

Norman Daniels

Cross references: health and healthcare; reflective equilibrium; liberty and liberties; fair equality of opportunity; justice between generations; equality; luck egalitarianism; G. A. Cohen; Amartya Sen

Norman Daniels (b. 1942), currently Professor of Ethics and Population Health at the Harvard School of Public Health, is one of the philosophers who have done most to explore and enrich Rawls's approach to social justice. Daniels was a graduate student in the Department of Philosophy at Harvard, although his own dissertation was not in moral or political philosophy, but concerned with Thomas Reid's treatment of geometry, and was supervised not by Rawls but by Hilary Putnam. Over the course of his career, Daniels has stood in a number of relations to Rawls's theory – from early critic, to extender and systematizer, through to acting as a defender of Rawls against a range of later critics.

Daniels edited the first collection of critical articles on TJ, *Reading Rawls* (Daniels, 1975), which brought together many of the most significant early discussions of Rawls's theory, including pieces by Nagel, Dworkin, Hart and Scanlon. Daniels's own piece in this collection, "Equal Liberty and Unequal Worth of Liberty" stands as one of the most interesting and powerful challenges to Rawls's view from the left, and later earned a clarifying response from Rawls (PL, 324-31; JF, 148-52). Daniels has also been one of the leading defenders and developers of Rawls's philosophical methodology of reflective equilibrium (see Daniels, 1996).

Perhaps Daniels's largest contribution has been his extension of Rawls's theory to cover issues of health and the distribution of healthcare resources. Rawls himself made the simplifying assumption that citizens are fully cooperating members of society, idealizing away from circumstances under which citizens fall below that threshold due to accident or illness (JF, 175). Daniels extends Rawls's approach by relaxing that idealization, and considering citizens' entitlements of justice to access healthcare resources that allow them to return to the range of normal functioning. His suggestion, which Rawls seems to have found sympathetic (see PL, 184-5; JF, 175), is that one should approach these questions through the principle of fair equality of opportunity, with "species normal functioning" being seen as a precondition for an individual enjoying fair opportunities (see Daniels (1985)).

Pursuing the agenda set by this research on the distribution of healthcare has led Daniels to develop important further work on rationing across age-groups, and related problems of justice between overlapping generations. He has developed the "prudential lifespan account" of justice between age groups (see Daniels, 1988), an idealized procedure in which prudent planners, operating behind a partial veil of ignorance, deliberate on how resources should be distributed to make their lives go as well as possible. Through this procedure, Daniels argues both that we must aim to preserve a "normal opportunity range" throughout our lives, and that age-rationing can be a requirement of justice. As one of the most significant landmarks in the field of intergenerational justice, Daniels's work on justice between age groups has attracted a significant degree of critical attention, in response to which he has gone on to modify his account in recent years (see Daniels 2008, 2009).

In his recent work, Daniels's work on health has broadened out from its earlier focus on medical interventions and healthcare resources, towards a more holistic and sociologically-informed

concern with both public health and the social determinants of health, and with fair procedures for public deliberation and justification with regard to health-related priorities (see Daniels, 2007).

In his role as defender of Rawls's approach to justice against some of its more influential critics, Daniels's "Democratic Equality: Rawls's Complex Egalitarianism" (Daniels, 2003) stands out for its force and sophistication. In it, Daniels shows how Rawls's theory can overcome some of the lines of critique advanced against it: from luck egalitarians concerned with the full eradication of morally arbitrary distributive contingencies; from advocates of Amartya Sen's capabilities approach; and from the specific criticisms of the operation of the difference principle associated with G. A. Cohen. In developing this defence of Rawls's "complex" egalitarianism, Daniels provides a rich account of the relationship between distributive questions and the question of how citizens relate to each other *as* democratic equals, and of the nature of a social ethos of justice.

Daniels stands out as a leading theorist of social justice in the Rawlsian tradition who extensively engages both with ideal theory and with the complex practicalities of social reality. In 1985, he wrote: "[a]n essay in applied philosophy has its risks – it risks frustrating both the professional philosopher and specialists in the area of application. (...) For some of them, the discussion starts a bit too close to the ground to really fly," while for others "this discussion is never down to earth enough." (Daniels 1985: vi) Daniels's work stands as an outstanding example for those who see value in an intermediate space, in which we both examine practical issues through a philosophical lens, and engage in philosophy with a sense of prevailing social realities.

References:

Norman Daniels, (ed.), *Reading Rawls*, (Basic Books, 1975)

Norman Daniels, *Just Health Care*, (Cambridge University Press, 1985)

Norman Daniels, *Am I My Parents' Keeper?* (Oxford University Press, 1986)

Norman Daniels, *Justice and Justification: Reflective Equilibrium in Theory and Practice*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Norman Daniels, "Democratic Equality: Rawls's Complex Egalitarianism," in Samuel Freeman, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 241-76.

Norman Daniels *Just Health: Meeting Health Needs Fairly*, (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Norman Daniels, "Justice between Adjacent Generations: Further Thoughts," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 2008, 16, (4): 475-494.

Norman Daniels, "Just Health: replies and further thoughts," *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 2009, (35): 36-41.

Further Reading:

Norman Daniels, "Reflective Equilibrium," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011.
Hyperlink: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reflective-equilibrium/>

Gopal Sreenivasan, "Justice, Inequality and Health," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,
2008. Hyperlink: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/justice-inequality-health/>