own choice (Roemer, 1998: 7). Persons that exert the same relative degree of effort across types should receive equal advantages³⁷ (Roemer, 1998: 10, 13, 15-16). Roemer (1998: 6, 9) acknowledges that there are practical difficulties in applying this model, which shall be discussed in chapter 6.3. Roemer's (1998: 15) equality of opportunity is desert-based: a person's propensity to exert effort, with respect for his circumstances, is what should be rewarded. Roemer (1998: 17-18) then distinguishes between accountability and responsibility, to clarify why circumstance-free effort should be a desert base. This distinction is somewhat superfluous, because it only shows that people should not be held accountable for behaviour that roots from circumstances, which he already argued (Roemer, 1998: 13, 15-16) and was done more convincingly by Cohen (2011). Roemer (1998: 20-23) ends the philosophical part of his book with a series of examples that challenge his theory. Again Roemer defends his theory with his core argument: people should only be held responsible for deliberate and circumstance-free choices.

Effort is crucial in Roemer's theory of equality of opportunity. Roemer (1998: 24) sees effort as the method where access to advantages (Cohen, 2011: 4) becomes an actual advantage, and as an expense for a person to achieve a certain advantage. This consideration of effort as an *expense*, i.e.

³⁶ e.g. The average *ab* in type A is 6, while the average *ab* in type B is 10.

³⁷ Formally Roemer (1998: 11, 27-28) call this the 'equality of opportunity policy', which "maximizes for every centile π the achievement level of all those at the π -th centile of their type distributions of achievement." In other words: those who spend more effort, receive more achievement.

an activity that has costs, fits well with the conventional belief where effort is praiseworthy and linked with exertion. However, Roemer (1998: 26) rejects the view that effort is always painful. Roemer (1998: 7-12) believes it is possible and commendable to make a distinction between effort as an effect of circumstance and effort as an effect of choice. Differences in outcome, i.e. achieved advantages, are only justifiable when they originate from differences in the selected relative exertion of effort by people (Roemer, 1998: 15-16). *ab* is a circumstance, because Roemer (1998: 5, 11-13) assumes that this ability is distributed beyond a person's control. In the Roemerian view, *ab* is not only simply the ability to exert some physical or mental activity in order to achieve a desired goal, but also the ability to process the resources that are needed in order to perform these activities within a certain time (Roemer, 1998: 6). Roemer (1998) does not explicitly reveal the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac* that Rawls (2009: 329) advocated, but this relation fits into the general theory of Roemer which acknowledges the demotivating effect of negative circumstances³⁸. People with a higher *ab* level can perform either (or both) more activities or relatively more activities within a certain time, or the same amount of activities with less resources. The Roemerian version of *ab* is thus far more inclusive than the basic definition I have developed in chapter 2.1, and shall be called *ab'*. Roemer transforms *ab* into a concept that is multi-dimensional: it does no longer only consist out of the ability to perform mental or physical activity in order to achieve a desired end, but also out of the ability to transform these abilities and the intensity of these abilities. The benefit of this inclusive *ab'* is that it seems to sweep circumstance out of the realm of *ac* and into the realm of *ab*. The drawback is that Roemer's *ab'* becomes a multi-dimensional and thick concept, which complicates the discussion on *ab* and *ac*. Roemer rejects *ab* as a desert base, because it is determined by circumstance and only circumstance-free effort can serve as a base for desert according to Roemer.

ac is the type of effort that approaches Roemer's definition of effort the nearest, because one could interpret *ac* as the method in which access to advantage, is transformed into actual advantages (i.e. results). *ac* is both an effect of choice and circumstance. Circumstances determine a significant part of the *ac* a person exerts. Yet within the boundaries of a person's circumstances — i.e. the distribution of effort within the type this person belongs to — a person is free to choose a certain amount of effort (Roemer, 1998: 7, 15). This is nothing more than the absolute *ac* and *rac* distinction: the effort that is exerted in general should not be taken as measure (i.e. absolute *ac*), because then there is no compensation for circumstance. Since Roemer has developed the *rac* measure he is a

³⁸ Roemer (1998: 14) explicitly discusses the negative effect of parents who believe that education is meaningless on the relative effort their children are likely to spend, which comes close to the Rawls's progressive relation (see chapter 4.2): people with a low *ab* (due to their circumstances) are likely to exert less act than those with a higher *ab*. Yet, Roemer misses the demotivation effect of a low *ab* level after the distribution of *ab* has taken place, as I shall argue in chapter 6.2.

strong supporter of it and argues that *rac* is circumstance-free. Due to Roemer's inclusive definition of *ab* (i.e. *ab'*) his *ac* is more circumstance-free than the one Rawls (2009: 329) attacks. Yet, as we shall see in Section 6.2, Roemer's *ab'* and *rac* still ignore the essential part of the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac*. Roemer (1998: 15-16) argues that *ac* could serve as a base for desert when the measure of this desert is circumstance-free.

In the Roemerian view, results are approached rather unusual. Roemer (1998: 16) argues that those who exert an equal degree of *rac* should receive equal outcomes. Hence, the concept of result is strictly limited: results should only depend on *rac*, and all results that are (also) a matter of circumstance (such as luck and talent) cannot be categorized as results. This view gets around the problems of result and effort as I listed them in chapter 2.1: the pollution in the expressions of result and the complex and unknown relation between effort and result. Roemer circumvents these problems by arguing that all fractions of a result that are not an effect of *rac* should not be counted as results. For Roemer all judgements on result root from the judgement on the *rac* measure: results are simply another expression of the *rac* measure. Roemer cuts many corners in his defence of this view. For Roemer *ac* does not seem an *attempt*, but a guarantee for a result. A person who exerts more *rac* than average should receive more advantage than average (Roemer, 1998: 15-16). *ac* is therefore always productive and successful in the sense that the transformation from *ab* into *ac* always lead to results. Hence, effort, the method that changes access to advantage into real advantage, is infallible for Roemer³⁹. This is problematic because unsuccessful *ac* does exist, even in the examples that Roemer uses⁴⁰. Another problem is that Roemer does not respond to the complex relation between effort and results, where the amount of (either relative or absolute) *ac* is far from a reliable predictor for the result. Roemer does not address these issues, apart from posing a set of assumptions that will be discussed in chapter 6.3.

Roemer's view on effort is, despite the flaws we came across, nothing short of a breakthrough in the debate on effort. It is a dazzling representation of what Swift (2014: 43) calls the 'mixed' view, and combines the best parts of the conventional view with the elements of the extreme view: *both* choice and circumstance determine the effort one can exert or possess, and *ac* can be a base for desert when it is circumstance-free. The *rac* measure, claimed by Roemer and conventionalists as circumstance-free, should be used as a measure of *ac*. Roemer argues that, when measured in *rac*, *ac* should be a desert base. Roemer admits that a distinction between choice and

³⁹. Roemer (1998, 16): "(...) if two actual persons with different circumstances exert the same degree of effort, their propensities to expend effort are the same, and they should therefore receive equal rewards – equal outcomes, whatever the outcome in question."

⁴⁰. Children who follow an education are not always successful in getting a degree: their *ac* is not always successful. Roemer (1998: 5-15) uses his education example a lot without referring to this reality. Also see chapter 6.3.

circumstance is difficult to realize in practice. But at the same time Roemer's entire theory is built upon that distinction and seems to reject Rawls's (2009: 329) critique on it. The Roemerian view on effort provides a view between those who reject that effort is (mostly) based on one's circumstances, i.e. the conventional view, and those who reject that effort is (mostly) a matter of choice, i.e. the extreme view. I support Roemer's effort view, because it approaches reality and the ideal of justice much more than the simplistic conventional view, where choice is everything and people are always responsible for their lack of making an effort, and the grim extreme view, where circumstances are so dominant that there is almost no room for choice and responsibility. Yet, Roemer's view on effort is not truly defensible in this initial version, due to the issues that Roemer did not discuss or solve thoroughly enough. In the next chapter I try to improve Roemer's effort view.

The Roemerian effort model

$$(1) ab' = Ci'$$

$$(2) ac = d(Ci) + e(Ch)$$

$$(3) rac = \frac{d(Ci) + e(Ch)}{Ci'}$$

Person A has a Ci' of 4 and a Ch of 3. Assume that d and e are equal to each other (i.e. Ci' influences ac as much as Ch). This is the chosen conception of the choice-circumstance distinction. Person A has an ab of 4 and an ac of 3.5. The rac of Person A is $87\frac{3}{4}\%$.

Note that increasing the relative weight of e in $(e + d)$ decreases the rac in cases where a person has an ac lower than his ab . Increasing the relative weight of d in $(e + d)$ increases the rac in cases where a person has an ac lower than his ab .

6. Improving the Roemerian view

6.1. Are choice and circumstance distinguishable?

In the previous chapter we came across problems that need to be addressed before Roemer's view on effort can truly be declared defensible. In this chapter I will discuss the most prominent problems and try to solve them. The first two problems are part of what I call the *double distinction problem*. Roemer's view on effort is based on two distinctions: it claims that choice and circumstance can be distinguished from each other (Roemer, 1998: 13-16) and it claims that choice and circumstance are distinguished in the measure of relative effort (Roemer, 1998: 11-12). Both claims are rejected by Rawls (2009: 329). This section is about the first distinction problem, Rawls's objection that choice and circumstance cannot be distinguished⁴¹. The next section is devoted to the question whether the *rac* measure is circumstance-free. In the last section of this chapter I respond to the practical limits of Roemer's effort view.

The most essential part of the double distinction problem that taunts Roemer's effort view is based on Rawls's (2009: 329) argument that effort cannot be a base for desert, because the factors of effort — in his view, abilities and alternatives, and in this thesis, circumstance and choice — cannot be distinguished from each other. Both the conventional and Roemer's effort view depend heavily on the assumption that choice and circumstance can be distinguished. The conventional view is not really engaged in this debate because it just represents public beliefs that are not required to meet any internal logic or academic standard. From the conventional view of, for example, *ab*, we can infer that this view does not agree with Rawls's objection (also see chapter 3). Nevertheless, Roemer's effort view could be interpreted as a philosophical attempt to defend the use of effort as a base for desert, and should meet these standards. Roemer (1998: 7) assumes that it is possible to distinguish choice and circumstance, at least in the realm of effort. Roemer neglects to defend his assumption, and this weakens Roemer's effort view. I separate two levels of Rawls's critique that choice and circumstance cannot be distinguished. The first level rejects the possibility of a theoretical distinction between choice and circumstance because they are always interrelated. I reject this view, and agree with Roemer that a theoretical distinction of choice and circumstance is possible. However, I admit that the second level of Rawls's critique is almost unfeasible: in practice, choice and circumstance cannot be distinguished. Roemer (1998: 7-8) agrees with these difficulties, although he never admits that this distinction is impossible in practice (also see chapter 6.3). I will now defend

⁴¹. Following Cohen's (2011: 11-12) interpretation. Also see footnote 30 and chapter 4.1.

why Rawls's notion that choice and circumstances cannot be theoretically distinguished should be rejected.

Rawls (2009: 329) denounces rewarding effort, because it is impractical to isolate freely chosen effort (i.e. alternatives). A hypothetical distinction of choice and circumstance is successful only when the two variables are independent of each other, when choice is circumstance-free and circumstance is choice-free at the moment of judging, i.e. when one 'makes the cut' (see chapter 2.2). Realising such a situation is hard, because circumstance and choice influence each other heavily prior to this hypothetical judgement. Circumstances are influenced by choice. A migrant choosing to move to another country which then becomes the scene of war five years later will influence the circumstances of that migrant. Choices are even more influenced by circumstance, because circumstances determine the limits and range of the options at a person's disposal. In the two extreme perspectives of chapter 2.2 this problem is solved by oversimplification: all situations depend completely on choice, or all situations can be traced back to circumstances. For a more realistic point of view, where choice as well as circumstance determine situations, there is no such simple solution. Roemer (1998: 20-22) admits to this problem but provides no further solution. Cohen (2011: 32) argues that an absolute distinction⁴² is not necessary to make judgements. The question of which choices are genuine is not the right one, because choices are never completely circumstance-free. What matters is to what extent a disadvantage actually depends on circumstance-free choice: it is a matter of degree (Cohen, 2011: 32). This question is more easy to answer when more information on the situation that has to be judged is available. Cohen (2011: 12) also presents an application of this idea when he defends his conception of Rawls, in which the degree of a situation that deserves reward is expressed in a percentage. Cohen's suggestion can be summarized by the argument that the distinction of choice and circumstance may not be absolute, but should be used to make better normative judgements. Roemer (1998) does not mention any of these thoughts.

I believe that Cohen (2011: 32) is right, although I also think that a distinction is possible in theory when the definitions of choice and circumstances are clear. In this thesis choices are somewhat dependent on circumstance, because before the process of choosing starts, some alternatives are already excluded from this process due to circumstances⁴³. Yet after circumstances played their part there could be circumstance-free choice: the process in which *ab* is transformed into *ac* has to be theoretically constructed in *different phases* to distinct choice and circumstances

⁴². The distinction between choice and circumstance is absolute when (1) the effects of choice on circumstance are entirely accounted for in the conception of circumstance that is used for normative judgements and (2) the effects of circumstance on choice are entirely accounted for in the conception of choice that is used for normative judgements. Also see chapter 6.2.

⁴³. See chapter 2.2.

when considering effort. The theoretical construction of different phases in the effort model make a distinction between choice and circumstance possible. In the first phase, circumstances that determine *ab* are distributed among persons beyond their control. Then, in the second phase, the effects of circumstance on choice should be accounted for. After this, choice and circumstance are theoretically distinguished. An example of this phasing is performed in the next section, in the discussion about whether or not the *rac* measure is circumstance-free. Roemer (1998: 2) used a similar phasing method in his theory of equality of opportunity, as we already saw in the discussion on the 'before' and 'after' in chapter 5.

Rawls (2009: 329) may argue that any nonabsolute distinction of choice and circumstance is useless, as choice then is not circumstance-free, but I do not see why my definition of choice could not be construed as circumstance-free. Moreover, I agree with Roemer that a system that rewards people on the basis of their exertion of circumstance-free *ac* is more attractive than a system that does not reward people but considers everything governed by circumstance. In the first system there may be cases where circumstance is rewarded or not compensated, but in the second system there may be cases where people become victims of the choices of others (e.g. people who prefer luxury cars 'due to' their circumstances). I prefer the first system, which may have some flaws, but is not unjust by definition, as the latter system that rejects that there is room for deliberate and genuine choice in many situations. For all these reasons I suggest that Rawls's denial of any distinction between either choice and circumstance or abilities and alternatives should be rejected, because it prevents the adoption of the more just and realistic, although not perfect, view of Roemer.

6.2. Is relative effort circumstance-free?

The second part of the double distinction problem originates from Roemer's (1998: 11-12) claim that the *rac* measure is circumstance-free: the distinction between choice and circumstance is complete and successful in the *rac* measure. In many ways this problem is an application of the larger debate about the choice-circumstance distinction that was the central to the last section. Rawls (2009: 329) rejects that the *rac* measure is circumstance-free because it lacks the essential point in the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac*. The conventional view accepts a simple measure of *rac*, which corrects the amount of *ac* people exerted for differences between people's *ab* levels, while at the same time rejecting the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac*⁴⁴. I believe that Roemer could

⁴⁴. See chapter 3.

and should accept Rawls's critique on the degree of effort, and that conventionalism defends an awkward, half-hearted position. In the following section I explain why.

The conventional view and Roemer both advocate the use of *rac* as measure for *ac*, because it corrects for differences in *ab* between people. Rawls rejects this approach because it would fall short of its objective: the relation between *ab* and *ac* is proposed by Rawls (2009: 329) as progressive. Circumstances also affect how hard one *tries*, i.e. their degree of effort. This rejects the view that *rac* is circumstance-free. Roemer (1998: 11-12) accepts this progressive relation, and tries to account for it by constructing a very inclusive version of *ab* (i.e. *ab'*): the ability to transform *ab* is included in *ab'* (also see chapter 5). Yet, this *ab'* does not challenge Rawls's objection. Roemer (1998: 15-16) attempts to judge people on the basis of their *rac* or, as he calls it on several occasions, 'how hard one *tries*' in a relative measure. The progressive relation of Rawls suggests that a person with a low *ab* level, say 5 when the average is 20, is demotivated to transform this ability into action because the fruits from his labour will be rather small. Why should a person exert a relative degree of effort close to 100%, i.e. an absolute *ac* value of 5 in the example, if his gains are negligible? Rawls's progressive relation argues that a person with a high *ab* level can achieve much more when he transforms a high degree of effort, while a person with a low *ab* level still achieves modest results with the same degree of effort. Thus, a person with a high *ab* has a larger propensity to transform his *ab* into *ac*. The Roemerian response might be that, since all justifiable differences in outcomes should derive from differences in relative *ac*, there is no problem: people are judged only on the basis of the degree of effort they have expended. This suggestion is at odds with reality⁴⁵ and self-defeating because there is not a single reason why people in such situations would choose to exert less relative effort than the maximum. This renders the *rac* measure superfluous. Rawls (2009: 329) simply points out that even the degree of trying is partly determined by circumstance, because it makes no sense for people with a low *ab* level to try hard. Because Roemer's (2009: 15-16, 24) main aim is to reward effort that is circumstance-free, he should include the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac* fully in his *rac* measure that is so central to his theory. Roemer's (1998) use of the concept of *trying* is ambiguous, and incorporates the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac* in his conception of *ab*. This is a dead-end strategy because one can only account for this relation *after* knowing the *ab* level, which could be achieved by the phasing solution of the previous section. I believe Roemer's effort view is more about the amount of *rac* that could be reasonably be expected (see Roemer, 1998: 14) than about the height of the *rac*, and therefore the measure of *rac* should be changed.

⁴⁵. If Roemer's suggestion were true we should reward lazy brilliant artists less than industrious naïve artists.

Theoretically speaking, replacing the *rac* measure for a measure that incorporates the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac* is not very difficult. The old *rac*, *ac* divided by *ab*, should be multiplied with a factor that accounts for the demotivating effects of a low *ab* level. This factor, that I call the expected transformation factor (*etf*), has a value between 0 and 1 and is computed by subtracting the *rac* value from 1⁴⁶. The new *ac* measure *rac'* is the product of the *rac* measure and the *etf*⁴⁷. A person with a high *ab* level is expected to be very motivated to transform his *ab* into *ac*, i.e. this person has a low *etf*. This is because he could receive extraordinary advantages if he transformed his abilities fully: this circumstance should not be rewarded and his low *etf* causes that his *rac'* is lower than his *rac*. Hence, the *rac'* measure corrects for the effects of the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac*. A person with a low *ab* value is expected to be demotivated to transform *ab* into *ac*, i.e. this person has a high *etf*. Even if this person exerts his maximum *rac*, the gains from the advantage would be average or even marginal: this circumstance should be compensated and his high *etf* causes that his *rac'* is higher than his *rac*. Again, the *rac'* measure compensates for the effects of the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac*. Note that it is necessary to know a person's *ab* value in order to determine his *etf*⁴⁸. The *rac'* measure of *ac* is circumstance-free and incorporates Rawls's progressive relation between *ab* and *ac*.

Conventionalism rejects the *rac'* measure, because it compensates for a low relative transformation of *ab* into *ac* if a person has a high *ab* level. One of the central ideas of conventionalism is that exerting effort is praiseworthy, should be rewarded and is expected of all persons. All persons have to *try* at the same level, and people do not deserve compensation for the demotivation that follows from a low *ab* level. These ideas conflict with the conviction of conventionalism that circumstances influence the amount of *ac* a person exerts. I believe this notion should prevail in the conventional view on effort; once you admit that a person's circumstances influence the amount of *ac* he exerts there seems no reason to deny Rawls's objection towards the original *rac* measure. One could counter that the possession of an *ab* level has no motivational effect, or that this effect is not circumstance-driven, but a matter of choice. I reject both objections, because I believe that *ab* is a circumstance and that there *is* a progressive relation between *ab* and *ac*. However, the conventional view ignores this part of the discussion on effort and defends a simple, but flawed vision. The extreme view could accept the *rac'* measure, because it incorporates the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac* and is circumstance-free. Yet, the extreme view still rejects the underlying idea of the *rac'* measure, because the extreme view rejects that choice and

⁴⁶. Also see the improved Roemerian effort model below.

⁴⁷. $rac' = (rac)(1 - rac)$. Also see the improved Roemerian effort model below.

⁴⁸. Hence, the phasing method of chapter 6.1 is needed in order to calculate the *rac'* measure.

circumstance are distinguishable⁴⁹. Roemer's effort view gains in strength when it incorporates the expected transformation factor etf , and should use the new rac' measure.

The improved Roemerian effort model

$$(1) ab' = Ci'$$

$$(2) ac = d(Ci') + e(Ch)$$

$$(3) rac = \frac{d(Ci') + e(Ch)}{Ci'}$$

$$(4) etf = 1 - rac$$

$$(5) rac' = (rac)(etf)$$

$$\text{or (5) } rac' = \left(\frac{d(Ci') + e(Ch)}{Ci'} \right) \left(1 - \left(\frac{d(Ci') + e(Ch)}{Ci'} \right) \right)$$

Assume that ac is a base for desert, and that d is 0.55 and e is 0.45. This is the chosen conception of the choice-circumstance distinction. Person A has a Ci of 16 because he was born into a privileged family. His Ch is 12 because he knows that the fruits of his work are valuable. Person B has a Ci of 4, because he was born into a disadvantaged family. His Ch is 2 because he knows that the fruits of his works are meagre.

The rac of Person A is $81\frac{1}{4}\%$ and the rac of Person B is $72\frac{1}{2}\%$. If we judge people on the basis of their rac value (as was done in the Roemerian effort model, see chapter 5) Person A deserves more reward than Person B.

The etf of Person A is 0.1875 and his rac' is 0.1523. The etf of Person B is 0.275 and his rac' is 0.1994. If we judge people on basis of their rac' value Person B deserves more reward than Person A. In other words: in the rac' measure Person B is compensated for the demotivational effects of his low ab value, while the motivational effect of Person A's high ab value is levelled off.

⁴⁹. Also see chapter 4.2 and 6.1.

6.3. Roemer's effort view and reality

Roemer's effort view is a model constructed by an economist, which should in itself already trigger alarm bells when discussing its practical use. In this thesis we came across multiple hurdles that contest the application of Roemer's effort view in practice. In this section I will summarize these obstacles, discuss possible solutions and reflect on the usability of Roemer's effort view in the light of these difficulties.

Roemer (1998: 7, 10) adopts, without much deliberation⁵⁰, a set of three theorems that are vital for his model. The first obstacle is Roemer's belief in the distinction between choice and circumstance on the practical level. An 'actually existing'⁵¹ distinction between choice and circumstance is almost impossible to achieve without violating privacy and other human rights. Apart from this point of critique, which is also presented by the opponents of luck egalitarianism (Nozick, 1974: 214; Knight & Stemplowska, 2011: 9-10), it is hard to know for sure which fractions of situations are traceable to choice-free circumstances or circumstance-free choices. I agree with Rawls (2009: 329) that this distinction is impractical, and I agree with Knight & Stemplowska (2011: 9-10) that it is not worthwhile. Roemer's (1998: 5, 14) position of such a distinction being hard to put into practice should be repositioned: such a distinction is empirically impossible and undesirable.

A second problem is Roemer's (1998: 7) assumption that effort is measurable as an interval variable. Throughout this thesis I have adopted this assumption (see chapter 2.1) because the discussion on a measure for (activity) effort is necessary to make progress in the effort debate. Yet in practice, effort is very hard to measure because effort comes in many forms. Some mental activities require other actions from a person than physical activities and vice versa⁵². This issue can only be solved when a whole system of effort measurements is introduced, independent from the themes discussed in this thesis. Such a system could, for example, adopt rules about how much effort each activity is worth, or that an activity only counts as effort-exerting when it is executed with a certain level of intensity. Note that these rules cannot be constructed on the considerations about effort in this thesis, but have to be developed independently. This is because all three views on effort are too loosely stated to foster such fine-grained considerations about the amount of effort yielded by various activities. I do not claim that such a system cannot be constructed, I only point out that it cannot be done without developing an complete effort evaluation system.

⁵⁰ Roemer (1998: 7, 14) admits that these assumptions are 'tall orders' and difficult to realise, but pays no further attention to them.

⁵¹ As in 'actually existing socialism'.

⁵² e.g. How can we compare writing a book to building a house in terms of effort?

The third obstacle that complicates the practical application of Roemer's effort view is closely connected to the previous one. Roemer (1998: 7) assumes that effort is one-dimensional, while effort is actually expressed in many forms. An evaluation system that assigns effort values to certain activities — for instance one in which writing a forty-page cookbook equals 10 effort units and harvesting an acre of corn within four hours equals 20 effort units — is one-dimensional. It only focuses on the material expression of the activities but not on the difference in abilities between people. Due to these differences, people experience the same activity in completely different ways⁵³. The fact that effort is expressed in many forms and is valued differently from different perspectives makes Roemer's assumption of one-dimensional effort an illusion. The fine-grained system that could solve the objection that effort is not measurable has to be converted into a system so sensitive that it becomes overcomplicated and impractical. Moreover, an extra set of rules is needed to decide which perspective — e.g. that of society or that of the person who exerted the effort — should be used in judgements about effort. I believe that these conditions are almost impossible to meet, and that the combination of the second and third obstacle tackle most aspirations to use Roemer's effort view in practice.

The previous paragraphs show that the assumptions of Roemer (1998: 7, 10) either cannot be solved at all or can only be solved with the greatest difficulty or without any guarantee of success. Applying Roemer's view on effort in practice is impossible in a strict sense. Yet, this does not mean that Roemer's effort view is useless outside of the realm of political philosophy. The view should be used as a starting point for considerations on effort. The idea that effort should only be rewarded when it is optimally circumstance-free represents a huge shift from the dominant conventional view. Roemer's view may never be fully implemented in policy, but it could be used as an inspiration for policy and political belief systems that want to attack the notion of rewarding circumstances. Cohen (2011: 11, 32) already explained that a system that rewards desert does not have to be absolute or complete to be valuable, and I agree with him. Roemer's effort view is usable because it represents an integration of two sets of important insights, and is preferable to the other views, as my conclusion in the next chapter will explain.

⁵³. A writer may exert significantly less effort in writing a book than a farmer, and vice versa when the desired goal is harvesting corn.

Table 1			
<i>View on effort</i>	Conventional view	Roemerian view	Extreme view
<i>Should ab be a desert base?</i>	No (it is a circumstance and it is unmanifested)	No (it is a circumstance)	No (it is a circumstance)
<i>Should ac be a desert base?</i>	Yes (exerting ac is mostly a choice and praiseworthy)	Yes (when ac is circumstance-free it is a choice and praiseworthy)	No (because ac is a function of ab , which was a circumstance)
<i>Is ac influenced by circumstances?</i>	Yes (but relative effort resolves this)	Yes (but relative effort resolves this)	Yes (and relative effort does not resolve this due to the progressive relationship between ab and ac)
<i>Should ac be measured absolutely or relatively?</i>	Both, preference for relative (relative effort is circumstance-free)	Relative (relative effort is circumstance-free)	None (relative effort is not circumstance-free)
<i>Is rac circumstance-free?</i>	Yes (it accounts for all the effects of circumstances)	Yes (it accounts for all the effects of circumstances)	No (due to the progressive relationship between ab and ac)
<i>Is rac' circumstance-free?</i>	Not applicable (rac' is rejected because it compensates people who renounce to try)	Yes (it defeats the rac measure because it incorporates the progressive relationship between ab and ac)	Yes (but this does not matter because choice and circumstance cannot be distinguished)
<i>Can choice and circumstance be distinguished?</i>	Yes (without a real argument)	Yes (at least theoretically)	No (this is impossible: choice and circumstance influence at such a level of intensity that a distinction is impossible)

7. Conclusion

Roemer's effort view defeats both conventional and extreme thought on effort. It approximates reality much closer than the other two views on effort because it values choice and circumstance adequately and does not lean toward any of the two factors of effort. The conventional view should be rejected because it refuses to compensate fully for differences between people caused by circumstances, and does not adopt Rawls's progressive relation between *ab* and *ac*. Another problem with conventionalism is that it is not well thought-through, which in itself is not surprising as this view is based on popular opinion instead of on political philosophy. There is no real justification for *why* conventionalism takes a certain stance on many topics in the effort debate, such as the distinction between choice and circumstance. The improved version of Roemer's view accepts the progressive relation between *ab* and *ac* fully and offers more arguments concerning the themes that conventionalism neglects, although some of them are not very convincing. I prefer the Roemerian view also because it takes circumstances into account more than the conventional view does: effort is a function of both choice *and* circumstance, not merely choice.

The extreme view is defeated by Roemer's effort view because its rejection of the distinction between choice and circumstance is not defensible on a theoretical level. The consequences of rejecting the existence of this distinction are extreme: effort cannot serve as a base for desert. Roemer's view shows that this rejection is - in theory - not necessary. One of the major gains of the improved Roemer's effort view is that it provides a philosophical defence of using effort as base of desert. The popular embrace of effort as a desert base is finally backed up by theory: circumstance-free *ac*, i.e. the *rac'* measure, should serve as a base for desert because *ac* is a praiseworthy activity that is often necessary to achieve advantage. When people are judged on the basis of the *rac'* measure we reward freely chosen *ac*: the effects of circumstance are eliminated. Roemer's improved view on effort is also preferable because choice is taken into consideration more than the extreme view does: effort is a function of both circumstance *and* choice, not merely circumstance.

Although Roemer's effort view in its improved form defeats both other views, it still has major issues. Due to the many practical limitations of Roemer's view, it is not implementable. It should, however, be used as the ideal starting point, because Roemer's view defeats the other views and provides many insights that can be used for policy making and the political debate. Both the full adoption of the progressive relationship between *ab* and *ac* and the rejection of Rawls's thesis that ambition and alternatives (circumstance and choice in this thesis) cannot be distinguished at all

improve Roemer's view on effort. These two improvements have increased the strength of Roemer's view on effort, which I can now fully support. With this conclusion, the aim of this thesis is achieved, but the debate on effort as a desert base should not end here. The model I have constructed around the two kinds of effort and the role of choice and circumstance when considering effort could be used as starting point to make progress in this debate and perhaps solve some of the problems that remain unresolved in Roemer's improved effort view.

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