

Real-World Global Egalitarianism

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The Oxford Handbook of International Political Theory

Edited by Chris Brown and Robyn Eckersley

Print Publication Date: Mar 2018

Subject: Political Science, Political Theory, International Relations

Online Publication Date: Apr 2018 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198746928.013.7

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter notes that normative International Political Theory (IPT) developed over the past several decades in response to political, social, and economic events. These included the globalization of trade and finance, the increasing credibility of human-rights norms in foreign policy, and a growing awareness of a global ecological crisis. The emergence of normative IPT was not simply an effort to understand these events, but an attempt to offer accounts of what the responses to them should be. Normative IPT, then, was originally doubly responsive to the real world. Additionally, this chapter argues that there is a plausible account of global egalitarianism, which takes the justification of principles of egalitarian justice to depend crucially on features of the social and economic world. The account of global egalitarianism applies to the current circumstances in part because of features of those circumstances.

Keywords: egalitarianism, human rights, ecological crisis, justice, normative political theory

THIRTY years ago there was no sub-discipline of political theory called “international justice.” Charles Beitz’s hugely influential book *Political Theory and International Relations* had been published (Beitz 1979). And there was a scattering of important publications by Brian Barry, Thomas Pogge, Henry Shue, and others (Barry 1981, 1982; Pogge 1988; Shue 1980). But the main normative debates in political theory were about issues of domestic justice. The end of the Cold War, the increasing globalization of trade and investment, increasing appeals to human rights in foreign policy, and the broadening of appreciation of the existence of a major global ecological crisis helped to bring about a significant change in the interests of many people working in political theory, especially young people. The rise of international justice to a major area of focus in political theory, then, seems to be the result of the discipline responding to major changes that made clear the importance of issues of justice between states and between people across state borders (see Chapter 11). One important way in which International Political Theory (IPT) connects to international practice, then, is by responding to questions posed by political and social developments.

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Hegel famously claimed that theory always follows events: “When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only at the onset of dusk” (Hegel 1991: 23). In contrast, Marx’s 11th Thesis on Feuerbach has a much more ambitious role for philosophy: not just to interpret the world but to change it (Marx 1972: 145). The explosion of normative theorizing about international justice in the last two decades not only tracks developments in the world but, in virtue of being normative, has posed important questions regarding whether and how the world should be changed. And any credible account of how the social and political institutions or policies should be changed will have to rely on information from the social sciences both about how existing institutions work and about how new ones might work. This chapter presents an account of global justice that is both empirically rooted and critical of (p. 119) existing practices and arrangements. It is an account that requires the input of empirical social science in order to support the claim of duties of egalitarian distributive justice. It is in that sense necessarily sensitive to empirical conditions. And it also can lend support to recommendations that policies and institutions should be changed so as to promote greater equality globally.

Global Inequality

The World Bank identifies two goals to be of the utmost importance. The first echoes the first Sustainable Development Goal: to end extreme poverty. The second, however, is to promote shared prosperity as a mean of addressing inequality (World Bank 2016). How unequal is the world? Across various measures there is deep, persistent, and in some cases growing global inequality. A recent study conducted by Oxfam found that by 2016 the combined wealth of the richest 1 per cent of the world’s population reached an amount greater than the combined wealth of the remaining 99 per cent. Recently, global inequality of wealth has been growing. In 2016 the richest 1 per cent’s share of wealth was over 50 per cent, while in 2009 it was about 44 per cent (Oxfam 2016). Within the wealthiest group there is also an incredible concentration of wealth. Thomas Piketty estimates that the wealthiest 0.1 per cent owns about 20 per cent of all wealth globally (Piketty 2014: 438) and he conjectures that their wealth has grown 6–7 per cent per year over the past three decades (p. 435). These can only be rough conjectures based on uncertain evidence, because the wealthy resist having their treasure officially documented.

Although wealth inequality is an important measure of private power differentials, there are other measures of inequality with moral salience. For example, global health inequalities are deep. According to the World Health Organization, the average life expectancy in low-income countries is just 57 years, while in high-income countries it is 80 years: one gets an average life-bonus of about 23 years just for living in a high-income country. Children in the poorest quintile globally are nearly twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday than children from the richest quintile (WHO 2001). Inequalities in education are also bleak. In the wealthiest countries almost no one aged 20–24 has less than four years of schooling. In many of the poorest countries of the world, the majority of the pop-

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ulation of that age has had less than four years of schooling. In Niger, the worst case, fully 78 per cent of the population aged 20–24 has had less than four years of schooling (WIDE 2016).

Not all political theorists condemn global inequality as an injustice. Thomas Nagel argues that the circumstances of justice do not exist globally. We cannot condemn existing inequality or even poverty as unjust, but the latter is nonetheless deplorable on humanitarian grounds (Nagel 2005). Many others argue that the deprivations at the bottom end of global inequality are morally objectionable, but inequality as such is not. Some condemn global poverty on human-rights grounds (Pogge 2002). And among those theorists who think that judgements of distributive justice apply globally, and who (p. 120) are committed to egalitarianism domestically, some argue that it is only poverty, not inequality, that justice condemns (Blake 2001). Rawls argues that peoples have only a duty of assistance to help other peoples who due to poverty are not able to form well-ordered societies (Rawls 1993; 1999).

There are various lines of disagreement among egalitarian political theorists. Some argue that egalitarianism is not owed to everyone simply in virtue of their humanity, but is on the contrary justified only within special social or political relations. For some theorists, coercion is necessary (Blake 2001; 2011; Nagel 2005; Valentini 2011); for others, reciprocity is required (Sangiovanni 2007). And sometimes the claim is that the special conditions exist only within the state. Others favouring global justice argue that justice necessarily applies to all persons in virtue of their humanity (Tan 2004; Caney 2005a; Gilibert 2011; 2012). Even some who affirm that humanity alone is a sufficient condition for justice deny that principles of egalitarian distributive justice should guide international institutions, because of the range of disagreement about those principles (Caney 2006).

Membership-Dependent Cosmopolitanism

Two broad positions have been briefly surveyed: that egalitarian distributive duties exist only between persons within institutional circumstances of the kind characterized by the state, and that they exist between all persons of the world in virtue of their common humanity. In this section I defend a third position, which holds that although egalitarian duties require more than mere humanity, they exist nonetheless among all persons globally as co-members of a common economic association (Moellendorf 2009; 2011).

The humanity-centred position might seem counterintuitive. If we imagine some society with which we have no significant interaction, is it really plausible that we could owe duties to its members to establish institutions securing egalitarian distributive justice? Even if we do not, it does not follow that such duties do not exist between all persons under contemporary conditions of globalization.

I begin with the assumption that persons have a morally basic duty of equal respect to everyone. This is a pre-institutional duty, and a basis of moral duties to everyone in virtue of their common humanity. That need not entail that there are duties to establish institu-

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tions of egalitarian justice covering everyone. Membership dependence is the view that duties of egalitarian social justice exist only among members of associations of the required kind (Moellendorf 2009: 40). Membership dependence requires a criterion or set of criteria that determine when associations are such that they give rise to duties of social justice. The criteria that govern when such duties arise can plausibly be adumbrated in the principle of “associational justice” (Moellendorf 2006: 608; 2009: 33). People must be members of an association that satisfies the following four conditions: it (p. 121) must be (1) relatively strong, (2) largely non-voluntary, (3) constitutive of a significant part of the background rules for the various relationships of members’ public lives, and (4) governed by norms subject to human control. There is no bright line distinguishing when duties of justice are generated by associations. Not all are sufficiently strong, nor do all generate effects with sufficient scope and force to structure a person’s membership in public life, and nor do all render a person’s participation sufficiently non-voluntary. So application of the principle of associational justice requires considerable attention to empirical detail.

If individuals are assumed not to owe duties of egalitarian distributive justice to all persons, why would the above conditions establish duties of justice between some subset of persons? Morally basic respect for human dignity is the basis of the account. Equal respect for the inherent dignity of persons requires taking them as co-authors of a common life. Respect constrains the rules of an association (Moellendorf 2006: 610). Persons must be offered a justification, which in principle they could accept, for the rules of associations, which satisfy the above conditions. There is no genuine co-authorship absent such a justification. This is the demand of “justificatory respect” (Moellendorf 2009: 11). To impose rules that could not in principle be justified to those governed by them is to disrespect those persons. It is to fail to treat them as co-authors of the common association. On the universalist basis of equal respect for the inherent dignity of everyone, justificatory respect establishes special duties of social justice.

Now, justificatory respect establishes a presumption of egalitarianism under the rules, regardless of whether the rules are directed towards determining how to live together in political community or towards how to distribute the goods and powers of our joint efforts. For any rule that establish members of the association as possessing special privileges or powers will be initially suspect. This is not to claim that differences would be impossible to justify on grounds of, say, need, desert, or advantage to the least advantaged; but no principle establishing powers on the basis the standing of one’s family, social class, gender, or race will be plausible. Someone might assert entitlements to wealth on the basis of a natural property right in their persons and products. Defeating such claims requires saying much more about why the natural-rights account employed to defend entitlement fails. For now, we assume that natural-rights accounts are not compelling. The associations that we consider are “common-good associations,” in the sense that no one has a pre-associational claim on the goods, powers, and opportunities that the norms of the association assign.

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The defence of an egalitarian presumption requires considering what members of an association *could* justify to one another. For this reason it might be rejected out of hand as an instance of what Amartya Sen calls “transcendental institutionalism” (Sen 2009). Sen’s favoured alternative is a realization-focused comparison, “interested primarily in the removal of manifest injustice from the world” (p. 7). But in many important cases it is not manifest injustice that concerns us. In a great many cases, such as global inequality, whether there is an injustice is the most important question. A more sophisticated normative account is needed when the question is not how to remove manifest injustices but whether particular institutional arrangements productive of inequality are unjust.

(p. 122) Now consider whether the global economic association satisfies the conditions of the principle of associational justice. The first condition concerns the strength of the association. There are various measures of the strength of an association, but the following three seem relevant: the duration of the association, the comprehensive character of its norms, and the effects of the association on the moral interests of its members. Strength is a matter of degree. The longer the association has endured, the more comprehensively it guides members’ lives, and the more profound the effects are on persons’ interests, the stronger it seems to be. Let us consider, then, three characteristics of strength. First, from early in the history of capitalist economic development there has been a tendency in the direction of globalization. It has been observable since colonialism, but speeded up in the second half of the twentieth century with technological changes. Second, the global economic association is comprehensively governed by the norm of competition for market share. Firms must ceaselessly innovate and reduce production costs. Moreover, norms governing most international trade are also in place through the regulatory framework of the WTO. Third, the globalization of trade, investment, and finance has had profound effects on the highest-order moral interests of persons. Export-led development strategies have produced significant gains for the human development of some countries (Chang 2002). But job insecurity around the world has increased as a consequence of globalization (Standing 1999). And as the Great Recession painfully demonstrated, speculative international investing has increased the danger of generalized global economic crises.

The second condition of the principle of associational justice is non-voluntariness. An association is not non-voluntary if there is no alternative at all to membership in it. That would be unreasonably demanding. Rather, an association is non-voluntary to the extent that there is no reasonable alternative to participating in the association. Now, although state leaders are formally free either to deepen engagement with the global market or not, the fact that nearly every country in the world is a member of the WTO is evidence that there is no reasonable alternative development path. Moreover, there is no successful case of autarkic advanced economic development. The third condition is that the association constitutes a significant part of the background rules for the various relationships of members. Whether one can find employment and under what terms is part of that background affected by globalization. The fourth and final condition of the principle of associational justice is that the association must be governed by norms that are subject to human control. Market competition can be limited, directed, or counterbalanced by delib-

erate public policy; and WTO rules can in principle be amended. There is no doubt that the global economic association satisfies this condition.

Egalitarian Reforms

A justified principle of egalitarian distributive justice will depend on the kind of association that exists and the policy options available. Different kinds of associations will (p. 123) distribute different goods, and quite possibly according to different egalitarian principles. Political associations must aim for equal and inclusive political membership (Moellendorf 2009: 54); and economic associations must aim for reciprocal relations characterized by equality in productive, ownership, and distributive relations (pp. 58–61). Although global egalitarians are sometimes criticized for simply extending to the globe principles of justice applicable in the state (Valentini 2011: 61), that is not a feature of the present account. On the contrary, both the principles of justice and the goods they govern are likely to be different globally from how they are in the state, according to the present account. If the capacity for governance is less well developed globally than in the state, that will also affect the kind of principle parties are duty-bound to follow in institutional reform or development (Moellendorf 2009: 63–7; 2011: 548–51).

A defence of particular egalitarian principles for a partially globalized world would be extensive (see Moellendorf 2009: 40–68). Here I set that aside to focus on the theme more central to practice. Which reforms to the global economic order might promote equality? Empirical study also tells us how global egalitarianism could inform political practice (see Chapters 8 and 9). Consider a very brief sketch of five kinds of egalitarian reforms. The first reform would be to liberalize immigration policies in developed countries. Immigration liberalization would advance the goal of equalizing opportunities globally. Branko Milanović's studies of global income distribution demonstrate that at least half the variability in a person's global income percentile rank can be explained by the level of human development and inequality of income in her country of birth (Milanović 2015). There seem then to be three means by which one's income rank might be improved if one were born in a country plagued with inequality and low levels of human development. First, one could advance one's career to receive greater than average remuneration in one's country. Second, a country's macroeconomic policy might lead to human development improvements there. Finally, one might emigrate in search of better income opportunities in more highly developed countries. Liberalizing immigration policies would make the third option more widely available. It would not equalize opportunities between people born in wealthy and poor countries, but it would narrow the gap between unequal opportunities.

Liberalizing immigration policies would also be likely to bring material gains to people who remain in the poor countries. According to a World Bank report, increased immigration from developing to high-income countries would increase the labour force of the latter by 3 per cent from 2002 to 2025, and would generate large aggregate increases in global welfare (World Bank 2006). When adjusted for prices, the increase in aggregate global income would be \$356 billion or 0.6 per cent. And the gains would go dispropor-

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tionately to developing countries, where incomes would increase by 1.8 per cent, compared to 0.4 per cent in high-income countries. The increased income would result from decreased labour market competition (due to emigration) and increased remittances (from those who have emigrated). In confirmation of Milanović's claim about the value of emigrating, the World Bank also finds that there would be considerable gains to new immigrants in the high-income countries. The cost-of-living-adjusted (p. 124) income gains would increase on average by nearly 200 per cent, due primarily to differences in wages between the countries of origin and destination.

A second reform would be to prohibit IMF loan conditionality that requires labour market liberalization. Often a country's access to crisis assistance from the IMF has been conditional on increasing retirement ages, weakening collective bargaining agreements, lowering minimum wages, reducing unemployment benefits, and loosening firing procedures. About one quarter of all IMF loans between 1987 and 2012 required liberalization (Caraway et al. 2012). The IMF justifies labour market liberalization as promoting growth and employment (Fuceri et al. 2012). This justification is made primarily on the basis of computer modelling exercises for the purpose of making long-term prognoses, despite the well-known short-term risks of increased unemployment, reduced growth, and even recession.

Some analysts support IMF-required liberalization as means by which to enhance borrower credibility and lender confidence, the impact of which on growth and employment materialize over the medium- to long-term horizon (Barkbu et al. 2012). But even if the medium-term growth projections were certain, egalitarians would have reason to reject liberalization policies because they tend to increase inequality within countries. A regression analysis over a 32-year period of a sample of 110 countries offers significant evidence to this effect (Vreeland 2012: 121–39). Liberalization programmes lead to greater class polarization. Labour's income decreases, while capital's increases (p. 133). A change to IMF policy, to prohibit making access to finance during economic crises conditional on labour market liberalization, would be a gain for egalitarianism.

A third global reform would be for the WTO to require sequencing trade liberalization in order to support developing countries. A central aim of the WTO is to liberalize multilateral trade. And although WTO agreements often give greater adjustment time to less developed countries, nonetheless the WTO does not require sequencing trade liberalization such that developed countries must reduce their trade barriers first. Historical evidence suggests that achieving significant economic development requires that developing countries support and protect their industries, especially industries producing for export. Ha-Joon Chang argues that Japan and the newly industrialized countries of East Asia all recently followed the well-established strategy of infant industry protection pursued some time ago by North America and Europe (Chang 2002). As we have noted, Milanović defends the importance to an individual's income of the level of human development of her country of birth. Hence, a trade regime that promoted development by allowing develop-

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ing states to protect and support their infant industries would also promote more equal opportunities for income among persons regardless of their country of origin.

Unlike the previous three reforms, the fourth aims to redistribute from the global rich to the global poor by means of a new tax facility. The Financial Transaction Tax or Tobin Tax was initially proposed by James Tobin as a disincentive to international currency speculation (Tobin 1982: 43). The Financial Transaction Tax targets short-term speculative investments in international money markets. Currency speculation can produce wild fluctuations in the value of currencies in developing countries. Such fluctuations (p. 125) can affect the ability of a country to export its goods, to pay for imports, and to pay its debts. One potential benefit of an appropriately designed Financial Transaction Tax would be the protection of the development aims of poor countries by softening fluctuations caused by currency speculations. Insofar as no great social good is served by short-term currency speculation, if the tax can be fine-tuned in a way that does not deter long-term investment, it would be morally costless.

Tobin and colleagues also suggest that the proceeds that the tax generated could be used for global poverty reduction (Eichengreen et al. 1995: 161-72). A very low tax could be effective in generating considerable revenue. Experiments thus far, however, do not offer full support for the effectiveness of the tax. A Swedish tax on the sale and purchase of equity securities and fixed-income securities was dropped after a few years because revenues were low and the volume of trading had declined significantly. But the explanation of these outcomes is disputed (Wroebel 1996). A possible European-wide experiment would be more instructive. Initially eleven EU states agreed to implement a financial transaction tax in early 2016 under an EU provision known as “enhanced cooperation.” But Estonia pulled out and Belgium and Estonia began expressing serious reservations. Under the plan at least nine participants are required. The June 2016 deadline for an agreement about the plan came and went. Although more experimentation is needed, there is little enthusiasm in Europe at the moment for initiatives in pursuit of greater cooperation.

The fifth reform is the global wealth tax proposed by Thomas Piketty. The central attraction of Piketty’s proposal for a global tax on capital is that such a tax could get to the main source of inequality far more effectively than an income tax. Because the very wealthy only take a very small proportion of their wealth as income, typically much smaller than the percentage by which their wealth grows, inequality of wealth can grow even with a progressive income tax (Piketty 2014: 525). What is more, given the high levels of private wealth, even a tax at a modest rate would bring in significant revenue for social-welfare policies that support people living in poverty and with low incomes.

In Europe, a tax of 2.5 per cent would generate revenues equivalent to 2 per cent of Europe’s GDP (Piketty 2014: 528). If a modest tax were to be implemented that did not address inequality much, it would nonetheless generate valuable information about the global distribution of wealth by requiring the reporting of wealth (pp. 518-19) and by requiring states to broaden their agreements about sharing banking data (p. 520). The lat-

ter would remove the possibility of hiding money away in remote countries, since it would require all countries to cooperate by agreeing to, and enforcing, a tax schedule applicable to wealth everywhere. The idea of a global, progressive wealth tax seems utopian under current conditions. But the proposal is nonetheless useful as a standard against which to measure the effectiveness of other proposals to reduce global inequality (p. 515). The five reforms sketched above indicate how global egalitarianism might guide international practice, as well as the extent to which normative theories must draw on research in the social sciences in order to have practical relevance within the context to which they apply.

(p. 126) **Practice, Context, and Critique**

The membership-dependent account of cosmopolitanism presented above is empirically rooted in three ways. First, the principle of associational justice applies if and only if the association satisfies certain empirical conditions. We do not owe duties of egalitarian social justice to everyone, but only to co-members of associations of the requisite kind. Second, the nature of the association determines the metric of justice. If there is a justificatory presumption of equality, consideration of the context is necessary to determine what egalitarianism concerns. Third, the changes supported by the account take into consideration the existing empirical literature on how the association might be reformed.

But unlike some contextualist accounts of justice, the present membership-dependent account also provides the basis for a critical theory. Although the account bears a resemblance to Michael Walzer's account of justice, which takes principles to be dependent on different spheres of social life (Walzer 1983), it is better able to support criticisms of the distributive principles governing the spheres of social life. Contrary to Walzer, the present membership-dependent account is founded on equal human dignity, which is the basis of justificatory respect. Such respect establishes a justificatory presumption of equality in all associations in which duties of justice exists. Goods might vary according to associations, and principles might too, but the justificatory presumption makes egalitarianism the benchmark against which departures must be justified reciprocally. Walzer seeks to ensure the critical capacity of his account by insulating spheres from one another. The membership-dependent account presented above ensures critical capacity by means of the demands of justificatory respect. Respect for the equal dignity of all persons requires that the rule of the relevant associations be justifiable to them. Such requirement establishes the justificatory presumption of equality.

There could be version of membership dependence for which, in David Miller's words, the "context dependence of principles goes all the way down" (Miller 2002: 7). Such accounts would be altogether too conventionalist. Accounts without leverage on the norms of existing associations could be widely accepted, but they would lack the basis upon which to criticize that acceptance (Williams 2005). A critical theory must be able to do that. In the membership-dependent account presented above, the principles are not context-dependent all the way down. On the contrary, although they apply only in certain contexts and

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their metrics are context-sensitive, the egalitarian justificatory presumption of justificatory respect has nothing to do with existing conventions. The critical force is based there. The empirical rootedness of the theory plus its critical force should appeal to some versions of contemporary realism in political theory, which stress the importance of such features (Stears 2005). Other realist accounts criticize normative theories that fail to begin by offering an understanding of politics (Rossi and Sleat 2014; see Chapter 48). Politics is not central to the present account; rather, associational features are. Indeed, it is a virtue of the present account that it takes concerns of justice to (p. 127) apply in cases, such as the global economy, in which political governance is not strong. Once again, this aspect of the critical force of the account is lacking in more conventionalist accounts.

Concluding Remarks

The discussions of global inequality and global egalitarianism offered in this chapter provide evidence that normative political theory can both be rooted in empirical understandings of the world and existing problems and still have the capacity to apply principles that offer a critical normative perspective on the world and its problems. I hope that the examples nonetheless provide some reason to believe that normative theorists of international justice often do well to develop accounts that are informed by empirical accounts both in the development of the relevant normative principles and in the discussion of how progress in light of those principles might be made. The world must be understood. But accounts of normative theory do not aim simply to interpret the world; they aim to change it.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Robyn Eckersley for advice in the development of this chapter, Eszter Kollar for comments on the penultimate version of the chapter, and Lukas Sparenborg for applying the proper format.

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