does not supply us with a simple formula or yardstick. Ultimately, the task of rich peoples providing aid to poor peoples is political, a task to which philosophy can only offer a framework for understanding. I hope to have clarified egalitarianism in this essay by providing a demanding yet nuanced project of equalizing the conditions of human flourishing; how to effect egalitarianism globally remains a matter of will and action in light of particular circumstances.

We live in a world characterized by enormous disparities of wealth and property, of health, self-respect, and the development of human potential. The moral worldliness of contemporary arguments for cosmopolitanism must be paired with cultural worldliness to give scope to the non-material aspects of human flourishing and sensitivity to the diversity that culture presents. It is an unequally flourishing world and it is by focusing our theory and practice on the social conditions that impede the flourishing of persons that we will better achieve the global justice that, for all the successes of egalitarian movements in certain, privileged parts of the world, continues so desperately to elude us.

NOTES

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1 Paradoxically, “cosmopolitan” was also a Bolshevik term of abuse connoting disloyalty to Russia, bourgeois class origins, or dilettantish taste.

2 Although it is interesting to note how socialist utopians have sought to address inequality in romantic success: the nineteenth-century French socialist Charles Fourier argued that the young should provide sexual services to the old; the Bolshevik Alexander Kollontai proposed a more encompassing idea of love with “winged eros”; in contemporary debate Philippe Van Parijs has suggested financial compensation for bad luck in the marriage market (see Fourier, 1972; Kollontai, 1992 and Van Parijs, 1995).

3 Glenn Loury’s idea of “racial stigma” in the case of black Americans captures this phenomenon. See Loury (2002).

4 Colien (1994) emphasizes the role of relations of community for redistribution.

CHAPTER 6

Global justice, moral development, and democracy

Christopher Bertram

Of all the unlucky things that can happen to a person, being born into the wrong state has to be one of the worst. Someone who is born to become the citizen of a wealthy country enjoys life prospects far better than those unfortunate enough to be born in a poor one. According to a common view, the goal of distributive justice is to nullify the effects of brute luck on a person’s life and to make their success or failure a function not of their circumstances but of their choices. Such a conception, once projected onto a global scale, becomes awesomely demanding in its apparent redistributive implications. Moreover, since there will always be new people born into circumstances not of their choosing, but, rather, determined by the prior choices of their forbears, such a view suggests an almost permanent regime of correction and transfer.

This essay argues that in order to secure individuals’ access to an important set of goods and some morally significant capacities, we ought to favor political arrangements that severely limit the scope for such luck-compensatory transfers. The goods in question are those associated with being a functioning citizen of a democratic community and the capacities are the Rawlsian ones of being able to form, pursue, and revise one’s conception of the good and of a sense of justice. Access to such goods and capacities – indeed, their formation and sustenance – requires the decentralized political arrangements characteristic of a plurality of states in the world and the possibility for citizens to shape their lives through a combination of individual and collective choices and efforts.

The inequalities that characterize the actual world are the product of centuries of both choice and effort on the one hand, and exploitation and oppression on the other. There is nothing that could justify such extensive inequalities, which leave some without enough to sustain their most basic capacity for life, whilst others enjoy almost unimaginable luxury. But were we to start with a plurality of democratic states operating against a
background of fair initial distribution of resources, it is foreseeable, as a consequence of reasonable choices, that some nations, states, or peoples would become wealthier than others. This essay contends that, subject to some qualifications, this predictable consequence is unobjectionable just so long as all are assured of the capability to function as citizens of democratic states.

In what follows I first argue that certain types of political arrangement are propitious for the development of moral capacities – such as the sense of justice – and also give individuals access to important dimensions of human flourishing. I then say a little about what the preconditions (in terms of resources, institutions, social structure, and culture) for those political arrangements might be. I then argue that the extensive decision-making autonomy associated with such arrangements makes a measure of inequality practically inevitable and that this should not be a matter of moral concern. Finally, I reply to some possible objections, entering necessary caveats and qualifications.

PSYCHOLOGY AND STABILITY

A complete theory of justice should contain an account of how people come to acquire and retain a commitment to its principles. Arguably, a theory that simply postulates universal principles without showing how they might be realized and maintained is otiose. Prominent among theories that do seek to marry the ideal to a sensitivity to the limitations of human nature and the practicalities of moral education and formation is that of John Rawls (1999b). For Rawls, one of the principal desiderata of just social arrangements is that they should generate positive feedback to strengthen themselves over time. If an institutional setup fosters a sense of alienation in those who work within it, or decreases their motivation to play their part, it is unlikely to persist over many generations. This requirement finds expression in Rawls’s emphasis on stability.

In Rawls’s own theory of justice for the domestic case, an important characteristic of the well-ordered society is that it have this self-reinforcing quality. Within the wider society, particular institutions, such as the family, play a vital role in fostering the moral attitudes and dispositions necessary to sustain justice at the societal level and the scope given to family autonomy is partly justified by this role. Although Rawls’s own view of the family and its actual configuration has rightly been criticized as being altogether too benign, the example is important for my argument here. The promotion and assurance of justice may require institutional arrangements which, if they are to retain integrity, themselves in turn place pressure on what may be done to promote justice.²

It is, then, a strong objection to a conception of justice that its institutional embodiment will fail to generate its own support. One way in which this failure might happen is if citizens systematically disidentify with the decisions taken within the structures that constitute that institutional embodiment. For example, if citizens do not see its decisions and processes as being their own but rather as being imposed upon them by technocratic or bureaucratic elites. I shall argue that political and legal structures where decisions that are fateful for citizens are not subject to their control but are rather taken by such elites will indeed fail to generate the necessary support. Specifically, that the institutional framework that the fostering of moral agency requires is one in which citizens enjoy considerable discretion about how to conduct their own lives (and those of their families) and where such restrictions as they impose on their conduct for mutual benefit are genuinely subject to their democratic control.

So what characteristics must institutions have if they are, first, to foster the development and sustain the possession of the capacity of people to formulate their plans and aims in life and to subject those plans to something like the right degree of critical scrutiny and revision, and second to have due regard for the personhood and agency of others and to their right to pursue their plans and aims? Two things seem especially important, even if they do not constitute the whole story about the formative capacity of just institutions.³ These two properties are first, that of supporting an appropriate connection between a person’s actions and what we may call, for want of a better word, their fate. Second, that of sustaining the possibility of each person achieving or securing the recognition by others of their own significance in a way that is non-self-defeating. The first claim is that the development of autonomy and of a sense of self-respect is usually dependent on a person’s fate being connected to their actions in an appropriate kind of way (see Rawls, 1999b, §67). By this I mean simply that insofar as my actions in the world have, and are reasonably expected to have certain consequences for my well-being, for my attainment of my objectives, insofar as it matters what I do, then my sense of self-respect and of myself as being a presence in the world will be enhanced. By contrast, if my fate seems wholly disconnected from how I act, I will come to lose self-respect and a sense of myself as having significance. The key notion is that it is generally desirable that things are such that I can take responsibility for and recognize myself in the way in which things turn out for me.
Notoriously many features of the world conspire to deprive people of a sense that their actions make a difference to their fate. Poverty traps are one example: involuntary unemployment another. In the case of poverty traps it is hard for individuals to act to improve their situation. To work seems pointless, since they will lose in benefits what they gain in wages. People are condemned to a life of passivity and dependency, and particularly, dependency on the will of bureaucrats and politicians. Similarly, people who have worked all their lives in some industry may find that due to market conditions they suddenly lose both their livelihood and the activity which gave meaning to their lives. This deprivation is experienced like a deprivation due to an act of God or nature: the individual’s fate is placed outside their control and put in the hands of others.

The second important psychological dimension is recognition (see Dent, 1988). The important thought here is that, normally, for human beings to enjoy the sense of self-respect that is necessary for them both to function as effective pursuers of their own ends and to be reasonable in their dealings with others, they must be granted by others an unforced recognition of their moral status. While this can take a number of forms – including love relationships and relations of care and nurturing among family members – it must involve individuals being recognized by others as having sufficient standing in the world to give them a right to the reasonable pursuit of their interests and that their most critical interests have at least a prima facie claim to be met.

There is a fairly straightforward connection between these sorts of psychological considerations and Rawls’s two moral powers (1993b, lecture 2). A person who lacks a sense of themselves as a significant presence in the world and therefore of their own agency, will hardly be able to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good. Insofar as they can do something similar, they are likely to adapt their aims to what is possible in an excessively restricted and unambitious way. Similarly, someone lacking a sense of themselves as acting autonomously in the world will be less receptive to the correlative claim of others to act similarly and hence will fail to develop or to exercise a sense of justice. Instead, their attitude to others may become marked by resentment and jealousy.

**The Capability for Democratic Citizenship**

One recent attempt to articulate an alternative to “luck egalitarian” theories of distributive justice, and that focuses instead on the types of relationships that individuals might enjoy together in a democratic society, is Elizabeth Anderson’s essay “What is the point of equality?” (1999). Anderson’s positive ideal rests on a vision of society as a set of relations among equals, relations of respect and non-domination. She argues that egalitarians, in pursuit of this ideal, should pursue the distributive aim of securing for each member of society the capability for democratic citizenship. She thereby adapts and extends Amartya Sen’s capability approach to justice (see, e.g., Sen, 1992), to argue that we should enable all citizens to achieve a range of functionings associated with becoming a fully participating member of a democratic community.

On Anderson’s view the position she calls “democratic equality” has both positive and negative objectives.

Negatively, people are entitled to whatever capabilities are necessary to enable them to avoid or escape entanglements in oppressive social relationships. Positively, they are entitled to the capabilities necessary for functioning as an equal citizen in a democratic state. (Anderson, 1999, p. 316)

These twin aims occupy a space somewhere between the merely formal egalitarianism of rights of classical liberalism and the comprehensive social ambition of some other conceptions of egalitarianism. Democratic equality select for its focus those capabilities that are relevant to the needs citizens have to stand as equals to one another in a democratic society. Clearly some deficits in capability space matter to our achieving this status and others do not. The capability to perform a graceful pirouette in ballet or the capability to bend a free kick like Roberto Carlos, though both valuable to their possessors, are not relevant to their standing as co-citizens with others.

Anderson suggests that if people are to stand in such relations to one another, they need both the capability of political agency and to play their part within the wider civil society of which they are members. The first of these requires that they have formal freedoms such as the right to vote as well as protections for their right to political speech and assembly. The second requires protection against exclusion from, or demeaning segregation within, social institutions and spaces such as parks, streets, firms, schools, hospitals, and so on. In both cases, such high-level capabilities presuppose and draw upon other broader capabilities, such as the capability to function as a human being and as someone who participates in a “system of co-operative production.” In order to achieve these more basic, grounding capabilities, people need to be assured of adequate nutrition and shelter. They also need to have the opportunity for sufficient
education to permit them to deliberate effectively together. Additionally, they need to have sufficient opportunities to access the means of production, to be rewarded fairly and to achieve proper recognition for their performance within the general cooperative scheme.

As with other variants of the capability approach, democratic equality does not aim to ensure that people will achieve actual functionings at any particular level, merely that they will have access to such levels. This means that people have to be sufficiently motivated if they are to take advantage of their capabilities. Someone may enjoy a capability without achieving the related functionings if they are lazy and live the life of a couch potato or because they value other activities more. Moreover, while it is important that all persons have the capability to access some relevant functionings at an equal level, for other functions it is only important that all achieve a threshold level. For example, everyone should have the right to vote, but whilst everyone should be enabled to read and write, democratic equality does not require that everyone should achieve the same level of competence in obscure foreign languages.

Finally, democratic equality is not a starting gate theory that provides us all with a range of initial (relevant) capabilities and then allows us to get on with life. Sometimes people lose capabilities as a result of their voluntary choices. When this happens, “luck egalitarians” will permit people to fall below a capability threshold. But the democratic egalitarian approach is different: if a relevant capability must be restored to a person for them to stand in a relationship of equals to others, and it can be within reasonable limits of cost and difficulty, it should be, notwithstanding the fact that a person’s capability loss was, to put things bluntly and crudely, their own fault.

**PRECONDITIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC EQUALITY**

What is necessary for people to enjoy the capability for democratic citizenship, the capability to stand as equals with others in a democratic community? A full treatment of this is beyond the scope of this paper, but it should be possible to delineate some types of precondition. First, citizens will need access to sufficient resources to assure them of access to adequate levels of nutrition, education, housing, health care, and so on. Second, they need access to the right types of institutions: such as democratic assemblies, systems of local government and administration, and a free and reasonably diverse media. Third, the distribution of wealth and income must not be so unequal as to undermine the equal standing of citizens or their access to political decision-making mechanisms. Fourth, cultural background conditions must be propitious for democratic citizenship: even given formal equality of rights and adequate material resources for everyone, a society where attitudes are such that a subordinate status is assigned to women or to members of some ethnic groups, will not realize democratic equality. In this section I attend to these conditions, paying special attention to how they might be secured in the global rather than the domestic sphere.

**Absolute resource preconditions**

The absolute resource preconditions for someone to function as a citizen of a democratic society are probably rather modest (see Rawls, 1999b, p. 107). Clearly, to function as such, people need to be assured over most of their lifespan of adequate levels of nutrition and access to health care, and they also need access to a certain level of education. The temptation for those who think of themselves as liberal egalitarians (for a broad sense of those words) will be to set the bar too high, out of an understandable concern for the world’s poor. There are very many people in the world today whose access to resources is such that they cannot function as citizens of their societies. But we need to distinguish between the level of absolute poverty that would rule a person out of effective participation in any democratic society and the level that excludes them from being effective participants in particular societies given the wealth, income, and resources of that society and the distribution of those goods within the society.

That the absolute resource preconditions are modest can be seen both from historical and contemporary examples. Historically, our ancestors in various countries often achieved levels of functioning as participants in political life that are comparable to or surpass those that we enjoy today. Yet they did this at a much lower level of economic development than we now have in North America or Europe. Indeed, it is possible that the absolute resource preconditions for democratic participation by all have been met in some countries for well over a century. In today’s world, we should beware of insisting that democratic capability is out of reach of many of the poor, lest we devalue the continuing achievements of many such people in continuing to participate effectively in political life, often at levels surpassing those of wealthy countries.
Institutional preconditions

The second set of prerequisites for democratic citizenship are institutional. The point here is partly the very prosaic one that you cannot have a functioning democracy and be a voter without elections. But we can go beyond this to say that for citizens to function as such and to play various associated political roles, they need not only elections, but also representative institutions of some kind, political parties, perhaps machinery of local government, and guarantees of basic liberties such as freedom of association, assembly, and speech. And the “public forum” needs to be arranged so that all citizens can secure a reasonable degree of access to it and so that it functions properly as an arena for the exchange of ideas and the negotiation of interests.

To focus just on the formal satisfaction of these requirements would not be enough. Democratic institutions may exist but yet not be vehicles through which citizens can hope to exercise effective influence over the matters that are most significant for them. The causes of democratic failure are many and varied. They include the excessive influence of money over the political process, and redistricting and gerrymandering that disenfranchise large numbers of voters. I shall discuss the money problem in a moment. Here I should like to emphasize one particular source of trouble: the preemption of citizen decision-making by elites. The problem here is that there is very little scope for decision-making in practice, because all the decisions that matter have already been taken by someone else, somewhere else. If, for example, people nominally have a say in governing their school but in practice their decisions are completely constrained by budgetary or policy decisions taken in an education ministry, they will not have the capacity to exercise their democratic agency in relation to school government. If British or Danish electors are unable to change some policy or other because of prior decisions by a supra-national body like the European Union, a similar difficulty arises. Again, if the International Monetary Fund imposes a structural adjustment plan on some indebted Third World nation, the actual deliberations of the citizens of that country may be deprived of all significance.

I have deliberately selected my examples in the paragraph above so that some of them pander to the prejudices of the right, and others to the left. The point is not to say that decisions should never be preempted by higher bodies, Supreme Courts, or international agencies. Sometimes this has to happen because the nature of the problem is such that it can only be addressed by some such body. But at other times the level at which a matter is settled may have nothing to do with the merits of having it settled in this particular forum or that one, and everything to do with the desire of lobbyists, non-governmental organizations, lawyers, industries and so on to achieve their preferred result where they can. When this happens, something of value is diminished or lost: namely the capacity of citizens to exercise their democratic agency. It is easy to see that global institutions charged with implementing some distributive pattern or other, would have especially disempowering effects on the democratic agency of individual citizens.

Social preconditions

The main social obstacle to citizens enjoying democratic capability is inequality. The ways in which inequality can undermine their co-equal status are several. I discussed above the fact that the absolute resource preconditions for democratic citizenship are modest, but they are modest in abstraction from consideration of what others have within a society and how access to the means of political participation may require a particular level of wealth in a particular society. So, for example, if a society becomes wealthier and most of the population gain access to radio, or television, or the internet, collective political deliberation will increasingly take place on the assumption that people can listen to the radio, watch TV, or surf the net. Those who cannot afford such things used to participate with others in the public forum, but increasing wealth and inequality means that they can no longer do so. Their relative disadvantage in the space of resources has turned into an absolute disadvantage in the space of democratic capability (for discussion see Sen, 1983).

Second, large inequalities in wealth may translate directly into political influence for the wealthy in ways that are directly undermining of political equality. So, for example, if a society permits excessive concentration of media ownership or fails to restrict the financing of political campaigns, the political system will become unresponsive to the needs and voices of the many. Third, there is the familiar point that, in a society characterized by great inequality, the rich and poor do not enjoy genuine equality before the law. Laws will often impact differently on people, depending on their wealth and income, and whilst the rich will have the services of talented teams of lawyers to defend their interests, the poor will not.
There is no need to labor these familiar issues. Some mitigation of these effects of material inequality on the equal status of citizens may be possible through reforms designed to insulate political decision-making from the power of money (although there is room for skepticism about the effectiveness of such insulation in many cases). The interesting point concerning global distributive justice is the fact that within-country inequality may be more damaging to individuals’ access to democratic capability than between-country inequality will be. The economic inequality that we find within states can have a dramatic effect on whether people have the capability to function as democratic citizens. The wealthiest citizens of the United States have, as a result of their wealth, a political influence that far outstrips that of their poorest compatriots. The wealth and income enjoyed by the richest Americans threatens the democratic capability of the poorest Americans far more directly than it threatens the ability of poor Indians to participate in the political life of their country. To be sure, the capacity of those poor Indians is damaged or undermined by the rich of India, the point here is, however, that within-country differences are usually more significant for access to this important capability than between-country differences are.

This should not be taken as a denial that between-country differences can be important for democratic agency. I mentioned earlier as one possible example of preemption of democratic decision-making, the possibility that an organization like the International Monetary Fund may evacuate the democratic processes of a country of its significance. When, and insofar as, events like this are a consequence of between-country inequalities, those inequalities also damage citizens’ access to democratic capability.

Cultural preconditions

Even where people have adequate resources and suitable institutions there may also be cultural obstacles to many of them attaining the capability for democratic citizenship. For example, in societies which assign a subordinate status to women it will not be possible for women to stand as co-equal citizens with men whatever the formal rights they may be given by constitutional or other laws. And clearly, a parallel point can be made about members of oppressed racial or ethnic minorities within a society. The Roma of Slovakia, for example, may be equal in the eyes of the law, but they cannot function as citizens of Slovakian society on the same basis as other Slovaks because of the pervasive discrimination against them.

IS DEMOCRATIC EQUALITY AN Egalitarian Principle?

Securing the capability for democratic citizenship for all in a plurality of different polities looks like an attractive goal. Individuals achieve the capability to function in an important domain of human life, together with the achievement of other functionings that sustain that higher-level capability. What is more, the closeness of the dealings that citizens have with one another and the degree of control they can exercise over their lives together should be a good environment for the fostering of the virtue of justice and senses of reciprocity and responsibility. Moreover, since, in a well-ordered society, co-citizens all enjoy their status fully rather than as a matter of degree, there is an important sense in which this conception is an egalitarian one. Although it involves a sufficiency threshold, it is a threshold that, once met, secures certain important goods for all, equally.

It may be, then, that the achievement of equality in this capability space is compatible with some, and perhaps considerable, inequality in the space of wealth and income. It might therefore be tempting to say, if we allocate sufficient importance to the bundle of capabilities associated with democratic citizenship, that egalitarians should be satisfied just so long as everyone (at their different levels of wealth and income and in their different states) has sufficient to cross the threshold where those capabilities are assured. But this would be to move too quickly, as a straightforward example should make clear.

Imagine three parties engaged in mutually beneficial cooperation that takes them all above a relevant capability threshold. Let us further imagine that their cooperation may be governed by an ensemble of rules that distribute the benefits and burdens of working together and that these rules are the object of choice and negotiation. We can imagine for simplicity that there is a limited number of such possible ensembles. Imagine further two scenarios. Under one, two of the parties insist on an ensemble of rules that guarantees all three parties of their capability threshold but under which the benefits of growth above the threshold-securing level flow overwhelmingly to themselves. Under the other, a different ensemble of rules ensures that such benefits are more or less evenly distributed among the three parties. Other things being equal, I think we should want to say that the more even distribution is better from the point of view of justice than the less even one and that the parties who work together to insist on terms of trade that enrich themselves whilst the third party languishes just above the sufficiency threshold are thereby acting unjustly. To make this more concrete, we could even grant names to the parties involved. We
could call them Third World, EU and NAFTA. It would be a great achievement to get Third World above the sufficiency threshold, but even if these were secured there would still be objectionable injustice if EU and NAFTA conspired to maintain trade rules that ensured their own further enrichment but little or no additional benefit to Third World. The lesson that we should take from this is that securing the capability for functioning at a certain level cannot provide a complete account of distributive justice because there are some circumstances where sufficiency is assured and yet where it seems wrong to think of the outcome as just.

We can also imagine circumstances where we are forced to choose between securing a sufficiency threshold for some and responding to the urgency of the demands of others. Here we need to be careful to distinguish between two problems: the problem of what principles of justice we ought to adopt at a fundamental level and the problem of what our policy goals should be. If we set up an abstract example, involving two equally numerous groups of people, one of whom faces immediate death through starvation if they do not receive our aid, the other of whom risks falling below a threshold where the capability for democratic citizenship is possible, then it seems right that the urgency of the first group’s claim should trump the demands of the second group. This tells us that, at least sometimes, we should give priority to the least advantaged rather than aiming at securing a capability threshold at a certain level. But it certainly does not tell us that we should not, if we are interested in justice, pursue the capability for democratic citizenship as a primary goal. This is because that goal is not just of value in itself but should also be valued instrumentally to the satisfaction of individuals’ most urgent interests (see Sen, 1999, ch. 6). As Amartya Sen’s work on famines has shown, the fact that people have a political voice via democratic institutions is vital if policymakers are not to neglect their most vital needs. Indeed, the sensitivity of democratic institutions to such needs is a vital protection for the most vulnerable, not just against the indifferent and greedy, but also against high-minded bureaucrats and theorists who would use political power to further their own view of what justice requires in the face of the “short term” interests of those who are actually poor.

A PLURALITY OF NATIONS GENERATES INEQUALITY IN THE SPACE OF WEALTH AND INCOME

If citizens are to exercise their capacity for democratic decision-making together with one another and to identify with the collective making the decisions, then it is foreseeable that many decisions that are important and fateful for individuals’ lives will be taken at national or subnational level. And this is as it should be if citizens are to have the possibility of enjoying the goods associated with having significant control over their lives, getting ahead by their own efforts, and so on. Citizens of some countries will opt for more of a market economy than citizens of others, some national legislatures will set the working week at thirty-five hours, and others will not. And, partly because of policy and partly because of individual choices, some societies will have higher labor-force participation rates than others, and so on for a range of different possible decisions.

Even if we were to start with a perfectly equal endowment of resources among nations, we would expect the wealth and income available to nations to vary over time. Would this be objectionable from the point of view of democratic equality? No, or at least, not as such. If a country became so poor that its citizens’ capacity to function as citizens or to stand as equals to one another were undermined, then that would be a matter of concern. Although it seems unlikely that a genuinely democratic nation would thus impoverish itself by poor decision-making, one cannot completely rule out the possibility.

The case of democratic nations co-existing together and starting from a baseline of equality is a highly idealized one. It is instructive, though, in that it throws up a contrast with luck-egalitarian views (see Rawls, 1999b, pp. 117–118 and Blake, 2002). According to those views, individual citizens of poor nations who had opposed decisions that resulted in relative disadvantage to their nation or who were not responsible for a decision in virtue of having been born after it was made, would be owed compensation. Presumably, this compensation would come, if it came from anywhere, from transfers from the relatively advantaged citizens of wealthier nations. By contrast, on the view defended here, so long as citizens remain capable of exercising the capability for democratic citizenship alongside their (perhaps imprudent) compatriots, they suffer no deficit in the relevant space and are therefore not candidates for such transfers.

Democratic equality therefore sets a limit on what justice demands by way of compensatory transfer; it is less demanding than luck egalitarianism. But the question naturally arises of what should be done about those societies with citizens who fall below the resource threshold where the capability for democratic citizenship can be exercised. One way this might happen is if a country is so poor that, however resources are distributed
within the country, some people are going to have insufficient to get them over the capability threshold. But another, and perhaps more likely, problem is where internal maldistribution of resources is such that some people fall below that threshold even though they would not do so with a more egalitarian distribution.

The worry here is this: that we have focused our attention on supplying the conditions under which citizens can take collective responsibility for their own fate. Here we have the possibility that they may, by their own decision, undermine the conditions for that democratic responsibility. We might draw an analogy with the case of an individual who chooses a path in life that undermines the possibility of them exercising responsible choice in the future. An individual who becomes dependent on drugs or alcohol would be an example of this.

One way in which we might start to think about this problem, would be to draw an analogy with families. Families share some significant and relevant features with nations: they involve more than one person, decision-making rights are not equally distributed among generations at any one time, but decisions taken by members of one generation can be significantly fateful for members of another. First, let us consider the hypothetical case of two families, the Smiths and the Joneses – we can call this the Two Caring Families case. The Smith and Jones family are, at a given time, identical in all important respects. The two parents in each family enjoy the same levels of skill as the two in the other family, have identical job prospects, and so on. Similarly, each family has the same number of children, of the same sexes and ages. In each family, father and mother discuss whether it would be best to maximize their income and use paid care to look after the children whilst the parents are at work or, rather, for one parent to work and the other to remain at home with the children. The Smiths choose for both parents to work and in the Jones family the mother pursues her career whilst the father stays at home with the kids. After many years it becomes clear that the children who grow up in one family have been relatively advantaged compared to the ones who grew up in the other family (perhaps the increased wealth of the Smith household makes the difference, or the more nurturing environment of the Jones household). So we have a pattern of unchosen individual disadvantage that results from responsible collective choice. Should we sanction a compensatory transfer payment from the relatively advantaged children to the disadvantaged ones in this case? My instinct, which falls short of being an argument, is to say no, just so long as the disadvantaged children remain above a certain threshold. To say otherwise is to

disincetivize responsible choice (“The kids will be just as well off whichever way we choose, honey, so we may as well do whatever suits us best”).

Imagine now a similar case, which we can call the Caring and the Uncaring households. In the Caring household, the parents choose whichever of the household models from the Two Caring Families case that you, the reader, thinks best. In the Uncaring household, the parents are alcoholics or heroin addicts who fail to make responsible choices (in fact progressively lose the capacity for responsible choice) and whose children consequently suffer significant disadvantage. Here we may consider intervening and arranging for the children to be brought up in another household altogether, or, if this does not happen, we may consider that the disadvantaged children have a right to support in order to overcome a disadvantage that is not only not chosen by them, but, indeed, not really chosen by anyone.

The analogy between the Caring and Uncaring households with the case where some states are failed states should be easy to see. But as Tolstoy said, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way, and, likewise, failed states fail for many and varied reasons. It would be nice to come out with a categorical statement of a duty of assistance to cover the case of failed states. Starting from the capability perspective defended in this paper, the obvious thing to say would be that citizens of functioning democratic states have a collective duty of assistance that would aim to assure that citizens of failed states regain the capability for democratic citizenship. Such a duty might require direct intervention in the affairs of failed states or the provision of substantial material aid to their members. But, naturally, questions will arise about how extensive and demanding that duty will turn out to be, questions to which I cannot provide a complete and satisfactory answer in this essay. Relevant considerations will include the impact of assistance on the assisting society. So, for example, it would not be reasonable to have a duty so demanding that it would undermine the possibility of citizens in the assisting country themselves enjoying the capability for democratic citizenship. And there we should also apply a test of reasonable prospect of success to justify either intervention or assistance. Just as a heroin addict may be entitled to our assistance as she first attempts via rehab to regain the capability to stand as a co-equal citizen with others, but we may reasonably deny such assistance to the addict who has lapsed after twenty such attempts, it is entirely possible that there are societies where the prospect of success is so remote that we may reasonably deny our assistance.
CONCLUSION

If democratic equality, that is to say the provision to each person of the capability for democratic citizenship, is an important goal for egalitarian justice, then if we are to provide that capability to each we must give both people and peoples a substantial degree of control over their own affairs. If peoples are genuinely to exercise such control via democratic institutions then it is foreseeable that some nations will end up richer than others in the space of wealth and income. Within nations it is plausible to suppose that income inequalities are very important for the maintenance of political equality. If there is a massive gap between rich and poor then the poor will be pushed below the capability threshold where they can exercise the capacity for democratic citizenship. Between nations, though, there is much less reason to suppose that income and wealth inequalities are significant in this way.

This essay has argued that significant inequalities in the space of wealth and income are both compatible with and a plausible effect of pursuing one attractive conception of what egalitarians value. But it would be wrong to conclude without pointing out that very many of our fellow humans suffer significant deficits not just in the space of democratic capability, but also in that their very ability to function as human beings is endangered by war, famine, drought and so on. My focus on democratic equality for the sphere of global justice should not be taken to suggest that their claims on us are not of the greatest urgency.

NOTES

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1 Advocates of such views include Ronald Dworkin, Richard Arneson, G. A. Cohen, and Eric Rakowski.
2 These remarks, which partly draw on Rawls’s discussion of the sense of justice (1999b, ch. 8), are not meant to do more than indicate a relevant parallel. Rawls’s over-benign and uncritical attitude to actual family structures was rightly criticized by Susan Moller Okin (1989). For recent discussion on the delicate relationship between family autonomy and justice see Swift (2003).