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Ayse Kaya

Swarthmore College, akayaor1@swarthmore.edu

A. Keba

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WHY GLOBAL INEQUALITY MATTERS: DERIVATIVE GLOBAL EGALITARIANISM

AYSE KAYA AND ANDREJ KEBA

Abstract: This article integrates empirical and normative discussions about why global economic inequalities matter in critically examining an approach known as derivative global egalitarianism (DGE). DGE is a burgeoning perspective that opposes excessive global economic inequality not based on the intrinsic value of equality but inequality's negative repercussions on other values. The article aims to advance the research agenda by identifying and critically evaluating four primary varieties of DGE arguments from related but distinct literatures, which span a number of disciplines, including economics, international relations, and political philosophy. Overall, DGE offers a number of persuasive arguments as to why current levels of global inequality are of concern, but aspects of DGE beg further philosophical and empirical examination. By situating DGE within the wider theoretical and empirical contexts, this article provides resources for its critical assessment and theoretical development.

Keywords: Egalitarianism, fairness, globalization, inequality, poverty, self-respect

Introduction

Inequality is a central theme in debates about globalization. Scholars have examined both global inequality – which is income inequality among individuals across the world – and international inequality, which is inequality between countries measured by their mean income differences.¹ Critics of globalization see persistent inequalities across the world as further proof that neoliberal economics has failed to raise the living standards of the poor.² Yet those that look more favourably upon globalization see little relationship between inequality

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and globalization, or argue that the failure of certain countries to adopt policies that allowed other countries to benefit from globalization is not a justification to criticize globalization (Wolf 2004). At the same time, existing inequalities can be regarded as stumbling blocks in engendering meaningful cooperation among states. Consider, for instance, the myriad objections to the way in which the World Trade Organization (WTO) informally advantages great economic powers over smaller ones (Stiglitz 2006). Furthermore, prevalent inequalities obviously raise questions about global distributive justice, not merely what the duties toward the worse-off should be, but what kind of moral considerations ground those duties. Regardless of whether globalization—which is the increasing interdependence of the world through the cross-border movement of goods, services, capital, and information—can be implicated for existing economic inequalities across the world, and regardless of whether global and international inequality are increasing (Wolf and Wade 2002), the fact remains: today inequality among individuals across the world is so high that it is higher than the inequality within most countries, including some notoriously unequal ones such as South Africa (Sutcliffe 2007). In this context, scholars have debated whether and why global inequality matters (Beitz 2001; Wolf and Wade 2002; Scanlon 2003; Birdsall 2004; Pogge 2007b).

This article aims to advance this debate by providing a detailed critical account of derivative global egalitarianism (DGE). Various arguments that can be labelled as derivative global egalitarianism oppose excessive global economic inequality on grounds that are distinct from the value of equality.³ ‘Derivative’ arguments condemn economic inequality, treating ‘inequality as a bad thing because of its consequences for values which are distinct from equality itself’ (Beitz 2001: 97). Thus the derivative claim is that one does not have to find an equal distribution morally desirable to consider an unequal distribution morally objectionable (Beitz 2001: 97). DGE focuses on objectionable social phenomena that are correlated with global inequality, such as the curtailment of poverty-reduction efforts and the erosion of procedural fairness within multilateral institutions. DGE is valuable as it promises to appeal to a broader audience than those egalitarians that consider equality as intrinsically valuable.⁴

Our discussion of DGE has two principal aims. The first aim is to critically synthesize various arguments that can be categorized as DGE. A critical synthesis may seem like a simple task, but the project is hardly straightforward. Arguments that can be considered derivative egalitarian are dispersed over a number of distinct literatures, including economics (Milanovic 2005), political economy (Wade 2007), political philosophy (O’Neill 2008; Scanlon 2003), and international relations (Beitz 2001). The article brings together similar objections to global inequality raised by these various disciplines and tries to generate a dialogue between compatible yet disconnected arguments that fall under the rubric of DGE.⁵ In so doing, our goal will not be to provide arguments for or against derivative global egalitarianism. In fact, a central claim

of this article is that it is too soon to provide any arguments of this sort, since the approach in question is importantly incomplete. As we will show, some of the central assumptions and ideas of DGE are undertheorized and unclear. Therefore, the second aim of the article is to illuminate the philosophical underpinnings of DGE arguments, and indicate and evaluate avenues for their further development.

Overall, the article maintains that DGE provides a number of powerful reasons as to why current levels of global inequality are of concern, but also leaves a number of philosophical and empirical questions underexplored. For instance, DGE successfully demonstrates how concerns about worldwide poverty need to integrate concerns about worldwide inequality, given global inequality's adverse effects on poverty reduction. Furthermore, DGE shows how worldwide inequality can subvert the fair functioning of global institutions. Nonetheless, the article also finds that some derivative arguments are not as applicable to the global context as they are to the domestic context. Furthermore, certain DGE arguments would benefit from differentiating between inequality between states (international inequality) and inequality between individuals (global inequality) as distinct concerns in contemplating institutional solutions to improving the lot of the worse-off.

The rest of the article is organized as follows: The next section briefly discusses how DGE circumvents some of the criticisms raised against direct egalitarianism, which holds that equality matters intrinsically. The remaining sections identify and discuss four types of arguments that fall under DGE. The conclusion summarizes and discusses possibilities for future research.

Derivative Global Egalitarianism

Some prominent contemporary critics of global inequality argue that global economic inequality should be of concern even if one remains agnostic as to whether inequality is morally objectionable *in itself* (Beitz 2001; Scanlon 2003). Such 'derivative' arguments condemn economic inequality 'because of its consequences for values which are distinct from equality itself' (Beitz 2001: 97). Hence, as previously mentioned, the derivative claim is that one does not have to find an equal distribution morally desirable to consider an unequal distribution morally objectionable (Beitz 2001).

Derivative egalitarian arguments circumvent many of the criticisms directed at 'pure egalitarianism'.⁶ Although the debate regarding direct egalitarianism is too diverse to be recapitulated in detail, its various critics converge on, for instance, regarding pure egalitarianism's neglect of absolute values as problematic. These critics object that egalitarianism tries to establish a purely relational value—parity across a range of incomes or levels of wellbeing—as morally significant, even if nothing is known about the positions that are compared.

Harry Frankfurt (1987), for instance, maintains that economic egalitarianism encourages neglect of persons' interests and needs. The preoccupation with relative shares, he argues, diverts attention from what is really valuable to individuals—their ability to cater to their own projects. Writing along similar lines, Martin Feldstein (1999) finds it 'spiteful' that the worse-off with adequate material means would resent the conditions of the better-off. What qualifies it as 'spiteful' is that the worse-off who are not poor have no good reason to be concerned with how much others have. Coming from a different perspective, David Miller argues that a preoccupation with global egalitarianism can hinder the achievement of genuinely valuable goals. He claims that aiming for the unattainable objective of global equality creates a frustration with the entire project of a more ethical world. If all the globe's inhabitants should have an equal share—of resources, opportunities, etc.—and there exists no conceivable way of getting even close to this ideal, then one might be tempted to think that morality has nothing to say on matters of global distribution (Miller 2005: 57).

In light of such criticisms, arguments favouring the intrinsic value of equality have come to be regarded as 'more controversial and less widely accepted, and more easily portrayed as elements of a sectional or parochial political doctrine' (Beitz 2001: 98). As will be seen, derivative egalitarian arguments acknowledge the force of criticisms directed at the pure egalitarian agenda, and oppose inequality by appealing to considerations that are not strictly egalitarian.⁷ Instead of focusing on the moral importance of equality, they highlight the strong relationship between inequality and certain facts or considerations that are morally important. Since these other facts and considerations are meant to be less controversial than the ideal of equality, the derivative outlook aims to be less contentious and more widely appealing than pure egalitarianism.⁸

This article will identify and evaluate four principal arguments that fall under DGE. First, some scholars argue that global inequality matters because it creates a duty by the rich to assist the poor that overrides all other considerations. Second, some scholars are concerned about global inequality's association with social ills, such as increased levels of violence. Third, some scholars claim that global inequality subverts proper social relations—by causing the humiliation of the worse-off or by undermining social equality. Fourth, DGE argues that global inequality erodes the procedural fairness of global institutions.

Global Economic Inequality and Moral Duties

Scholars have drawn on global inequality to argue about the duty of assistance on the part of the rich inhabitants of the globe. For instance, Thomas Pogge (2002b: 1) uses inequality as an indicator of the capacity of the well-off to assist those in economic need: 'With our average per capita income nearly 180 times greater than that of the poor (at market exchange rates), we could

eradicate severe poverty worldwide if we chose to try'. As Charles Beitz (2001: 99) explains, '[w]hat motivates [the concern for inequality's association with material deprivation] is... a recognition of the lopsidedness of the comparison between the suffering that could be reduced for some and the opportunity costs to others of doing so'. David Miller (2005: 56) similarly maintains that global inequality sheds light on the 'costs of achieving justice'. These arguments agree that inequality is morally important because it illuminates the ability of the rich to assist the poor. Implicitly, they also presuppose a more basic argument as to why the ability of the rich is morally relevant, an argument that was famously put forward by Peter Singer. Calling for action to combat famine in Bangladesh, Singer (1972: 231) claimed that 'if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it.' This principle (hereafter: 'Singer's principle') is a necessary supplement to the DGE claims about the ease of global assistance because it explains the moral dimension of that ease. One's supreme ability to assist the severely poor matters morally because people generally ought to prevent easily preventable moral wrongs, in this case human suffering.

Given the importance of Singer's principle for the aforementioned DGE argument, the principle must be scrutinized. What needs to be determined first is whether the principle maintains that the ease of assistance generates the duty to assist. If so, derivative global egalitarians could use the principle to argue that vast inequality has direct and large moral significance. The moral importance of inequality would then be that it is a sufficient condition of the duty to dispense aid. However, closer reading reveals that Singer's principle does not in fact claim that the ability to assist generates the duty of assistance. As the quote above indicates, one ought to prevent something that is already deemed to be bad, provided that one can do so without excessive cost to oneself. Hence the claim about the moral significance of inequality presupposes a *prior* judgment about badness—the badness of human suffering. The duty to prevent human suffering is the premiss, rather than the conclusion, of Singer's argument. Furthermore, it is important to note that this moral premiss is not tied to any particular moral perspective, including the utilitarianism that Singer otherwise espouses, and is meant to be 'accepted by people who hold a variety of ethical positions' (Singer 1993: 231). This ecumenical nature of Singer's principle is largely a function of his activist perspective: his article was primarily meant to motivate action to alleviate the dire conditions of the Bangladeshi people, which must be regarded as morally deplorable from any ethical standpoint (Singer 1972: 231).⁹

Since Singer's principle presumes, and not establishes, the duty to alleviate suffering, the key question becomes what exactly the principle achieves. A plausible answer is that Singer's argument aims to establish the overridingness of the duty to assist. Namely, it aims to illuminate a condition under which no other consideration can outweigh the duty to assist. The condition is that the

duty can be easily discharged. If this condition is satisfied, the requirement to assist cannot be defeated by any other consideration. This idea relies on a pluralistic view of practical reasoning, according to which persons decide what to do by weighing a variety of values and principles—moral as well as hedonistic, habitual, emotional, and so on.¹⁰ Based on this conception, Singer may be understood as saying that one's supreme ability to assist makes the moral requirement to do so overriding. It removes the possibility of that duty being defeated by any other consideration. With this clarification, it is now possible to see how Singer's principle can support DGE claims. The principle grounds the following argument:

- A₁ One's ability to alleviate the suffering of the world's poor without sacrificing anything of comparable value renders overriding one's duty to do so.
- A₂ Vast world-level inequality indicates the ability of the better-off to alleviate the suffering of the world's poor without sacrificing anything of comparable value.
- A₃ Therefore, vast world-level inequality matters morally because it indicates that the better-off have an overriding duty to alleviate the suffering of the world's poor.

Singer himself offers an argument as to why there can never be a consideration that can outweigh the moral duty to assist the poor: not aiding the poor is effectively the same as refusing to save their lives. Singer illustrates this point with the now famous argument that not helping the poor is analogous to not saving the child drowning in a near shallow pond. And there is nothing—no non-moral project or attachment—that can possibly outweigh the value of human life (Singer 1993: 244).¹¹ Yet the analogy between non-assistance and refusing to save lives is a misleading way to think about the issue. The analogy does not work because the alternatives in the pond rescue case do not correspond neatly to the alternatives in the poverty assistance case. In the pond rescue scenario the choice is between the preservation and the loss of the child's life, but choosing in the poverty assistance case may not have immediate existential consequences. Undoubtedly, at any given point many poverty-stricken individuals face imminent death unless helped. However, the idea that donating resources has the direct consequence of saving lives is questionable. A host of intermediary agencies, supervisory bodies, and field operatives stand between the donor and the final provision of aid to the needy.¹² For instance, experts point to aid loss through corruption (Easterly 2006) as well as the wider institutional problems that beset countries that cannot easily be solved through aid (Collier 2007). Also, a number of studies point out various accountability problems associated with NGOs, one of the primary deliverers of aid (Edwards and Zadek 2002; Grant and Keohane 2005; Wenar 2006). In different ways, these scholarly studies question the idea that donating resources has the immediate consequence

of saving lives.¹³ One could overlook these problems and still contribute money to aid organizations, as Singer (1999) recommends embracing Unger's proposal. After all, even if assistance does not immediately eliminate suffering, it still seems unquestionable that those who are able should make an effort to both deliver aid and optimize its delivery. Nonetheless, the myriad objections raised regarding the effectiveness of aid call into question the *stringency* of the duty to donate resources. Since the outcome of assistance is less certain than in the shallow pond scenario, the duty to assist cannot be presumed to be automatically overriding.

Furthermore, the analogy does not distinguish between different types of assistance, primarily between humanitarian aid and long-term development aid. While the former is provided for short-term relief in a crisis situation, such as a famine or the aftermath of an earthquake, the latter is not crisis-necessitated and intends to address long-term issues related to a country's underdevelopment. Singer's seminal piece is concerned with immediate aid for relief of the Bangladeshi famine and can therefore be fitted into the analogy with refusing to save lives. In that case, not giving aid resembles not saving a drowning child in a shallow pond. However, his later work focuses more on development aid, which does not easily fit into the life-saving analogy. Although many examples can be provided to support this point, consider the following analysis by Singer (1999): 'An American household with an income of \$50,000 spends around \$30,000 annually on necessities. . . . Therefore, for a household bringing in \$50,000 a year, donations to help the world's poor should be as close as possible to \$20,000'. Singer's focus here is not on humanitarian relief, but on long-term development aid. Unlike humanitarian aid, development aid cannot be likened to rescuing a child from a shallow pond, as its consequences are both more long-term and a lot more uncertain.

We do not wish to argue that foreign aid should be dismissed, or that non-governmental or multilateral aid organizations should not be supported. Rather, we emphasize that the argument for poverty assistance cannot be analogous to the argument for saving lives from a nearby shallow pond, and because the analogy does not work in the way in which Singer supposes, his claim that there is nothing that counts against assistance also becomes untenable. He may after all be correct that there is nothing that counts against the rich's assistance, but because the analogy does not work, this contention needs more explication and defence. Put differently, a plausible account of the criteria for weighing the various considerations that bear on the issue of assistance becomes necessary, since other considerations may gain in importance if assistance does not have the effect of saving lives. One such consideration is cited by Thomas Nagel, who suggests that a categorical requirement of global assistance may conflict with individuals' core pursuits—*aesthetic, cultural, romantic, athletic, and the like*. These are the pursuits that are so important to persons'

self-understanding as agents that they give their lives substance (Nagel 2002: 151), or, as Bernard Williams (1981) puts it, that they give persons a reason to 'go on'. Given the possibility of such conflicts, the categorical nature of Singer's principle must be further justified. Consequently, proponents of $A_1 - A_3$ owe a more thorough account of how different considerations are weighed in situations of choice, and an explanation of why the requirement of assistance always defeats other competing considerations.¹⁴

Global Economic Inequality and Global Social Ills

The second type of DGE objects to global inequality through an analogy with the domestic context. It assumes that certain concerns about inequality within political societies can be extended to denounce inequality between individuals worldwide. The domestic argument and its global application can be summarized as follows:

- B₁ Economic inequality is correlated with various social ill.
- B₂ The existence of social ill is morally wrong.
- B₃ Therefore, the existence of economic inequality morally matters because of its association with social ill.

A group of authors have argued that economic inequality matters because of the social ill that are associated with it. Richard Wilkinson (2005) and Robert Wade (2007) claim that in more equal societies, social relations are relatively more amicable, marked by higher levels of trust and involvement in the community. Similarly, James Galbraith (2002: 202) notes that 'a sufficient degree of wealth equality is... necessary for any collection of individuals to be considered a society in the first place...'. On the other hand, more unequal societies suffer from more violent crime, more homicide and less communal social relations (Wilkinson 2005: chaps. 1 and 2). Robert Wade (2007: 115) emphasizes that income inequality is also correlated with higher unemployment, weaker property rights, and lower quality of public services, with access to these services being uneven. Some studies also show that inequality leads to higher levels of violence (Alesina and Perotti 1996). Worries about inequality may thus stem from wider concerns about the ways in which economic inequality weakens the social fabric of communities.

Although these objections are compelling in the domestic context, their applicability to the international realm is not entirely straightforward, and merits further discussion.¹⁵ Transposing the argument about inequality's correlation with social ill from the domestic to the global context, we explore the plausibility of three arguments that seem likely extensions from the domestic

to the global context: a) global inequality's correlation with violence in the form of terrorism; b) global inequality's curtailment of poverty-reduction efforts; and c) global inequality's ability to undermine global social cohesion.

There is not enough evidence to suggest that global inequality leads to or intensifies terrorism. For instance, Piazza's (2006) research finds no statistically significant relationship between measures of economic development, including inequality, poverty, and unemployment, and terrorism. Krueger and Maleckova (2003) similarly question the link between poverty and terrorism. In terms of transnational Islamic fundamentalism, Olivier Roy (2004) emphasizes the importance of non-material factors, such as the role of identity, for terrorism. However, some research disagrees with these findings. Burgoon (2006) argues that social welfare policies via their impact on poverty and inequality, among other factors, translate into lower incidents of terrorism. This research suggests that through alleviating inequality, social policies lessen the feelings of injustice, haplessness, and resentment by the worse-off. The study, however, leaves open to debate what the exact influences of poverty or, more importantly for this article's purposes, inequality on terrorism are. Other authors also agree that even though poverty (note, not inequality) may not be directly related to terrorism, it may provide an environment that is more conducive to manipulation by terrorists (von Hippel 2009). Thus even though terrorists themselves may not be from the worse-off portions of societies, as evidenced by 9/11 attacks that were planned and partly carried out by relatively rich and educated individuals, terrorist sympathizers may be from disadvantaged backgrounds. The upshot of these findings on the relationship between inequality and transnational terrorism is that while it may be too soon to rule out a significant relationship between the two, it is also too soon to establish that there is one.¹⁶

Research, however, does show with much greater certainty that inequality interferes with poverty-reduction efforts, thereby hindering the ability to combat the social ill of poverty. There is both an economic and a political rationale that link inequality to poverty reduction efforts. If growth occurs with inequality reduction, which reflects changes in the distribution of income, then poverty reduction occurs faster (World Bank 2005: 85). Moreover, the same rate of economic growth can reduce poverty faster in a country with a relatively more equal distribution of income (World Bank 2005: 86). Basically, growth's ability to reduce poverty is lower in more unequal societies. The connection between inequality and poverty can also be political. For instance, scholars cite the inability of poor countries to put poverty-reduction measures on the agenda of world-order institutions as evidence of inequality of influence. Pogge (2007b: 141–5) thus notes that successful policy decisions to tackle poverty are feasible only under low levels of economic inequality. Along the same lines, Wade (2007: 126) contends that high levels of income inequality – 'income outcomes' in his words – generate political rules that maintain the gap between the rich and the poor and stifle social mobility. Hence, overall, the 'empirical link between

income inequality and poverty reduction reinforces the conceptual link between the aversion to inequality and the quest to avoid absolute deprivation' (World Bank 2005: 76). Since poverty is one of the great social ills, then inequality's ability to hamper poverty reduction efforts should be of concern.

Some authors argue that global inequality can undermine global social cohesion, similarly to how domestic inequality undermines domestic social cohesion (as explained above). For instance, Milanovic (2005: 158) argues that globalization can 'foster among the people in poor countries the feeling of being left out. It is the same effect that we would expect greater inequality to produce within a single country'. Birdsall (2004: 299) appears to agree, when she explains that worse-off people may be increasingly comparing their consumption patterns to others that are better-off regardless of their location: '“globalization” may have changed her [the worse-off's] reference group and her consumption goals: the global brand sneakers may seem necessary'. Whether or not worse-off individuals are concerned with the living standards of those beyond their hometown is a matter that demands further research. A plausible, but by no means the only way, to explore this question could be to rely on individual perceptions of the matter. Some evidence from global public opinion polls suggests that individuals care about global inequality, but given that the questions about inequality do not differentiate between intra- and inter-country inequalities, it is hard to assess the extent to which the latter matters. For instance, a 2005 Gallup poll finds that 26% of the survey respondents from a variety of countries find poverty and the gap between the rich and the poor to be the most important global problem, but it is difficult to ascertain whether the respondents are reflecting about their own country's situation, the world's, or, most likely, both (Gallup International Association 2005). Hence more empirical study that is able to differentiate between individuals' reactions to inter-country or global inequality versus intra-country inequalities seems necessary.¹⁷ A particularly interesting question is whether people feel 'relative deprivation' in comparisons with individuals from other countries, as studies show that people are negatively affected if they are in disadvantaged positions vis-à-vis others in their close proximity or social reference group (Deaton 2001; Stewart 2006). In further exploring this question, we also discuss the point about global social cohesion with a focus on the concepts of humiliation and self-respect.

Global Economic Inequality and Individuals' Self-Respect

A further line of DGE argues that, in current conditions of vast global disparities in income, inequality causes the humiliation of the world's worse-off. Charles Beitz (2001: 104) forcefully makes this argument when he notes that global economic conditions make some individuals 'feel unacceptable or unworthy

of respect, as if one's life is not regarded by others as having significance or integrity of its own'. Thomas Scanlon in his work on domestic inequality expresses the concern that underlies Beitz's point. According to Scanlon (2003: 204), one reason for objecting to vast differences in income is:

the belief that it is an evil for people to be treated as inferior, or made to feel inferior. . . . Large differences in material well-being can be objectionable on the same ground: when the mode of life enjoyed by some people sets the norm for a society, those who are much worse off will feel inferiority and shame at the way they must live.

Transposed to the global context, the argument about humiliation runs as follows:

- C₁ A secure sense of self-respect is an essential element of individuals' well-being.
- C₂ The world's worse-off suffer damage to their self-respect by perceiving the vast difference in income between them and the world's better-off.
- C₃ Global economic inequality is objectionable because it undermines the self-respect of individuals' worldwide.

However, the notion that global inequality creates humiliation is open to dispute. To begin with, its claim that the global poor take the global rich as a reference group, both for consumption and social reference is contentious, as mentioned above. If one accepts the widespread 'subjectivist' understanding of self-respect, this uncertainty undercuts the claim that global inequality diminishes the self-respect of the poor. On the subjectivist view, self-respect consists in having favourable self-regard, or an attitude of self-approval (Massey 1983; Middleton 2006). If it is unclear whether worse-off individuals worldwide compare themselves to the global rich, it becomes dubious to consider global inequality relevant to the self-respect of the global poor. In reply, one might reject the subjectivist understanding of self-respect. One might insist that severe global inequality is harmful to the self-respect of the worse-off in an *objective* sense—that is, regardless of who they compare themselves against. However, invoking standards of self-respect that are independent of individuals' own perspectives is likely to produce contentious, metaphysically charged arguments. This goes against the grain of much contemporary theorizing, which aims to 'stay on the surface, philosophically speaking' (Rawls 1999: 395). Until it is shown how such 'thick' arguments can be justifiable to all citizens of a pluralistic society, the objectivist reply is of limited usefulness.

A further weakness of the DGE argument about self-respect is that the humiliation-based objection to inequality seems difficult to sustain if inequality is not accompanied by poverty. Scanlon mentions that those who live below

a certain standard of living could conceivably be humiliated because of living below that standard. In this regard, there needs to be initial agreement of an absolute level of an accepted standard of living, so that individuals below that standard can be determined. This is likely to be socially contingent, and it is unlikely that the social level is global as opposed to domestic or even regional. Importantly, Scanlon discusses extreme inequality. It is very difficult to separate the moral objection to this type of inequality from the extreme poverty of the person involved in the comparison. Thus whether an objection to inequality, as opposed to poverty, has been established remains open to dispute. Scanlon (2003: 204–5) emphasizes that the situation is comparative and goes beyond an objection to poverty. It should thus be applicable to a different hypothetical world. Let us imagine, in today's conditions, a region/country/world that is very prosperous on the whole with the highest income being \$10 million a year and the lowest income being \$100,000 a year. The relatively poor in this society cannot present themselves in the same way the rich can – their cars, for instance, give them away. In this case, unless one acknowledges the moral importance of envy, it is very difficult to see how the lives of the poor in this hypothetical world are humiliating. It seems, then, the humiliation objection is not comparative across all cases and remains entrenched in an objection to poverty.¹⁸

Our simple scenario, which can be called *S*, abstracts from some important features of today's world. For instance, *S* does not take account of the fact that relations of economic inequalities are mostly maintained by unfair means. People often cannot improve the economic status they inherited by birth as a result of factors outside their control – educational disadvantage, class segregation, racism, gender stereotypes, and so on. Because of this underlying element of real-world unfairness, inequality is often humiliating even when it is not accompanied by poverty. This is a hardly disputable claim about current social and political conditions, and we do not wish to deny it. But the claim does not contradict our findings about *S*. Our example is designed to isolate the moral significance of inequality alone. The unfairness objection just adds a further variable to the scenario – morally arbitrary constraints on individuals' life chances. This new scenario, which can be called *S*₂, certainly engenders humiliation. However, our point is that the source of humiliation in *S*₂ is not inequality but unfairness. This can be seen by removing the element of inequality from *S*₂. Thus imagine a new scenario, called *S*₃, in which individuals' life chances are constrained by *equality* rather than inequality. In *S*₃ persons are born into very similar economic circumstances, which they are unable to improve despite their best efforts. Extreme historical variants of communism, which glorified economic uniformity in the name of emancipation, may be likened to *S*₃. If one thinks that *S*₂ is humiliating, it is difficult to deny that *S*₃ is also humiliating. Moreover, the two scenarios are humiliating for the same reason that is unrelated to inequality – the inability of individuals to shape their lives as they see fit.

One possibility for strengthening the humiliation objection has been proposed by Martin O'Neill. He claims to advance arguments that are 'egalitarian in a more robust sense' (O'Neill 2008: 125), since he presents global inequality as objectionable even without the intervention of other factors, such as poverty. O'Neill's position focuses on the distinctly *social* dimension of economic inequality—that is, the effects of economic inequality on how persons interact with one another in their private, everyday pursuits. O'Neill emphasizes that economic disparities subvert the spirit of caring about treating persons in a fair, respectable and non-humiliating way. In other words, inequality undermines the conditions under which individuals can relate to each other as social equals, one of which is individuals' self-respect.

O'Neill's argument is inspired by the republican insight that equality requires an egalitarian ethos.¹⁹ On this view, the idea of a society of equals demands an important active component: individuals' commitment to behaving with respect for the equal standing of all members of the society. This type of social interaction crucially demands that citizens harbour proper, equality-affirming attitudes, and that they act on these attitudes in their mutual relations. The core idea of O'Neill's 'robust' DGE is that factors outside individuals' control—namely, economic inequality—deter them from forming such proper attitudes. Individuals are, for instance, discouraged from displaying civic regard for others when their own self-respect is under threat. They will then struggle to find value in any of their pursuits, including those that concern the equal standing of others. As Rawls (2005: 440) writes, in such conditions individuals lose confidence in the worth of their projects, and 'sink into apathy and cynicism'. And this erosion of self-esteem, maintains O'Neill (2008: 130), is 'offensive to the dignity and standing of human agents'.²⁰

O'Neill's argument isolates the concern about inequality from concerns about the various accompanying effects of inequality, such as poverty. However, it remains incomplete because it fails to provide any explication or defence of the bold claim that global economic inequality undermines individuals' dignity. In order for his claim about self-respect to be reinforced, a more comprehensive justification of the concern about global social equality is needed. His claim that links individuals' dignity to their standing in non-market social relations can be expanded in various directions. We cannot survey the various possibilities here, but we can make a note about the general character of the requisite account of dignity. O'Neill favours a particular approach to defending this concern, which has been termed *non-relational*. According to this approach, facts about the kind and intensity of social relations play no part in the justification of principles for regulating those relations (Sangiovanni 2007). As O'Neill notes, although strong DGE is 'centrally concerned with social relations', the source of this normative preoccupation is not in any feature of those relations. The mere fact of worldwide interaction between persons—whatever the quality of that interaction—triggers the requirement of social equality. Properties such as the amicability, frequency,

cultural intimacy, or mutual profitability of persons' contacts are normatively irrelevant. These properties are 'significant with regard to the *application* of egalitarian considerations', but not to their content of justification (O'Neill 2008: 138 n. 43, original emphasis). Appealingly, this perspective can explain how persons that are not united by affection, citizenship, culture or economy may owe each other duties of equal concern, so long as they have minimal mutual interaction. However, the perspective also calls for deep, perhaps even metaphysical backing. As Sangiovanni (2008: 139) remarks, since the non-relational approach fully abstracts from the qualities of human interactions, its normative claims must be defended 'by appealing solely to moral values or to facts about human beings as such'. The challenge in developing $C_1 - C_3$ is to provide some such justification of the concern about global social equality, and yet do so without invoking arguments that are overly contentious or speculative.

Global Economic Inequality and Procedural Unfairness

A third line of derivative global egalitarian argument, proposed by Charles Beitz, concerns the connection between global inequality and procedural fairness at multilateral institutions. The argument can be presented as follows:

- D₁ Global economic inequality creates procedural unfairness in multilateral institutions.
- D₂ Procedural unfairness is morally objectionable.²¹
- D₃ By virtue of generating procedural unfairness, global inequality is objectionable.

Beitz's (2001: 108–9) argument is that in international organizations inequality 'distorts the process of political decision making by causing some interests to be weighted more heavily than they should be, given their nature and urgency, and others less'. Beitz supports this argument with empirical evidence of how international organizations formally or informally limit the choices of the worse-off states. To elaborate upon Beitz's examples, multilateral institutions constrict the choices available to worse-off states in two major ways. First, some international organizations assign *unequal status* to their members due to disparities in political-economic power. For instance, the World Bank and the IMF have weighted voting structures, which privilege the role of the USA in decision-making and reflect a political-economic economic system that has become increasingly out of date with the rise of emerging markets (Beitz 2001: 108; Woods 2006).²² Second, political-economic inequalities also translate into *inequalities in influence* over the institution's policies.²³ For example, the WTO acknowledges the equality of status of its member-states, such that the

principle that each member is entitled to one vote underlies the practice of decision-making through consensus. However, the dominance of great economic powers, particularly the USA and the European Union, in agenda setting and bargaining can distort the formal equality of status (Steinberg 2002). More generally, a substantial concern of the recent literature on economic development has been the lack of ‘policy space’ afforded by international organizations to developing countries. The idea of policy space refers to a country’s ability to push forward, within some institutional framework, the goals necessary for its economic development. Assuming there is no uniform set of policies that is able to promote development in all countries, under all circumstances, policy space advocates domestic autonomy and experimentation with development policies (Gallagher 2005; Rodrik 2007).²⁴ In sum, Beitz’s argument about procedural unfairness is compelling because global economic inequality clearly affects poor countries’ ability to shape their own future within the framework of global bodies.²⁵ For instance, in explaining how the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations were tilted in favour of advanced economies, Beitz (2001: 108) writes:

What is clear is that the poor countries’ inability to win more favourable terms of access to intellectual property was related to the lack of resources they could bring to bear in the negotiations. Their capacity to represent their interests effectively was impaired in a way when the political process is subject to the influence of extremes of private wealth.

Beitz’s approach appears state-centric, in that he seems to be suggesting that global inequality matters because it curtails the choices of *states* (and not individuals). However, reading Beitz in the wider context of his work in global ethics, which is firmly individualist,²⁶ reveals that Beitz refers to states as being both recipients and agents of justice.²⁷ For instance, when states receive foreign aid, they are recipients of justice. Yet, states are recipients of justice only insofar as they are agents of justice internally – as deliverers of justice to their citizens. Thus Beitz (1999a: 271) suggests, ‘there is no conceptual reason to have to choose between a theory whose only units are individuals and one whose only units are states’. Even if one is ultimately concerned about the rights and interests of individuals, it is not inconsistent to advocate improving the position of states, as inter-state inequalities can be regarded objectionable because they can impair states’ abilities to act as agents of justice. Simply, international inequality can hinder poor states’ capacities to offer to their citizens the goods and services they would be able to offer in the absence of inequalities.²⁸ All in all, Beitz’s concern with international inequality seems intuitive and compelling.

Yet we believe that Beitz’s concern about international inequality as a means to ameliorating the condition of individuals, where states act as proxy recipients of justice, is inadequate *so long as* it does not take into account the fact of

widespread intra-country inequalities. These intra-state disparities curtail the ability of many states to deliver justice internally, which defeats the purpose of treating states as proxy recipients of justice. Let us illustrate this point with examples. Today the USA is undoubtedly a great economic power, meaning it suffers no negotiating disadvantage in international fora, such as the WTO. Nonetheless, the USA's negotiating power in these platforms is no guarantee that the state actors will be advancing the interests of poor individuals. It is a well-documented fact that rich citizens are able to exert disproportionate influence on internal governance.²⁹ In some cases, the rich have so much political power domestically that they can shape the agenda of international negotiations by influencing national decision-makers. For instance, scholars argue that pharmaceutical interest groups in Europe and the USA pressed their governments for the signing of the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights agreement as a part of the WTO agreements, the precise concern of Beitz's aforementioned example (Stiglitz 2006; Wade 2005). In contrast, since the poor lack the resources to effectively organize themselves, their interests have little chance to be voiced in the highest political fora. This problem is present in many democratic settings, let alone non-democratic settings. A criticism of this point could be that the USA uses its negotiating leverage to advance the interests of not just its rich citizens, but also its less-advantaged citizens. Consider, for instance, the USA's protection (until recently) of its textile industry, which was to protect both its textile factory-owners and textile-workers. Nonetheless, this example does not suggest that state policies are shaped by concerns for the poor generally, but rather concerns for competitiveness and interest group pressure. Research has demonstrated that relatively small groups that have coherent preferences over an outcome and that stand to gain/lose from a policy can lobby the government more effectively than diffuse groups that experience dispersed benefits/losses and/or with less coherent policy references (Olson 1965). This point does not suggest that interest group capture occurs everywhere and all the time and always in favour of the privileged groups and that international organizations are always plagued by it.³⁰ Rather, it suggests that complex dynamics of policy-making complicate a simple formula of enhanced state power equals better representation for the poor. Thus addressing international inequalities may be necessary, but not sufficient.

The differentiation between global and international inequality is also important in determining which international-level policies may improve the lot of the worse-off. For instance, in his writing about 'resource and borrowing privileges', Pogge (2007a: chap. 1) draws attention to the fact that corrupt leaders of poor countries have been able to claim ownership of resources, such as oil, that in essence belong to the people in that state. At the same time, these corrupt leaders have been able to borrow in international markets, being treated as legitimate sovereigns by the international community. Wenar (2008) similarly emphasises the disenfranchised position of the poor citizens of

poor states in relation to their countries' natural resources, and their ensuing political powerlessness. Both authors show that ensuring fairness for the poor may require revisions of some international law practices, such as the present understanding of resource ownership. At their cores, these two works have a concern for how international-level policies can address global, and not international, inequality. Furthermore, as Milanovic (2005) shows, there is a chance that some transfers from citizens of developed countries to citizens of developing countries could in fact be regressive transfers, i.e. those from someone relatively poor to someone relatively rich. He demonstrates that the likelihood of regressive transfers increases if transfers occur from rich countries to countries with high inequality, such as Brazil, who have very rich people at the top decile of the income distribution (Milanovic 2005: 134–5). Milanovic's example is important in demonstrating that if one were to institute a global redistribution mechanism, the transfers would not simply be in accordance with international inequality, but would have to take into consideration intra-country inequalities. In sum, $D_1 - D_3$ represents a compelling argument about procedural fairness and the design of global institutions, but incorporating a concern for the conceptual differentiation between international and global inequality would strengthen it considerably.

Conclusion

The article has analyzed global derivative egalitarian arguments that focus on the association between global inequality and global social ills, global inequality's effects on individuals' self-respect, and global inequality's impact on procedural unfairness within international organizations. In doing so, the article has aimed to create a dialogue between works that make similar arguments across a number of different disciplines. In its synthesis, the article has identified arguments that are compelling as well as arguments that could be strengthened with more research. For example, the concern of various authors that global inequality affects efforts to reduce global poverty merits great attention. Arguments regarding global inequalities' effects on procedural fairness are also compelling. Yet the article has also aimed to point out areas where more argumentation or empirical work is necessary to advance some of the moral claims. For instance, certain global derivative egalitarian arguments make insufficient conceptual differentiation between two forms of world-level inequality: global inequality among individuals and international inequality among countries. An area where more empirical research would be beneficial concerns the extent to which individuals compare their living conditions with those that live across the world as opposed to in local, national, or even regional settings. Overall, derivative egalitarian arguments are important in establishing points of convergence regarding why global inequality matters for

commentators coming from different perspectives. For instance, communitarians and cosmopolitans can reach basic agreement on the points that global economic inequality reinforces political inequality, that there is something about gross inequality that affects nations' abilities to self-determine, and that it adversely affects international cooperation.³¹ In short, derivative arguments usefully widen the normative debate about worldwide inequality by detaching the concern about global inequality from the ideal of equality.

There remain important issues that fall outside of the scope of this article. Specifically, this article has examined economic inequality in the form of income inequality. It has not made any claims as to how the global derivative egalitarian arguments hold up against considerations of other types of inequality, including wealth inequality, gender inequality, as well as inequality in capabilities.³² Future research could focus on this issue. Moreover, since the goal of this article has been to prepare the ground for the further development and assessment of DGE, we have not explored the possible policy implications of our discussion. This is another area for further investigation, since it is not immediately obvious how some of our points can bear on political practice. Particularly how the concern about worldwide inequality between persons can be incorporated into the agenda of global institutions begs clarification. We, therefore, conclude with some preliminary and tentative suggestions on this matter.

We have argued that if global institutions are to contribute to improving the lot of the global worse-off, then levelling the negotiating power of states may not suffice.³³ Individual access to the global institutions may be necessary, so that poor individuals do not suffer from the problem of lack of voice, and proper representation, on two different levels, both on the domestic and the international. The international human rights regime aims to redress domestic failures of justice on the international level by allowing individuals to bring cases against states (e.g., the European Court of Human Rights), or by stepping in to punish crimes against humanity when the domestic system fails to do so (the International Criminal Court). How these principles of the international human rights regime can be applied to other global institutions is beyond the discussions of this article, but it is not unfeasible to imagine ways in which individuals can seek redress from the global institutions discussed in this article. For instance, an ambitious proposal has been to form an elected WTO parliamentary body, which would ensure direct individual access (Cabrera 2007).³⁴ Less ambitious proposals have focused on allowing individual access to the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism, for instance through relevant non-governmental organizations, though one has to recognize that NGOs can act differentially toward some individuals at the expense of others.³⁵ Most likely, different institutions can offer differing solutions to the problems set out. What remains important is that in today's world of widespread domestic injustices, equalizing the formal or bargaining position of states may not contribute enough to improving the position of the worst-off individuals.

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Notes

- ¹ As Milanovic (2005) explains, global inequality has two major determinants: international inequality, understood generally as differences in the mean incomes of countries, and intra-country income inequality. Here, we use the terms more loosely: 'global inequality' refers to economic, specifically income, inequality between the world's individuals, and 'international inequality' to economic inequality across countries. Most calculations, including Milanovic's, demonstrate that when countries are weighted by population, international inequality has recently been on the decline, thanks mostly to economic growth in China and India.
- ² For the notion of 'radical inequality' see Pogge (2002a: 196–215) and Nagel (1977).
- ³ See for instance Beitz (2001) and Wilkinson (2005).
- ⁴ For earlier statements of intrinsic and non-intrinsic egalitarianism, respectively, see Cohen (2000) and Raz (1986). For a useful overview of issues surrounding egalitarianism see Parfit (1997).
- ⁵ We offer a synthetic classification of arguments embraced by various authors, sometimes coming from different fields. We imply neither that any of these authors actually regard themselves as 'derivative egalitarians' nor that they do not hold views outside this rubric.
- ⁶ For a discussion of different strands of egalitarianism see Parfit (1997).
- ⁷ Some may question whether one who thinks that inequality is wrong but *not* that equality is morally required can convincingly call herself an egalitarian of any sort. We do not pursue this thought any further, and instead assume that the derivative position is a coherent form of egalitarianism.
- ⁸ Beitz (2001: 109), for instance, claims that the principal advantage of the non-intrinsic outlook is that it 'shows that there are ethically significant reasons for concern about global inequality that do not depend on the prior adoption of a particular theoretical view about the moral character of the global community or of an egalitarian social ideal whose pertinence might be limited to the western liberal democracies'. Raz (1986), writing earlier, was more inclined to justify the non-intrinsic outlook by presenting it as the soundest way of grounding the concern about equality.
- ⁹ In later work, Singer (1977: 35–6) re-emphasised that this essay's core argumentation is *not* tied to the utilitarian standpoint: '[W]hile I am myself inclined toward a utilitarian view, it was my aim in writing "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" to produce an argument which would appeal not only to utilitarians, but also to anyone who accepted the initial premises of the argument, which seemed to me likely to have a very wide acceptance. So I tried to get around the need to produce a complete ethical theory by allowing my readers to fill in their own version – within limits – of what is morally significant, and then see what the moral consequences are'.
- ¹⁰ The utilitarian outlook, which Singer otherwise espouses, is incompatible with the pluralistic view of practical reason, since it presents net utility as the only weighing criterion. However, as noted, Singer's principle does not have a utilitarian basis and leaves open what grounds the duty to assist, which makes it possible to analyze the principle using the pluralistic conception of practical reason.

- ¹¹ As Wenar (2003: 291) remarks regarding Singer, 'clearly what the rich could sacrifice would be of little importance to them compared to the tremendous benefits that their sacrifices could bring to the world's impoverished people'.
- ¹² As Wenar (2003: 291) puts it, the trouble with Singer's assumption is that it 'ignores the extraordinarily complex causal nexus that lies between the rich and those distant from them who live in poverty'.
- ¹³ An intensely debated question is whether/when foreign aid promotes the economic development of poor countries. For opposing perspectives on this issue see Sachs (2005), Easterly (2006) and Collier (2007).
- ¹⁴ Although we do not contest Singer's principle per se but its applicability to the issue of global inequality, the principle itself has met with much criticism. A recent objection was put forward by Appiah (2007: 158–62), who argues that the principle generates practical requirements that are either too demanding or too vague. He therefore suggests a revised principle: 'If you are the person in the best position to prevent something really awful, and it won't cost you much to do so, do it' (2007: 161). Although this revision arguably makes Singer's recommendations more precise, it also fails to clarify the notion of the 'cost of assistance'.
- ¹⁵ Within the bounds of this essay, we assume the tenability of these arguments in the domestic context.
- ¹⁶ Sen (2008) seems to support our point here by arguing that although a relationship between poverty/inequality and violent conflict cannot be ruled out, 'economic reductionism', namely reducing the presence of violent conflict to economic factors as such, overlooks the complexity of factors leading to conflict.
- ¹⁷ In the next section we consider a corollary to this argument about social cohesion: one that examines how individuals' self-respect is affected by global inequality.
- ¹⁸ Some pluralist egalitarians, like Larry Temkin (1993), allow for the badness of inequality to depend on the absolute levels of advantage of the involved parties and not just the magnitude of the inequality itself and agree that inequality is not the only important value. However, our suggestion here is stronger than the claim that inequality is less objectionable when not accompanied by poverty. We claim that it is difficult to see that inequality is objectionable *at all*, from the standpoint of self-respect, in the absence of poverty.
- ¹⁹ O'Neill thus approvingly cites Rawls's 'Rousseauian' treatment of excessive economic inequality among members of a political society: 'the fundamental status in political society is to be equal citizenship, a status all have as free and equal persons' (Rawls 2001: 132). Although Rawls's remark does not relate directly to excessive economic inequality, it arguably demonstrates his allegiance to the republican ideal of a society of equals.
- ²⁰ O'Neill neither distinguishes clearly between the concepts of self-respect and dignity, nor explains their inter-relationship. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that O'Neill regards individuals' self-respect as a necessary condition of their dignity.
- ²¹ The concept of global procedural fairness refers to the way in which the membership of existing world-order institutions is regulated and the way in which these institutions formulate decisions and policies. Being constrained to the proper functioning of existing global bodies, the concept is narrower and less contentious than the concept of distributive justice, which often abstracts from current institutional arrangements and is more likely to involve idealizing assumptions. For a more detailed discussion of global procedural fairness see Franck (1995).
- ²² Beitz's example of the UN Security Council's permanent members' veto power is more problematic here, as they were assigned the permanent membership based on the outcome of the Second World War, and not due to global economic inequality per se.
- ²³ On this point see also Scanlon (2003: 205).
- ²⁴ In this regard, policy space is the antithesis of the neoliberal economic policies advocated vehemently, at least until lately, by the World Bank and the IMF, as well as the WTO.
- ²⁵ We say 'affect' instead of 'cause' because it may be that unfair rules are not necessarily caused by economic inequality, but rather maintained or exacerbated by it. Hence a more nuanced articulation of $D_1 - D_3$ along these lines would make the argument more precise.

- ²⁶ See for example Beitz (1999b) and Caney (2005). An alternative reading here is that Beitz is primarily concerned about inter-state asymmetries and not about individuals, but that seems unlikely given the large body of work in which he advances cosmopolitan arguments.
- ²⁷ This is not to say that states are the only recipients or agents of justice. In later work on human rights, Beitz (2009) has focused on the deliverance of human rights by NGOs.
- ²⁸ Compare Kapstein (2006: 43): 'When states deny one another the possibility of shaping their own destinies, it becomes much more difficult to achieve cosmopolitan objectives'.
- ²⁹ See World Bank (2005) and Verba et al. (1995).
- ³⁰ Keohane et al. (2009) argue that international organizations can allow for 'democracy-enhancing' policies on the domestic level. For instance, by allowing the US Executive, who appeals to a broader set of interests than special interests, the WTO indirectly diminishes the power of special interests. This point, however interesting, does not settle our concern because the diffuse interest groups could very well be rich consumers. In fact, the authors concede that 'multilateral institutions may often incorporate a pro-rich bias' (Keohane et al. 2009: 13).
- ³¹ David Miller (2007: chap. 3) thus agrees with all these points despite the theoretical divergences between him and, for instance, Beitz.
- ³² See Sen (1999).
- ³³ A counter-argument could be that global institutions should not be burdened with the task of contributing to improving the lot of the worse-off. It is worth noting, however, that major global institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF, recognize poverty reduction as part of their core missions, and the WTO facilitates world trade with a view to engendering economic development. In any case, the legitimacy of these institutions have been inextricably linked with whether they are able to advance the conditions of the worse-off.
- ³⁴ Falk and Strauss (2001) argue for a general global parliamentary body.
- ³⁵ The WTO disputes occur only between member states and no private third parties are represented. Since the pressure to have (groups of) individuals, particularly NGOs, access the dispute settlement process has been brewing, the WTO has itself taken a tentative step in including third parties. Although contested by member states, the Appellate Body of the WTO dispute settlement mechanism has declared its right to accept *amicus curiae* briefs, and the dispute settlement Panel can 'seek' such briefs. For further discussion see Mavroidis (2001).

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