Equality in a Realistic Utopia

Anyone who follows international political argument will before too long hear objection taken to “the increasing size of the gap between rich and poor.”¹ Yet the principled basis for this objection is seldom made clear. The problem is in part that roughly half of humanity lives without easily meeting basic needs, while great wealth in developed countries suggests real opportunities to bring most people out of poverty. In addition, mention of “the size of the gap” between richer and poorer suggests a concern with inequality. If we compare different countries according to mean country income, for example, prospects in wealthy industrialized countries such as the US, Germany, or Japan tend to be far better than in, say, Ghana, or Brazil, or Indonesia.² In theory, this relative disparity in prospects could remain as great as it is today despite a process of development that eventually eliminates all absolute deprivation, as well as substantially reducing inequality within each society. The process need only give richer and poorer societies proportional gains. But if inequality across societies is separable from conditions of poverty, on what principled basis, if any, might it be objectionable?

If one surveys the global justice literature, one could easily conclude that our answer will depend on the extent to which justice is political, in


²For certain purposes, focus on “global” or “world” inequality (as measured by the Gini coefficient, for example) may be more appropriate than the focus on international inequality that I suggest in the text. (This is perhaps so when absolute poverty is our basic concern and inequality reflects possibilities for wealth transfers.) I will not, however, focus on global or world inequality as a separate source of concern below. In fact, the magnitude of global or world inequality is by and large explained by population-weighted international inequality. See Glenn Firebaugh, “Empirics of World Income Inequality,” American Journal of Sociology 104 (1999): 1597-1630; T. Paul Schultz, “Inequality in the Distribution of Personal Income in the World: How It Is Changing and Why,” Journal of Population Economics 11 (1998): 307-44.
the sense that its principles are tailored to, and take for granted, the modern state and the Westphalian state system. On the one hand, prominent views that are “politically realistic” in this sense tend to deny that socio-economic inequality across societies poses any principled issue of distributive justice as such.\(^3\) On the other hand, some views favor significant international or global principles of distributive justice, but without giving any particular role in the justification of principle to political structures like those that are likely to exist for the foreseeable future.\(^4\) I will describe what I take to be an unduly neglected, mixed possibility: we can be realistic about global political structure, in the sense of allowing the state system to shape the very justification of principles, and still make the principled egalitarian case against inequality across societies, on grounds of structural equity. The basic moral demand that existing institutional and social structures treat those they affect in an equitable way generates real limits on socio-economic inequality across societies, limits that would survive the eradication of poverty.

I proceed as follows. I first elaborate a “pragmatic realist” argument for the justifiability of the state system. Though the argument is of independent interest, I simply assume it for the sake of argument. If it can be shown that structural equity nevertheless supports significant limits on cross-societal inequality, we can conclude that the “realist” credentials of those limits are, in a significant sense, secure. I then make the case for practically significant limitations on cross-societal inequality, by considering in turn existing “structures” of three kinds: the state system itself, viewed as a system of property, the multilateral system of trade, and, in a more limited way, international finance.


\(^4\)Charles R. Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, with a new Afterword (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999 [1979]). For details, see below. Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), is quite concerned with existing institutions and the feasibility of reforms, but his concern is largely with relievable absolute poverty. What he calls “radical inequality” (p. 198) is defined in part in terms of absolute deprivation, and so is not clearly concerned with inequality that might survive the eradication of poverty. Thomas Pogge, “An Egalitarian Law of Peoples,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 23 (1994): 195-224, does argue for limits on international inequality on the assumption, made arguendo, of a specifically international system. My argument will have a similar form, though, unlike Pogge’s, it is not made from within Rawls’s original position apparatus.
Pragmatic Realism

The issue whether, why, and in what sense justification should be “realistic” has an underappreciated role in shaping our basic choices with regard to questions of global justice. Before describing the “pragmatic realism” that my overall argument assumes, I begin by bringing the issue of realism to the fore.

I do not mean to address classical realism of the sort that denies the applicability of moral principles to international relations. What I will refer to as “realism about principle” is a view about how any principles of justice are to be justified: even the fundamental principles of justice are to be justified in the light of what the world happens to be like. To be sure, I take it that any plausible realism will be minimally utopian. It will idealize away immediate obstacles to political action such as lack of political will and wisdom, as well as the considerations of realpolitik that animated the classical realists. If these realities are among what is to be assessed as just or unjust according to any principles we justify, they also cannot coherently limit what those very principles could require. The hard question, for realists, is where to draw the line. How sensitive to reality should principles be? What realities should be idealized away, and what should be left in place?

Let us say that realism about principle is serious to the extent that it is sensitive, in the very justification of principle, to reality as it now is, including not only the human condition and general circumstances of global social life, but also political, legal, social, and economic arrangements as we more or less now find them on the global scene. To the degree that realism is not so sensitive (being concerned, say, only with highly general circumstances, and not particular sorts of arrangements), it is relaxed. So, for example, Charles Beitz’s well-known argument for apply-

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5 Views of these kinds are helpfully surveyed and effectively criticized in Beitz, Political Theory and International Relations.

6 This is the view challenged in G.A. Cohen, “Facts and Principles,” Philosophy and Public Affairs 31 (2003): 211-45. Cohen argues that any “fact-sensitive” principles presuppose further “fact-insensitive principles,” and so they cannot be fundamental. I reply to this argument in an unpublished manuscript, so I will not address it here. Note that Cohen presents and rejects this kind of view under the heading of “constructivism.” I prefer the term “realism,” so as to distinguish the “fact-sensitivity” of justification from a more general, meta-ethical characterization of “constructivism” that may or may not give reality any special privilege. I discuss constructivism in this meta-ethical sense in Aaron James, “Constructivism About Practical Reasons,” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research (forthcoming), and “Constructivism as a Foundational Theory” (unpubl. ms.). Cohen is happy to grant the general difference, as he explains in his Rescuing Justice from Constructivism (unpubl. ms., University of Oxford).

7 This question of degree of sensitivity can arise within “ideal theory.” It is compatible, for example, with Rawlsian “ideal theory,” as described in Aaron James, “Construct-
ing Rawls’s domestic egalitarian principles globally originally aspired to a fairly serious realism, taking prevailing global socio-economic arrangements as his basis for the extension. Beitz had always claimed that states and state obligations are of “derivative” significance, suggesting a relaxed realism about global political structure. But he later relaxed his realism about economic structure as well. In the Afterword to the 1999 edition of Political Theory and International Relations, he writes:

[I]t now seems wrong to say that [facts about the extent and character of the world economy] explain in any very specific way why principles of international distributive justice should constrain the present structure of the world economy. For the justification of international principles does not depend on the extent of international interaction or the details of the institutions that organize it.

This is to say that principles of international distributive are compatible with a relatively relaxed realism, not necessarily that they are incompatible with realism of a more serious kind. My question of chief concern is whether the realist argument for such principles must be relaxed. That is, if we assume for the sake of argument some clearly serious form of realism, might the argument for such principles still go through? My overall aim is to explain how structural equity can support requirements of international distributive justice despite a clearly serious form of realism, which I present momentarily. Though for this purpose I can simply take realism for granted, my argument would not be of great interest if little could be said in realism’s favor. So I should mention some of its motivating rationales.

Why assume realism? Why not simply ask, independently of given facts, what our ideal of justice involves? If our answer is an ideal of equal material prosperity for all, or some such essentially comparative, egalitarian state of affairs, the problem with inequality across societies

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8Beitz, Political Theory and International Relations, p. 153.
9Ibid., p. 204.
10I treat “equal prosperity for all” as a stand-in for a range of well-known egalitarian proposals that differ in (i) whether they require strict equality, “priority for the worse off,” or “decency/sufficiency” (which might rise above any and all measures of absolute poverty), as well as in (ii) whether they treat as relevant goods, resources, opportunities, welfare, or something else. For my purposes, what matters is what such proposals tend to share, namely, the idea that equality, however characterized, is a master ideal goal, whose justification is not assumed to depend on the given facts. Such an ideal might also be said to be justifiable realistically. Though I offer no argument against this, it is not the realistic approach I mean to be developing.
becomes straightforward: it falls short of the ideal. What more needs to be said? I think this is fine as far as it goes. Yet if it is all we can say about what is wrong with inequality across societies, the oft-heard objection to “the size of the gap between rich and poor” is perhaps not quite as powerful as those who voice it in international political argument suppose. Consider that some of the most zealous defenders of unregulated markets and unmitigated inequality will happily concede that inequality is less than ideal. As the concession is sometimes put, a goal such as equal material prosperity is “fine for a perfect world,” yet impractical or unduly utopian in the imperfect world we’re stuck with.11 One can argue, in reply, that we have reason to promote equality as far as we can, even if the goal is unachievable in practice.12 Yet few ideal egalitarians would be willing to insist that the ideal goal of equality must, morally, be among the highest priorities of global governance; most concede that, in general, equality is at best one worthy value among others.13 Perhaps the oft-heard objection can be fully explained in these terms. Yet the urgency with which it is often expressed suggests something more, such as an assumed failure of binding standards of rightful treatment, and not simply failure to achieve or promote a worthy ideal. I won’t defend this interpretive claim here. I take it that we do at least have reason to consider deontological approaches which would give existing inequality across societies this kind of weighty significance.

Consider, then, what is perhaps the minimal realist commitment, which Rawls puts this way: “Conceptions of justice must be justified for the conditions of our life as we know it or not at all.”14 Thus, if the human condition as we know it (on some or any plausible specification) precludes the achievement of one of our favored ideals, the realist asks us to conclude not that the world is tragically unjust, but that the favored ideal cannot be justice. Why conclude this? One general rationale is deontological. On any deontological conception of principles of justice, principles are, by their very nature, addressed to some specifiable indi-

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11This is perhaps the implicit suggestion in David Dollar and Aart Kraay, “Spreading the Wealth,” Foreign Affairs 81 (January/February 2002): 120-33.
individual or collective agents, as reasons for conduct that is assumed to be in those agents’ power. Because general conditions of life limit what agents can do in practice, they limit what justice could require in principle.

In itself, this is not particularly constraining. The conditions for successful address can be unspecific with respect to agents and times. On one conception, for example, all that is needed for ideal principles to address all existing individual and collective agents is for there to be some physically possible route from the status quo to the favored ideal. At a given time, one is simply to promote justice as far as one can. A more serious realism results if principles are normative for us in a stronger sense. On one view, held by Rawls and Scanlon, principles are essentially addressed to agents, not as mere pro tanto reasons to promote an ideal, but as normally conclusive reasons for action. Barring extenuating circumstances, then, principles need to be justified in the light not only of general conditions of life, but also agent-specific conditions such as what is in the power of the particular kind of individual or collective agent being addressed, what its known or knowable feasible alternative forms of conduct or organization are, and any costs it will be expected to bear.

If this is right, justice is relative to historical position. Let us say that a set of arrangements Y is accessible to us (some individual or collective agents) from another set of arrangements X, if and only if, when in X, we know with reasonable confidence that we can move from X to Y at a reasonable cost. In principle, then, it might be that arrangements B are accessible from the status quo, A, and that further arrangements C are accessible from B, but nevertheless that C are not accessible from A. For it may be that, although we will in fact know of a possible and reasonably costless move from B to C once we are in B, we may not know now that we will have this knowledge. Our best guesses may even make this seem unlikely. Thus, given the deontological assumption that (normally conclusive) principles of justice can only require of us what is accessible to us, C would not be required of us now, as desirable as it might otherwise be, even if it would, in fact, become required once we move to B.

What might all of this show? Mathias Risse has suggested that similar considerations justify the state system. Ultimately, Risse means to bolster the view defended by Michael Blake and Thomas Nagel that the state is normatively special by comparison to the various economic, po-

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16It also follows that principles are “agent-relative.” Though this is implicit in my discussion below, I will not defend or focus on it here.

17Risse, “What to Say About the State,” PAGES??
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litical, and social forms found on the global scene, because of its peculiar coercive power. However, often immigrants at the border are turned away at the point of a gun, citizens are coerced under the laws they live by in a way that foreigners are not. This gives citizens special, egalitarian demands of fair treatment against the state, demands that foreigners are in no position to make. The idea is that this provides a general rationale for applying principles of socio-economic distributive justice within societies, but not across them. However, as Risse helpfully emphasizes, the argument is at best incomplete. Even if state coercion is in some sense distinctive, we can still ask, Why have states at all? Why continue with horizontally concentrated territorial states, instead of transitioning to some feasible alternative, say, a scheme (à la Thomas Pogge) of vertically dispersed sovereignty? 18 Why not opt for political revolution? Risse’s answer is as follows. In the light of what we are ever likely to know, in our current and expected historical position, any radical move away from the state system will not be justified given likely costs to collective, national self-determination—one of the state system’s main advantages. For whatever the potential advantages for peace, security, legitimacy, and democracy, we are likely to be too uncertain about whether such gains really do require revolution as opposed to mere reform. 19

Call this style of argument “pragmatic realism.” Though it bears some similarity to Rawls’s idea of a “realistic utopia,” Rawls’s realism is less restrictive. Rawls does not rule out revolutionary political change, but merely suggests that we need not assume its possibility in order for political philosophy to fulfill its guiding aim. Rawls assumes we should “begin from the political world as we see it,” taking for granted not only the human condition, but also historically contingent and specifically political aspects of modern life, including positive “international law and practice.” 20 He also suggests that any concern with inequality across societies can be explained either in terms of its relation to absolute poverty, or in terms of its untoward consequences, such as its tendency to make political dealings unfair. 21 Material cross-societal inequality is not of any principled, egalitarian significance in itself. Given this supposed implication, we should ask: Why begin from the political world as we see it? Rawls’s answer is in part methodological. Political philosophy is, or should be, “realistically utopian,” that is, “it extends what are ordinarily

18Pogge, World Poverty and Human Rights, chap. 7.
19Risse, “What to Say About the State,” PAGES??
21Ibid., p. 113. Rawls does mention that inequality among “peoples” can cause stigmatizing differences in status, which has a significant comparative and egalitarian dimension. This is, however, seen as an untoward consequence to be managed, not a basis for substantial egalitarian principles of distributive justice.
thought of as the limits of practical political possibility and, in so doing, reconciles us to our political and social condition.”22

In principle, however, we can be reconciled by any of several possible sets of arrangements, more and less realistic. The arrangements need only be possible, in the sense that we can reasonably hope for and work toward their realization. For this they must be both possible given “the deep tendencies and inclinations of the social world,” as well as achievable “if not now then at some future time under happier circumstances.”23 Beyond this, Rawls is mainly concerned to show that some arrangements do suffice to reconcile us, not that only one set of arrangements could do so. Thus when Rawls suggests that his own Society of Peoples reconciles us to our condition this is not to deny the possibility and achievability of a revolutionary political order. Though he does not seem hopeful for such an order, his essential thought is that, even if some such order is realistically utopian as well, it need not be. Given the possibility of a Society of Peoples, we stand reconciled, even if hope for revolution would be unjustified.

If pragmatic realism is different from Rawls’s realism, it is not necessarily available to coercion-based theorists such as Blake and Nagel. Their accounts are of interest partly because they vividly show how the moral equality of each individual might not come to very much in the way of substantive limits on inequality; at least in principle, one can be a “cosmopolitan” about justice, in the sense of affirming the moral equality of individual persons (and thus of denying the moral status of nations or peoples or cultures, except insofar as they serve individuals), and yet limit socio-economic distributive justice within the confines of the state. But if Blake and Nagel assume the state system, and Risse is correct in speculating that appeal collective self-determination is “the best we can do” in its defense, then coercion-based theory cannot take an individual-oriented form.24

Is Risse’s speculation correct? In fact, as I will now explain, the pragmatic realist argument for the state system is robust; it can take a specifically cosmopolitan form and rely only on expected costs to values of relatively uncontroversial importance, such as the value of effective poverty reduction.

In general, the argument for something like the state system is that, at present, revolutionary orders are inaccessible to us. Although we have come a long way from the Treaty of Westphalia—international law now recognizes a wide range of human rights as a condition of state sover-

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22Ibid., p. 11.
23Ibid., pp. 12, 128.
eignty, and global governance now takes many and various international, supranational, and transnational forms\textsuperscript{25}—the existing order remains more or less Westphalian in its basic political organization. It is not hard to imagine more desirable, radically different global orders. But given the present assumptions, if they are now and for the foreseeable future inaccessible, justice could not require them of us. Further accessible reforms might be necessary, and eventually make a revolutionary order accessible and required. But such reforms could not be required on the grounds that they constitute a path to that revolutionary order, until that order is, in fact, accessible.

This is quite compatible with cosmopolitanism, understood as the view that justifiability to individuals is all that matters for justice. Perhaps we cannot justify the status quo, A, to each person, in part because B is accessible. That is, the transition from A to B comes at a cost that no one can reasonably complain of, and so the independent merits of B for individuals (supposing there are such merits) render A unjustifiable. And perhaps, once in B, it, too, will not be justifiable to everyone, in part because the move from B to C will be similarly required. Yet this is not to say that the status quo is unjustifiable to individuals because C will eventually be possible. We may not now know that it is possible, or reasonably expect to come to have this knowledge. And if not, then C is not something anyone can demand in the name of justice.

In the abstract, no mention of collective self-determination is assumed here. Nor is it needed to justify the state system, in particular. The pragmatic realist argument can instead cite the importance of effective poverty reduction: a suitably (and perhaps dramatically) reformed version of the state system is justified, because, for all we know and are likely to know, for the foreseeable future, political revolution would do worse with respect to poverty reduction than mere reform.

To see how the argument might go, set poverty reduction aside for the moment and focus on civil and political justice. For Rawls, the existence of current “international law and practice” is supposed to be justified in part because it has arisen in response to political injustices that he regards as the “great evils of past and present.”\textsuperscript{26} In principle, that claim might be put wholly in terms of standard civil and political threats to individuals. The post-war international system, informed by human rights conditions on national sovereignty, is in part a response to grave injustices committed by domestic or foreign governments against individual persons, not just against whole “peoples.” Let us assume that taking in-
individually seriously rules out the status quo; serious structural reforms
would be needed to support security, civil order, and legitimate governance,
including, for example, the abolition of existing international borrowing
and resource privileges, as a means to reducing incentives for
dictatorial rule,\(^27\) the creation of “linkage” between labor and trade
structures,\(^28\) and perhaps much more. At least in theory, however, such reforms
can fall short of political revolution, preserving the state system, or something near enough like it. Perhaps, for example, international or transna-
tional governance appointments are still made via elected representatives
of territorial states. Is the (reformed) state system therefore justified?

The answer depends on whether there are accessible alternatives. Let us assume that further, gradual revolution toward a system of vertically
dispersed sovereignty would have clear specifically political advantages:
individuals would gain greater influence over the structures that affect
them, for example. But let us also suppose, for the sake of argument, that
a merely reformed state system gives each individual a reasonable degree
of influence over structures, or at least over the officials that appoint
those who govern them. In this case, even if civil and political interests
have a certain high priority, other important factors such as poverty redu-
ction arguably come into play. For all we are likely to know, we may
suppose, poverty will be most effectively reduced by leaving something
like the state system intact. Could we be sure that continual shaping and
reshaping of sovereign units will not undermine our executive capacities
for large-scale, poverty-reducing structural changes? The answer may be
unclear, and we may expect it to remain so for the foreseeable future.
Those capacities are at least real within a more horizontally concentrated
scheme, at least provided political will and the help of ever more con-
straining international and transnational regimes. To be sure, it may be
that a more vertically dispersed scheme will do better or just as well. But
if we are not and cannot expect to be in a position to know this, we can-
not argue that revolution is required.

Of course, a cosmopolitan can still reject the state system, either by
rejecting pragmatic realism, or by defending the empirical assumptions
needed to justify revolution. But this is a dispute among cosmopolitans,
not simply a dispute between individualist and collectivist approaches.
This poses our larger question in a particularly forceful form: supposing,
for the sake of argument, that the state system can be justified as sug-
gested, even in cosmopolitan terms, should we only apply principles of
socio-economic distributive justice within societies, as coercion-based


Standards” (unpubl. ms., Columbia University).
theorists urge? Or can a principled argument against inequality across societies be made anyway, within the constraints of pragmatic realism? In the remainder of my discussion, I outline one way the argument might go.

Structural Equity

What I will call the argument from “structural equity” is a species of fairness argument, specifically, argument about what constitutes fair treatment under an independently identified institution or social practice (for short, a “structure”). Generally, structures are assumed to raise special questions of justification, as distinct from the justifiability of any particular act or line of individual conduct within them. One such question is whether a structure treats those it affects equitably, as indicated by its distributive and other consequences for those persons. Specifically, the idea goes, a structure treats those it affects equitably (and, in this sense, “fairly”) if and only if each person affected receives an equal or otherwise acceptable level of benefit, given the burdens it imposes on those persons.

When we turn to the global context, one obvious question is: How might considerations of equitable treatment, of what is “equal or otherwise acceptable,” place real limits on inequality across societies? But the answer to this question in a given case depends on at least two prior kinds of question, which leave the philosopher beholden to the real world: What independently identifiable, real-world “structures” are at issue? How do they affect peoples’ lives, in a way that supports egalitarian claims? I will focus below on these last two, particularly difficult issues of application, instead of the first issue of substance. I will mention the kind of principled concern at issue as I proceed. But since I will not defend my substantive assumptions in any detail, it is worth saying something up front about the normative content of the structural equity argument, as I understand it.

Here one wants to ask, Why doesn’t what is “equal or otherwise acceptable” presuppose a general ideal of equality of distribution? The answer, I take it, is that it cannot do so if it is to be the kind of argument it

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29 On the difference between practices and individual conduct, see Aaron James, “Power in Social Organization as the Subject of Justice,” Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 86 (2005): 25-49. Below I say slightly more about what sort of social organization must be in place for concerns of structural equity to arise. But I take my overall argument to turn largely on examples.

30 In principle, the relevant structures need not be existing, real world structures. They can be merely hypothetical structures, or required by some independent principle of justice that independently applies to our world. Since my concern is to be seriously realistic, I focus on prevailing arrangements.
purports to be. This is for at least two reasons. First, as far as equitable treatment is our concern, there is no general question, across all structures, of what the right or fair distribution is. What outcomes are fair needs to be argued on the merits of the case, depending on the sorts of justificatory considerations relevant to the structure in question, the genuine interests at stake, and on what is, in the relevant case, “equal or otherwise acceptable.”

For all that says, equity may well require equality of outcomes of some specified kind, because the needed arguments are available. But, second, this may fall short of what is required for any given reality-independent, general ideal distributive goal. The argument from structural equity, as I understand it, always assumes that the relevant, existing structure affects some class of people in one or more ways. The question is what it would take for this independently identified treatment to be equitable, not what it would take to help those as yet unaffected, in order to promote a further, more general goal of material equality.

These features raise large questions. For my purposes, I introduce them as a matter of stipulation. My argument is that, even if we grant such “realistic” constraints, the argument against inequality across societies goes through. Indeed, as I will emphasize, the argument can remain egalitarian, in one central sense: its concern is not simply with how people fare in absolute terms, but with how people fare by comparison to one another, even in the absence of poverty.

This brings us to my central concern, with how exactly the argument is supposed to proceed. What sorts of structures on the global scene are supposed to generate egalitarian demands?

**Equity in Property**

One way to answer this question is to consider why coercion-based accounts of the peculiarity of the state are too narrow. I have argued else-

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31I assume that what is “equal or otherwise acceptable” can be interpreted within a contractualist framework. The activity-sensitive framework for interpersonal relations described by Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, can be used for structure-sensitive evaluation, for example. I do not, however, assume the possibility of any general use of Rawlsian original position argument, which I regard as premature before having identified the structures under review. On how the shape of Rawlsian original position reasoning is determine by prior structures, see James, “Constructing Justice for Existing Practice: Rawls and the Status Quo.”

32Any distinction between ways people are already affected and ways they might be helped or harmed is of course controversial. My claim here is only that the structural equity argument assumes that the difference can be plausibly discerned, if not in fully general terms, then in particular cases of interest.

33For this broad conception of the class of specifically “egalitarian” arguments, see T.M. Scanlon, “When Does Inequality Matter?” (unpubl. ms., Harvard University).
where that the accounts defended by Blake and Nagel unduly limit the scope of socio-economic distributive justice.34 As Risse admits, this is true even in coercion-based terms. Coercive International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionality and World Trade Organization (WTO) reciprocal trade sanctions are not sufficiently different from state coercion to justify the intended restriction of socio-economic distributive justice to the domestic sphere.35 Risse argues that state coercion nevertheless retains a kind of “immediacy” that coercive IMF conditionality and WTO reciprocal sanctions lack. He concedes that we might be able to defend association-specific requirements of distributive justice, perhaps for the WTO; we should, he suggests, reject the TRIPs agreement as unfair. Yet, he concludes, it will be “much harder to argue for extensive financial transfers of the sort that are embodied by a domestic tax system.”36

Risse overstates both the ease of justifying domestic distributive principles as well as the difficulty of justifying international ones. In the case of the state, its agents may, for example, constrain my body, or divert my assets, or deprive me of information, voice, and an audience. Provided the infringement is limited, the international community will not intervene. In that sense, state coercion is, as Risse suggests, “immediate.” But why should this justify anything more than familiar civil and political rights, seen as checks on the institutional abuse of such powers? Rich and poor can both be arrested for tax dodging. But that will not in itself justify a progressive rather than regressive tax scheme. Perhaps redistributive policies like progressive taxation or estate taxes are needed for civil and political rights to be effective, but this is not quite what Blake, Nagel, or Risse have in mind as a basis for domestic egalitarian claims.

The idea may instead just be that one can always raise claims of fair or unfair treatment under a set of distributive rules.37 But if so, although coercion might need to be involved in some sense, why must it take any very direct form? In the case of the state, it seems enough that tax, prop-


35Risse, “What to Say About the State,” PAGES??

36Ibid., p. 692. In his “Fairness in Trade” (Kennedy School of Government Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP05-004 (2005)), Risse identifies several ways trade can be morally significant within a Westphalian state system. He does not argue that fairness generates significant cross-societal distributive demands of the kind I describe below.

37Risse, “What to Say About the State,” PAGES??
property, and other laws significantly affect one’s interests or prospects, and that such rules are well beyond one’s power as an individual, and in that sense an imposition. That seems enough to raise a significant issue of fair treatment, in the sense of structural equity, as defined above. But if so, the issue is of a kind that might equally arise in social structures of socio-economic consequence beyond particular states.

Take, for example, the state system, which is, among other things, a system of property. On one plausible interpretation, the legitimate aim of a system of property is social utilities such as prevention of the deterioration of assets. Yet any property system is by nature exclusive; its rules will deprive what may be significant forms of access that might otherwise be enjoyed. Although preventing the deterioration of assets is of some benefit to everyone, this will not be sufficient as a justification if the deprivation of access is significant or severe. One plausible requirement of structural equity in the state system is thus what might be called “Fair Exclusion”: the state system can only reasonably deprive people of access to basic resources if it also provides adequate means to enjoy the significant benefits of that access.

To the extent that deprivation of access to foreign resources is among the many causes of absolute poverty, Fair Exclusion supports a straightforward case for assistance. When the access denied is to means of material substance, nothing less than comparable access to those means is “adequate.” For example, the Turkish not only control the source of the Euphrates River, but divert its water into irrigation systems within Turkey, leaving downstream Syrians and Iraqis with insufficient fresh water. In the absence of the state system, or simply more liberal rules of movement, thirsty Syrians or Iraqis might move up-river, closer to the source. Under the state system, any such movement, if taken without official permission, would count as trespass, and presumptively justify forcible removal. Yet we can’t say this deprivation of access is fair simply because Syrians and Iraqis each enjoy their own self-determining political community that controls its own territory—territory that may, or in this case may not, have an independent water supply. Nor will it suffice to say that given enough time, infrastructure that guarantees water security will probably emerge from international bank loans, internal economic reform, freer trade, privatization of industry, the liberalization of capital, and the like. Means of subsistence need to come sooner and with greater certainty, by whatever means the international community has at its disposal.

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39 I suspect that debates over the causes of poverty are generally debates over emphasis. I assume here only that the global system of property is often implicated in poverty. Other factors, such as the quality of domestic institutions and geography, are also presumably causally significant.
It is controversial what these means are, to be sure. The important point is the kind of moral issue at stake. If the system of property really does give rise to a significant deprivation of access, and if there are ways to fund and facilitate local and regional solutions, then inaction by the international community would not simply be a failure of humanity, of natural duty to support just domestic institutions, or even of natural duty to do no harm and to compensate for any harm done (although the failure may be any of these as well). It is, rather, a failure of the international community to rectify distributive unfairness generated by its own institution of property.40

This is an egalitarian issue, albeit in a limited way. For all Fair Exclusion says, poverty might remain within the global system of property, and inequalities might justifiably emerge over time, so long as the differences in people’s lives accrue to factors sufficiently independent of the system’s existence and actual consequences. This follows simply because structural equity is at issue: under its principles, only burdens that the relevant structure creates can be assessed as equitably or inequitably distributed. I assume there are moral requirements of aid beyond requirements of fairness in standing forms of treatment, if nothing else, humanitarian ones. Yet, as far as the consequences of exclusion are concerned, the issue of equitable treatment is an egalitarian one, in the sense that it arises, quite aside from whether the deprivation leaves people badly off, in absolute terms. Even people who are not poor might incur significant costs from being excluded from foreign territories or transactions. If the cost of inclusion of foreigners is relatively insignificant, many forms of exclusion will be unfair.

Though immigration and labor mobility naturally come to mind as examples, consider economic exclusion at the level of countries, in particular, cases in which a country or some of its members are excluded from participation in global markets, whether by embargoes, denial of membership in regional or global trade regimes, or by discriminatory trade policies. Absent extenuating circumstances (such as domestic political oppression), considerations of Fair Exclusion might apply when excluded countries do less well than included countries over time, as a result of their exclusion. To be sure, no particular distribution of material benefits is required; egalitarian fairness here applies to opportunities for benefit, not specific sorts of outcomes. Nevertheless, when inequalities do emerge, they can be said to reflect unfairness in the large-scale structure of property of a kind that does not depend on the existence of absolute poverty. Even if poverty were eradicated, emergent relative ineqauli-
ties across societies could remain wrongfully unfair.

Here the charge of undue utopianism would be out of place. We have made no assumption of a master goal of equality, or of demands for arrangements that are clearly inaccessible to us. Because the argument from structural equity takes the state system for granted, beginning from an established structure, it is clearly seriously realistic. And though I have not made the case here (given my focus on application rather than substance), it is plausible to suppose that the relevant requirements of equity are normally conclusive; barring extenuating circumstances that arise from time to time, the state system ought, all things considered, to respect Fair Exclusion’s demands.

One might object that any such demands are unrealistic in a way that disqualifies them as deontological requirements: they lack a specific, real addressee. While in the domestic context principles of structural fairness can be addressed to particular, centrally governed states, there is no analogous global authority. But why can’t principles of structural equity for the state system be addressed to the international community, as organized by the state system itself? The global system of property is at least partly governed in actual practice. When international jurists rule on resource disputes between states, say, over ownership of the local sea, considerations of equity are often seen as an important factor.41 And it is plausible to suppose that such courts simply act with the authority of the international community, which bears collective responsibility for the structure of its organization, including its system of property. At least from a minimally utopian point of view, there is no reason why equitable distribution within the global system of property cannot be an important issue for international politics.42

Equity in Economic Structures: The Case of Trade

This argument does not implicate market relations as such, beyond the property structures that constrain them. One insight in coercion-based views is that the international community can conceivably bear collective responsibility for practices concerning security, war, and property although market relations across societies remain a localized state of nature. That is, particular transactions within markets may be regulated by basic legal institutions of contract and property, and such transactions

41 Thomas Frank, Fairness in International Law and Institutions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), chap. 3.

42 Assurance problems and the role of self-interested bargaining can, however, suggest a need for centralized authority. In James, “Distributive Justice without Sovereign Rule: The Case of Trade,” I argue that, in the case of trade, such realities do not undercut the relevance of structural fairness in decentralized governance. Similar points apply here.
may be assessed as coerced, bullied, or exploitative, and in any of these senses unfair. Yet in principle there might be no occasion for speaking of large-scale structural inequity across societies, at least as far as markets are concerned. So global markets need to be considered in their own right. I now turn to this task, by considering the case of international trade.43

Imagine a world of minimal and inconsistent economic transactions between societies. Let us grant that in such a world there is no question whether any larger, emergent pattern of distribution is fair or unfair, beyond the terms of each transaction taken by itself. The same is true, let us assume, even of a world of significant and regular patterns of exchanges. Perhaps, as in the case of “black markets,” societies have little control over what transactions and distributions occur, though each unilaterally plans for and even relies on certain expected benefits. Such de facto coordination and mutual awareness could still fall short of the kind of agreement and mutuality required for a common practice of relying on shared markets.44 As far as trade goes, we may suppose, there is no basis here for arguments from equity in common structures.

All of this is quite irrelevant to the assessment of trade in our world, however. Beginning in 1947, in the aftermath of two world wars, the major nations of the world established a common practice of mutual market reliance as a public and self-conscious collective act. The subsequent real existence of the GATT/WTO system is enough to give questions of structural fairness their point. Whatever that system’s precise contours, it clearly includes trade rules that coordinate policies across countries, generally allowing or proscribing a kind or degree of tariff, quota, subsidy, or other trade protection, as well as less formal expectations for trade and trade-related policies. The types of rules and expectations involved can be arranged in different ways, yielding different combinations of relative and absolute benefit and burden, within societies (e.g., employment restructuring), as well as across them (e.g., changes to GDP). Whatever we say about pre-existing conditions, or even fair opportunities to trade, the real consequences of the trading system, as it is structured over time, entitle us to ask: Is the current system (e.g., current rules and policy expectations) fair to everyone it affects, given that alternative available rules will affect people in quite different ways?

Traditional “realism” in political theory would of course argue that international conditions of anarchy undermine any real rule of international law, including the laws of trade. But such realism has become un-

43My discussion of trade below follows my “Skepticism about Fairness in Trade” (unpubl. ms.). [OMIT SINCE UNPUBLISHED??]

44For a classic conception of what a common practice might involve, which requires more than de facto coordination and mutual awareness, see David Lewis, Convention: A Philosophical Study (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).
realistic. Contrary to traditional realist expectations, the GATT/WTO treaty has given rise to an ongoing, rule-based system, with many of the trappings of legal authority: it is governed by ongoing, agenda-guided negotiations, adjudicated by a dispute resolution system, and enforced by authorized reciprocal trade sanctions. Accordingly, “neorealists” now qualify their skepticism about institutions. They purport to explain such things as when and why nations cheat, without suggesting the institutions cheated are less than real, mere transitory strategic alliances, or of no importance for understanding why nations do what they do. 45 So long as the multilateral system is established and governed, and therefore not a state of nature in the relevant sense, trading nations bear certain collective responsibilities. The fair price of undertaking and maintaining a common practice of mutual market reliance is, for each trading nation, not only a responsibility of “fair play” to keep established rules in good faith, but also for each to use its bargaining powers in trade negotiations so that the system of trade itself treats those it affects equitably.

But what, specifically, does this require? 46 The minimum requirement is weakly egalitarian: barring extenuating circumstances, all countries must enjoy opportunities to trade, even when trade exclusion has other, desirable outcomes. To see why, suppose that, because India and China combined contain much of the world’s population, and much of the world’s poor, the WTO could maximize poverty reduction globally by allowing trade only with these countries. Perhaps each country is to erect high trade barriers against the rest of the developing and less developed world. We would not call this fairness in trade. Even the most vigorous advocates of global free trade assume that the poor of Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa are supposed to have a chance to benefit from access to global markets, even if that chance costs the poor elsewhere. This is not, however, to say that fairness in trade requires anything like the positive provision of benefits, or certain outcomes, beyond providing oppor-

45 As one leading neorealist explains, “In general, realists have argued that cooperation is possible under anarchy, but that it is harder to achieve, more difficult to maintain, and more dependent on state power than is appreciated by the institutionalist tradition.” Joseph M. Grieco, “Understanding the Problem of International Cooperation: The Limits of Neoliberal Institutionalism and the Future of Realist Theory,” in David A. Baldwin (ed.), Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 301-38, at p. 302.

46 One methodological answer is that fairness principles are those that would be accepted in a Rawlsian original position, in which hypothetical trade negotiators bargain self-interestedly in ignorance of which country they represent. Any principles agreed to would be fair, in part because no representative could give special weight or legitimacy to his currently favored position in the trading system. This is not wrong in my view, but since it does not show how fairness has egalitarian upshot, I focus on more substantive claims about principles that do.
tunities to trade. In principle, the system of trade can be free from “for-
mal” discrimination in access to global markets, whether or not the op-
opportunity to trade is taken, and whether or not it is ultimately beneficial.

Here true equity may seem to require more, including (at least) what
might be called “Fair Inclusion”: people affected by trade are to be pro-
vided with the material basis for market access to be of real benefit. At
the level of government trade policy, this plausibly requires prerogatives
for developing countries, for instance, of “infant industry protection,” of
engaging in the “self-discovery” needed for trade according to dynamic
comparative advantage, and perhaps of other forms of temporary protec-
tion. Such prerogatives are egalitarian, in the sense that the level of de-
velopment at which they become inappropriate may not correspond with
levels of absolute poverty. In principle, special protective measures may
be needed for beneficial trade despite the fact that a country is relatively
prosperous in the absence of trade (perhaps it enjoys natural resource
abundance and a culture of mutual concern).

Such measures imply that other trading countries must forgo certain
advantages, but not necessarily that they must take positive and poten-
tially costly action. In another class of cases, Fair Inclusion plausibly
requires positive provision. If less economically developed countries are
indeed supposed to have a chance to benefit from access to the global
markets that already affect them, trading nations bear responsibility for
the roads, communications, and other infrastructure needed to make that
chance real. To the extent that this requires new and better-funded multi-
lateral development institutions, their creation is a requirement for fair-
ness in trade. That is to say, it is not a purely domestic responsibility, but
the fair price, as it were, of a common practice of mutual market reliance.
In poor countries, this is particularly important if trade is to benefit the
rural poor, whose market access and profit levels are often hampered by
a lack of infrastructure. But, again, the demand for “development,” at
least of certain forms, does not depend on the existence of absolute pov-
ety. As above, a relatively prosperous society could require similar pro-
visions, generating similar international responsibilities.

Aside from a responsibility to provide the material basis for real
benefit, fairness in trade plausibly requires that people not be subject to
unfair burdens. This issue might be called “Fair Burden”: people are to
be given adequate protection against, or compensation for, the harms of
trade. In fact, trade often adversely affects the local poor. Though in the-
ory trade does not change overall employment numbers, in industrialized
countries it does shift jobs toward higher-skilled industries, threatening
lower-skilled, less-educated, and often relatively poor workers with un-
employment. But Fair Burden may also appear highly inegalitarian. Does
it imply, for example, that it is fair for rich countries to protect their mar-

kets at the expense of the foreign poor, in order to avoid untoward domestic distributive consequences for the rich?

I take it that harms to the rich are relevant for fairness in principle, but that they do not necessarily justify protective trade barriers that hurt the foreign poor. As economists often argue, “the losers” from trade should be compensated by social welfare institutions and transitional protections. Trade barriers are at most a “second-best” or “third-best” solution as compared to such direct policy measures. The point here should not be that we do even better than “free trade” if domestic compensation is possible, however. It is rather that dropping barriers to trade can be fair only if compensatory institutions are put into place. If they are not feasible or affordable, as in some developing countries, “next-best” trade protection may well be fair. Thus, as in the case of infrastructure development, a country’s exposure to global markets generates international responsibilities for the cost of social security and transitional protections. This is the fair price of signing on to the multilateral trading system. But, again, this point does not depend on the existence of absolute poverty; it could equally apply to a relatively prosperous trading society that, for whatever reasons, cannot afford to maintain a substantial social safety net.

When poverty is at issue, Fair Burden limits what measures of poverty reduction can be taken. In “net food importing” developing countries, for example, the elimination of rich country farm subsidies benefits domestic producers, particularly the rural poor, but at the expense of consumers, particularly the poor in urban areas. One can argue that the urban poor often receive compensation in other forms, such as the benefit of infrastructure or economic opportunities. But this cannot be taken for granted. Fair Burden requires the establishment of compensatory mechanisms, such as basic mechanisms of social security, again, provided by international support.

Beyond preventing trade from being harmful and providing real opportunities for benefit, structural fairness in trade can also require the actual enjoyment of benefits of certain kinds. The issue might be called “Fair Gain”: trade is fair only if members of trading countries reap adequate levels of benefit from the gains of trade. The name of the game in trade is, after all, mutual economic gain (from specialization), as each country trades to its comparative advantage. But many developing countries (for instance, all of those in Sub-Saharan Africa) will for the foreseeable future have their comparative advantage in agriculture and textiles. If so, there is no way to honor that fact, according to the very aim

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of trade, unless rich countries wean themselves from agricultural production, according to their own comparative advantage, and allow the developing world to reap its full bounty. So, for example, Fair Gain, applied to the present case, rules out widely publicized, billion-dollar-per-day US, EU, and Japanese agribusiness subsidies. Though they further impoverish millions of already poor cotton and sugar farmers in Africa and Latin America, absolute poverty is not the only problem. It is also that benefits that belong to millions of developing world farmers, given the accepted aim of trade, instead go to a relatively small number of affluent farmers in the richest countries. That poor farmers are made even poorer exacerbates this unfairness, but the unfairness would remain even if they enjoyed a decent standard of living. In this sense, the issue is egalitarian.

Fair Gain can also apply on a larger scale, for example, by constraining how much trading countries gain in the aggregate over time. To be sure, there are large and difficult questions of how exactly to specify what “gains” from trade are relevant. Do they include mere changes to GDP, or other economic and noneconomic benefits of trade? How are they to be weighted for absolute levels of welfare, given that gains have greater value from the point of view of fairness the worse off people are in absolute terms? How does domestic distribution and size of population make a difference? Assuming, however, that the relevant gains can be identified and measured, if only by our best guesses, principles of Fair Gain may be relatively straightforward. One plausible proposal, for example, is the Nash equilibrium—a fair distribution is one that maximizes the product of the relevant gains. This requirement is egalitarian, in the sense that it applies in the absence of poverty. When relative gains are not in this sense fair over time, and inequalities across societies that reflect this emerge, the unfairness is of a kind that can exist even among affluent countries.

Continuing poverty in developing countries may also reflect unfairness in levels of relative gain, and in this regard be an egalitarian concern. According to some economic theory, countries that trade under certain background conditions tend to converge in living standards over time.\(^{48}\) If differences in living standards remain despite ongoing trade, and the cause of the relative deprivation is not the difference in background conditions (or some other causal factor that otherwise excuses trade), the inequality can be said to reflect insufficient levels of benefit for developing countries. Continuing absolute poverty is not then simply a general problem of humanity or justice, but specifically a matter of unfairness in trade.

One may ask here: Why focus on the gains of trade? At least accord-

ing to conventional understanding, the answer is that the multilateral sys-
tem of trade is premised upon growing economic interdependence, but
with no assumption of complete integration. While trade can certainly be
appropriated for various ends, including the fulfillment of independent
duties of assistance, its generally accepted primary function is to improve
(via specialization) the variety, number, or quality of general goods or
services (food, technology, income, labor) that societies of the sort we
are familiar with would to some degree enjoy even in a condition of eco-
monic isolation. It is these “gains” that are open to assessment as fairly
or unfairly distributed, not the underlying goods or benefits of society,
which are seen as in large part “external” to the system.

It is probably correct that, though economic interdependence across
societies is now significant, it does not yet amount to integration of the
sort found within most domestic or regional economies. Thus, even if we
grant that principles of structural fairness apply within each society, it
would not follow that they apply globally. It needs to be argued, as Beitz
once did, that the analogy is nevertheless close enough. The argument
for globally applicable egalitarian principles of fairness in trade would
have to establish the reality of deep integration across all or most socie-
ties (perhaps on the grounds that supposedly “external” factors such as
natural endowment or labor are systematically created by the system of
trade itself). The point would not have to be about current levels of inte-
grantion. It is enough that deep and global integration is sufficiently likely
to occur in the relatively near future such that it should constrain what
economic structures are now fair. Such an argument seems to me possi-
bable, although it depends on empirical claims that I am not in a position to
develop and assess. The essential point is that the argument from struc-
tural fairness in trade does not depend on the plausibility of an argument
that societies are now or are likely to become fully integrated. There are
real egalitarian distributive requirements, under the conditions of partial
integration we find on the global scene today.

All of this may of course seem to beg the question of principle: Why
shouldn’t structural equity in trade be concerned with distributive out-
comes even if they are not created by a common practice of market reli-
ance, but the result of pre-existing conditions? As in the case of property,
this is a matter of what moral concern with structural fairness involves.
Structural equity argument is accountable to the facts, or “realistic,” be-
because it must independently identify the structure under review as well as
the ways it affects people’s lives. Other, less realistic moral arguments
can of course come into play. But they need not do so simply for egal-
tarian argument to be possible; we can do more than appeal to a mere

49Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*. 
worthy ideal goal of equality. Though I have not rebutted arguments why structural inequity in trade might be, on balance, justified (again, my focus is application instead of substance), it is not hard to believe that, over the longer haul, the egalitarian requirements I have mentioned are normally conclusive responsibilities, for the reasons I have suggested. At the very least, what I have argued shows that cross-societal egalitarianism and serious, deontological realism are not clearly incompatible.

**Further Structures: Economic and Political**

As the global economy goes, the multilateral trading system is something of an easy case. Because it was undertaken publicly and self-consciously as a common practice of market reliance, it does not force us to reckon with difficult questions about what is necessary for questions of structural equity to arise. In cases such as capital markets, these deeper questions come to the fore. The benefits of relying on global and not just domestic capital markets are generally known—a country thereby provides market actors markedly greater financial opportunities for borrowing and lending, reaping enormous net gains in monetary terms. Given the entirely foreseeable dangers, it seems morally necessary for domestic governments to take precautionary measures (such as focusing on less-risky capital, bank regulation, and capital controls) and for the international financial community to encourage this. But, for all this says, reliance on global capital markets might be a unilateral affair, which raises moral concerns of “due care,” and perhaps duties of assistance, but no further question of fairness or equity in common structures. So we can still ask: To what extent, aside from the multilateral trading system, do questions of structural equity arise in the global economy?

Though I cannot argue fully for this here, I take it that we have a site of structural equity under the following two conditions. First, there must be sufficient regularization of behavior and (perhaps decentralized) powers of governance between agents to ascribe collective responsibility to the set of agents in question (though perhaps, as with the case of an angry mob, only responsibilities of due care). Second, the structure in

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question must have specifiable consequences which the group of agents can be required to govern, so that the organization in question can be said to be equitable or inequitable to those it affects, in light of the specified kinds of outcome. Politically speaking, these conditions are relatively minimal: so long as the organization is in effect governed, no particular form of governance is necessary. Justice can therefore require whatever manner of governance best advances structural equity over time (though fairness in governance may also be a separate, relevant factor).

To see how international finance might meet these conditions, consider the IMF under its original, Keynesian design as a collective response to threats of economic instability. The American Great Depression showed that richer and poorer nations alike could fall into economic and social crisis, making it clear that every country could benefit from being able to borrow in order to fund expansionary measures that encourage spending, reduce unemployment, and so on. Since in times of crisis private banks and other countries do not reliably give loans even to creditworthy countries, the availability of such loans can be assured only through the centralization and earmarking of funds specifically for crisis mitigation. Every country benefits from having the opportunity to borrow, but each also benefits when other countries have access to funds in their downturns. Economic crises tend to be contagious, and any collapsed economy is a lost market for exports. Thus there is a need for a lender of last resort. If the IMF by its original design is not a full-fledged common practice of reliance on global markets, it is at least a common practice for coping with expected market consequences.

It seems plausible to talk of structural equity or inequity here. Since the immediate burden of setting up a centralized fund falls to those who put up the initial capital, contributors tend to want the further governance benefit of controlling when disbursements are given; with such control, those who face greater risks of loss in case of loan default could increase chances that loans are repaid. In fact, however, although the IMF is controlled primarily by representatives of the US and European financial community, the real costs of the practice do not fall to richer lending countries, since most loans are repaid. The real costs have fallen to countries from Russia to Indonesia to Korea to Argentina to Brazil who accepted IMF funds and see matters go from bad to worse after trying to implement associated privatization, rapid liberalization, and contractionary measures. The countries most likely to bear such burdens do not receive a similar governance benefit that would allow them to minimize

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the chances of being exposed to risky policy measures. As a result, richer countries receive a huge governance benefit to compensate for a negligible risk of default while less rich and more vulnerable countries have little or no control over the terms of disbursement.

A similar case might be made, not in terms of governance benefits, but in terms of the benefits of lending practices themselves. Rich countries reap large gains from increased stability at little cost, while developing countries face significant crises or risk of crisis at little net gain. The structure of international lending practices itself, aside from its governance structure, can thus seem unfair.

A thorough treatment of the argument from structural equity would develop this and other economic cases with detail and depth that I cannot provide here. I have mainly tried to indicate how the argument might go. The upshot is that structural equity can and ought to be a high political priority, even among those who are conservative about the shape of political structures. I do not mean to advocate political conservativism as such, however, so it is worth emphasizing, in closing, that structural equity argument can also support an argument for revolution in global governance. This also highlights my claim that structural equity can make significant demands.

Suppose, as suggested above, that societies that trade under favorable conditions can be expected to converge in living standards, over some period of time in the foreseeable future. In that case, the burden of justification falls to existing or proposed structures that would make this result less likely. Perhaps the state system does not meet this burden. But supposing, as above, that it does, it may not do so in its present form. If various accessible political and other reforms advance equity in trade and other economic structures, and thus the equalization in living standards, they may be required as a matter of justice. The organization of the state system may need to serve the goal of material equalization.

This point equally applies to institutions for governing the global economy. Suppose that equity in trade and other economic structures is best advanced by measures such as breaking up the World Bank and IMF into several competitive lending organs, by “linking” International Labor Organization standards to WTO sanctioning mechanisms, and by creating new aid and development regimes. If such measures really would advance structural equity, they would be required by justice, even if they do no better by poverty reduction and only change how inequality is governed. Thus, however justified some form of the state system may be on pragmatic realist grounds, there is no presumption against localized political revolution in how the global economy is governed. But this need not be for specifically political reasons; we can still assume, as above, that all governance need only give a reasonable or adequate level of in-
fluence over the structures that affect them (via, say, representatives elected within states). The argument here is that barring further countervailing considerations, the global economy should be governed in whatever would best respect the demands of structural equity and their limitations on inequality across societies.

To be sure, it is ultimately an empirical question what governance organization would tend to make the global economy structurally equitable. There is perhaps some presumption in favor of efficient governance, in the light of the expertise needed to govern the economic issue area in question. The special uncertainties of capital markets may mean, for example, that they should never be governed within the WTO. But this is not to say we should have anything like the governance arrangements we have today.

To conclude: egalitarians concerned about inequality across societies can answer the charge of undue utopianism head on. Even if we grant realism about justice of a serious, political kind, considerations of structural equity provide a basis for closing the gap between richer and poorer. For all I have argued, one can also object to our failure to achieve or promote equality as an ideal goal. Aside from clearly urgent concerns with poverty, however, this is not the only or even the most important egalitarian objection to the inequality we find on the global scene today.\footnote{For comments or relevant discussion I thank Marshall Cohen, Joshua Gert, Nicole Hassoun, Peter de Marneffe, James Nickel, Priya Ranjan, Mathias Risse, Nicholas White, the Southern California Law and Philosophy Group, and audiences at both Arizona State University Law School and Florida State University.}

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