

Two Liberal Egalitarian Perspectives on Wealth and Power

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In the first quarter of 2021, the top one percent of households in the USA had 32.1 percent of the nation's wealth, while the bottom 50 percent held 2.0 percent. Is this a problem? An increasing chorus of social scientists finds that the affluent have more influence on choice of laws and public policies than the nonaffluent, and especially that the extremely rich have greatly disproportionate impact on the content of the laws and public policies we all are coerced to obey (Bartels 2016; Gilens 2012; Gilens and Page 2014). The USA is in the vanguard of this tendency, but the same trend is discernible across contemporary wealthy democracies.

This chapter sketches how liberal egalitarian doctrines of social justice respond to this issue. Let's say this is the problem of wealth and power. I begin by dividing liberal egalitarianism into two schools, welfarist and relational. Section 2 gives the welfarist egalitarian perspective, while section 3 provides the relational egalitarian perspective. The latter is somewhat more complicated, and section 4 analyses a crucial notion in this approach: equal opportunity for political influence. Section 5 contrasts the implications of the two approaches.

1. Background

1.1 Liberal egalitarianism

The division that structures the discussion in this chapter is between what we can label for convenience as *relational egalitarians* and *welfarist egalitarians*. Relational egalitarianism (sometimes called 'democratic egalitarianism') is here understood as an approach that takes protecting the equal basic liberties to be the fundamental liberal principle that takes priority over other justice values. It includes the right to an equal democratic say among these basic liberties. Welfarist egalitarianism refers to an approach that takes equally meeting the needs of all members of society (or in other words increasing and equalising individual welfare (well-being)) to be what matters morally for its own sake. It upholds the basic liberties including the right to an equal democratic say as instrumentally necessary to promoting well-being fairly (equally) distributed.

For the welfarist egalitarian, what in itself makes a society more or less just is entirely the degree to which its arrangements bring about good quality lives for its members and spread out that good evenly across persons. For the relational egalitarian, these facts about individual welfare are not in themselves even a part of what makes a society just or unjust. From this perspective, achieving justice consists in building a democratic society controlled equally by all its citizens, a society of free persons cooperating together without hierarchy,

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without excessive inequalities in political and economic power and social status, on a footing of equal basic liberty. In other words, what matters for justice is establishing institutions and practices that induce people to relate as equals, as equally functioning members of democratic society. Equal liberty for all is the rock-bottom value, and it is understood as incompatible with social hierarchy. The welfarist egalitarian is not opposed to hierarchy per se, rather to bad hierarchy, understood as the kind that results in avoidably bad lives for people and maldistribution of what good there is.

From each of these two versions of liberal egalitarianism there arises a sharp critique of current wealth inequality's impact on the functioning of democracy. The critiques differ. This chapter explores the differences between these approaches to what each of them will identify as a big problem. Besides clarifying and contrasting the welfarist egalitarian and relational egalitarian reasons for opposing the dominating influence of wealth on democratic politics, this essay uses the contrast to comment on the plausibility of these two versions of liberal egalitarianism. On this issue I lean towards welfarist egalitarianism, but the main task is to highlight where they stand, and to glean from both what insights they can deliver regarding the stance we ought to take toward the wealth and power issue. The question is how strongly we ought to be committed to building and sustaining a democratic political order, and to what sort of democratic political order we should be committed.

1.2 Democratic decision making

Political decisions might be reached in ways that are more or less democratic, and it may be helpful here to give a partial characterization of democracy. The more these features obtain, the more democratic the process. Each feature can vary by degree. (1) All adult members of society have a vote that counts the same as all others in majority rule elections that determine the content of laws and other public policies. (2) Elections take place against a backdrop of freedom of speech and freedom of political association. (3) When the majority will of voters changes, the majority can immediately bring about a corresponding shift in law or public policy. (Imagine a regime in which if and only if the will of the majority on some issue stays constant for 50 years, or 100, the will of the majority is then instituted. This regime would not be a democracy.) (4) There are no political constraints on the types or character of issues that are within the scope of majority will decision-making. (5) All adult members of society have equal opportunity for political influence.

These five features are not a full characterisation of democracy. That would also specify rules for agenda setting appropriate for democracy, and specify what groups of people should constitute a single society within which the majority rules (Goodin 2007).

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Also, not all features of this partial characterisation are of equal importance, if democracy is to be prized for its place in a non-hierarchy ethic, as the relational egalitarian affirms. From that standpoint, (1), (2), and (5) are the central planks.

1.3 The problem of wealth and power, and two remedies

Inequalities in citizens' wealth holdings are thought to bring about inequalities in citizens' opportunity to influence their government's political decision-making. This might come about in several ways.

Inequality of wealth can bring about greater political influence for the rich. This can occur via several mechanisms, *described at length in some of the other chapters in this volume*. (1) Campaigns for elected public office as now structured require candidates to raise large sums of money, and large contributors to political campaigns can engage in implicit quid pro quo bargaining. As is said, who pays the piper calls the tune (Destri 2022). (2) Public officials including legislators who cater to wealthy special interests while in office find the door open to lucrative careers working for those special interest enterprises after their term of office ends (Kogelmann 2022, Parvin 2022). (3) The wealthy may belong to social networks more likely to include elected officials and other politically influential agents compared to the networks of the less wealthy, and informal interaction among those in one's social network may provide opportunities for influence (Parvin 2022). (4) When issues are debated in a legislature, interested parties may lobby the elected officials urging that any policy changes enacted be congenial to their special interests, and the wealthy can use their wealth to organise these lobbying efforts (Kogelmann 2022, Parvin 2022). (5) The wealthy can use their wealth to sponsor public discourse that favours their policy views. In this way they help shape the background public opinion that in turn affects the calculations of legislators about what laws and policies to support (Kimpell Johnson 2022, Parvin 2022). (6) An indirect influence occurs when it is believed that wealthy owners of productive resources will withdraw these resources from jurisdictions that accord them unfavourable treatment. For example, an increase in taxes on corporations may spur some corporations to relocate to a place where corporate tax rates are lower (Shoikedsbrod 2022).¹ (7) Wealth can help wealthy individuals who seek to be politically well informed succeed in this aim more than the non-wealthy with similar aims; plausibly, being informed enhances one's opportunity for political influence (Kogelmann 2022).

If morality requires us to reduce or extinguish unequal opportunity for political influence, there are two broad strategies available: *insulate* and *eliminate*. The insulation strategy tolerates inequality of wealth but pursues ways of keeping possession of greater than average wealth from conferring above-average opportunity for political influence. A well-known example is campaign finance reform

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(Ackerman and Ayres 2002). The elimination strategy pursues ways of reducing power concentrations in the private sphere (Bennett, Brouwer and Claassen 2022). The most obvious way of doing this is to compress the distribution of wealth across individual citizens through redistribution. Insulation and elimination might be pursued in tandem, or only one might be embraced.

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2. The Welfarist Egalitarian Perspective on Wealth and Power

The welfarist egalitarian holds that justice requires boosting the well-being of all persons who shall ever live, while giving some priority to achieving gains for those who would otherwise be very badly off, or worse off than others. There's an intramural disagreement here. Prioritarians hold that it is morally more valuable to achieve a welfare gain for a person, the worse-off in absolute terms she would otherwise be over the course of her life, regardless of how her condition compares to that of others (Parfit 1995; Adler 2012). Egalitarians by contrast hold that how well off one person is compared to others matters for its own sake, and that justice requires increasing the total of people's well-being and also equalising people's well-being (Temkin 1993, Otsuka and Voorhoeve 2018). The intramural dispute between upholding equality or priority is nontrivial (Adler and Holtug 2019), but the two views share enough in common so that grouping them together makes sense for purposes of clarifying welfarist and relational egalitarianism.

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Welfarist egalitarianism could be upheld as one among several social justice values. Here we interpret this doctrine as the sole fundamental justice value, or at least as ruling the roost, taking priority over any other such values there might be. On such a view, political and social arrangements should be set so that over the long run they bring about the greatest reachable equality/priority-adjusted total sum of individual well-being.

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The alert reader might well surmise that the implications of welfarist egalitarianism regarding wealth and power will be hopelessly indeterminate in the absence of some understanding of what individual welfare really is. The issue can be restated: what in itself makes a person's life go better for her rather than worse? Or in still other words, what is it a person seeks for its own sake, insofar as she is being rationally prudent?

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A first response is that it is not really the case that welfarist egalitarianism has no implications for wealth and power public policy without specifying some particular conception of welfare. In some circumstances, on any non-crazy conception of welfare, steps to prevent wealth inequality from having an impact on the political process, whether by an insulation or an elimination strategy, will clearly be required by welfarist egalitarian justice. In other circumstances, the reverse will be clearly be true.

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What rises and falls with the conception of well-being that completes the welfarist ideal? Perhaps the crucial divide is between the idea that welfare consists in gaining objectively valuable goods and the view that it is subjective, bottoming out in people's desires. For the purposes of the wealth and power issue, one consideration is that on the former view, beyond some modest point, wealth increases are as likely to distract one from making welfare enhancing choices as boost one's prospects. With a small income, Arneson drinks beer and lives well, and with a large income, he uses cocaine and lives less well, or comes vastly to overvalue the improvement in his welfare that a fancy yacht will afford him, compared to a canoe. This amplifies the tilt of welfarist egalitarianism toward channelling wealth toward those who have little. And this dampens the likelihood that more political power in the hands of the rich will bring about justice gains. The contrast here is with desire fulfilment views.

Abstracting from the contrasts between egalitarianism and prioritarianism and between objective list and desire-fulfilment accounts of welfare, we can set out the basic response of welfarist egalitarianism to the wealth and power issue. This social justice doctrine seeks to reduce the impact of unequal wealth holdings on political decision-making when, only when, and to the degree that doing so is part of the best strategy for maximising equality-weighted welfare summed across persons over the long run. Social justice is here conceived mainly as the standard for assessing institutions and social practices as they combine to affect people's welfare prospects.

The causal linkages that determine what welfarist egalitarianism implies for wealth and power in given circumstances are complex. Reducing the impact of wealth inequality on the political process might enhance its democratic character, and thereby the good functioning of democracy, and thereby generate greater well-being more fairly distributed. But the opposite might be the case in some circumstances: wealth inequality can be a countervailing force against majority tyranny, the ability of elected officials to entrench their power and subvert democracy, or the entrenched power of officials in state bureaucracies to manipulate the political process against democratically elected officials and the will of the majority (see Kogelmann 2022). And when the impact of wealth on political power enhances democracy, the upshot might be good or bad from the welfarist egalitarian perspective. The will of the democratic majority might be to redistribute advantages from worse-off citizens to a majority coalition of better offs. The will of the democratic majority might be to enact policies that are good for growth and prosperity in the short term but prosperity-dampening in the long run, in a complex world of climate change and conflicts over access to water, food, and habitable shelter (Cowen 2018). Alternatively, the will of the majority might over the long haul tend towards prosperity and sensible policies that tame and complement prosperity, boosting the actual quality of

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While the relationship between welfarist egalitarianism and wealth and power is ultimately contingent, three examples can help to further illustrate the likely tilt of welfare egalitarianism when it comes to wealth and power in contemporary liberal democracies.

1. Welfarist egalitarianism tends to favour egalitarian redistribution of wealth and income and related pro-poor policies, and insofar as the influence of the rich and even more the super-rich on politics puts the brakes on instituting such policies, welfarist egalitarianism stoutly supports squashing the (here) excessive political influence of the rich and super-rich.

2. The more it is the case that a stable majority of voters in a democracy is disposed to solidarity with all members of society and is disinclined to see itself as 'us' versus a 'them' composed of other members of society whose welfare interests somehow count for less, welfarist egalitarianism favours measures that facilitate control of political decision-making by majority rule.

3. Unequal wealth's impact on the political process may extend beyond affecting the quality of political decision making and of the laws and other public policies. The outsize influence of the wealthy on the political process can have indirect effects that register in a welfarist egalitarian accounting. These effects could be positive or negative. Beyond some point, the disproportionate control of political decision making by the wealthy might discourage constructive engagement in the process by non-wealthy citizens, resulting in their missing opportunities to widen their outlook beyond their private concerns. Mill (1991) speculates the structure and operation of the political system likely has effects on citizen virtue. A widespread perception that politics is a rigged game might reach a tipping point past which social trust and cooperation between social groups in everyday interactions diminish.

3. Relational Egalitarianism and the Anti-hierarchy Perspective on Wealth and Power

This section and the next explore the relational egalitarian ideal and its implications for the problem of wealth and power. This ideal can be variously interpreted, and some advocates see it as one component of a theory of justice, not its entirety (for discussion, see Lippert-Rasmussen 2018). The discussion in this chapter treats relational egalitarianism as a proposed complete theory of justice for assessing institutions and social practices. So viewed, it is a full-fledged rival to welfarist egalitarianism. In this treatment, the ideas of John Rawls loom large. Rawls's view is that justice requires, as a first priority, achieving political democracy in a form that liberates us from social hierarchy, the avoidance of which is the core of relating as equals. Relational egalitarianism thus yields a basis for a stringent and

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uncompromising rejection of significant inequality of wealth precisely for its adverse impact on political democracy. The upshot is stiff opposition to the impact of wealth on political decision-making, very different from the highly contingent opposition to inequality of wealth as undermining political democracy that welfarist egalitarianism delivers. In this perspective, relational egalitarianism is stalwart and firm in its stance against social hierarchy, whereas the stance of welfarist egalitarianism is wishy-washy. The issue of wealth and power shines a bright light on the contrast between these two versions of liberal egalitarianism.

That's the big picture. But the details turn out to be important, and they complicate the comparison. I shall try to show that depending on circumstances, the relational egalitarian view will retract its opposition to inequalities of wealth that in some respects undermine the degree to which the democratic ideal can be achieved, and the welfarist will condemn inequalities of wealth that undermine democracy in some circumstances in which the relational egalitarian will not. The two approaches can pull together, but sometimes one will zig where the other zags. So, becoming clear which approach if either should attract our allegiance will be an important factor in arriving at a reasonable view on the wealth and power issue.

3.1 *Rawls*

John Rawls, the most prominent political philosopher of the twentieth century, provides an account of social justice that gives content to the idea of relating as equals (Rawls 1996, 1999, 2001). On this view, we live together on just terms when we cooperate with others to build and sustain institutions that protect equal basic liberties for all citizens, as a first priority. These protected civil rights establish a status of inviolability for all. We are morally bound to refrain from sacrificing the basic liberties of some, or even of everybody, to gain greater prosperity or greater opportunities for competitive success. None of these liberties may permissibly be curtailed except to protect the overall set of them for all over the long run. As a second priority, just institutions must be arranged to fulfil a strong equality of opportunity principle: all those with the same ambition and same native talent potential must have the same chances of success in competitions for social positions and roles that confer advantages and authority greater than others enjoy. This principle requires a fair provision of schooling and socialisation to all, entirely offsetting deficits in the ability and willingness of one's parents or guardians to provide one a fair start in life that develops one's potential to attain superior positions. Finally, as a third priority, institutions must combine in their effects so that any inequalities in basic resources across persons that obtain make those with least resources as well off as possible in resource holdings.

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drive vehicles and walk on public roads just as we like. But intuitively, it seems, sensible traffic laws that facilitate everyone's opportunity to travel wherever they want to go with reasonable speed and safety are not ~~violating~~ basic liberties. Rawls proposes that basic liberties are those that are especially needed for the development and exercise of our capacity to comply with fair terms of cooperation (play fair with others) and our capacity to choose and revise our life aims and pursue them. In other words, the basic liberties are those needed by free persons to develop and exercise their capacities (1) to behave morally and (2) to be rationally prudent by looking out for their own self-chosen interests.

Let's take stock. The Rawlsian account of justice has two striking features that differentiate it sharply from any welfarist egalitarianism. One is that within the constraint of respecting basic liberties, justice requires real freedom for all to pursue self-chosen aims, with fair shares of ~~general-purpose~~ resources, ~~not~~ maximal fair attainment of good quality life, individual ~~fulfilment~~.² As Rawls puts it, in the justice as fairness doctrine he advances, the right is prior to the good.

The second striking feature comes into view only when we understand the stringency of Rawls's idea that the equal basic liberties have priority over the other justice values (and that within this lower-ranked set, attaining strong equal opportunity has strict priority over making the ~~worst~~-off best off). Rawls writes, 'Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override' (1999, 3). And not only welfare. The inviolability to which Rawls here alludes comes to this: ~~the~~ three components of Rawls's principles are rank-ordered absolutely and exceptionlessly. The first-priority equal basic liberties must be fulfilled to the greatest extent we can attain, and no trade-offs at all are allowed that would countenance slightly lesser basic liberty in exchange for greater ~~fulfilment~~ of the lesser-ranked equal opportunity and resource distribution norms.

Rawls specifies the equal basic liberties by a list: 'freedom of thought and liberty of conscience, the political liberties and freedom of association, as well as the freedoms specified by the liberty and integrity of the person; and finally, the rights and liberties covered by the rule of law' (Rawls 1996, 291). The political liberties centrally include the right to a democratic say, ~~-~~ the right to an equal vote in majority rule elections that determine directly or indirectly the content of laws and public policies. Moreover, the right to a democratic say is fulfilled only when the right is more than formal: each person with the same political ambition and political talent has the same chance of being politically influential.

~~Rawls~~ supposes the strict priority attached to the equal basic liberties is a nonbinding constraint, in that we ~~will be able to~~ fully protect the equal basic liberties as best we can and still have lots of resources and administrative capacity remaining to boost ~~fulfilment~~ of

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the lesser ranked principles. But he is assuming that his principles are a realistic utopia: in modern times, they can be implemented, and when implemented, people will become motivated fully to comply with them - enforcement is needed only to assure each person that others will be complying.

However, in actual circumstances of the modern world, this 'realistic utopia' is a utopia plain and simple. Short of genetic manipulation of human psychology that could not be guaranteed to work out well, human psychological nature brings it about that some of us will seek our own good at the expense of others, or fanatically oppress others in the service of oddball aims or worse. We tend to divide people into 'us' and 'them' and such moral inclinations as we have get harnessed to boosting the advantages of us over them. Rawls supposes the basic liberties can be secured in a fully adequate manner, but just consider police protection to uphold the rule of law. There is no upper limit to what resources we might devote to enforcement: even a police officer at everyone's elbow always would not suffice, unless the reliable compliance of police themselves with rule of law values could somehow be secured. Greater resources devoted to socialisation might keep paying off just a little in greater compliance, no matter what budget we have now. And given strict priority of basic liberties, the protection of even one individual's right, and even a small basic liberty right at that, takes strict priority over any gains we might achieve by deploying resources toward fulfillment of equality of opportunity and doing the best we can for the worst off.

Even if one were to figure out a way to relax this conclusion a bit, it will remain the case that Rawls's position comes close to the affirmation that each person's right to a democratic say (interpreted to require equal opportunity for political influence) must be upheld whatever the consequences. The only clear exception obtains when upholding the set of basic liberties in dire circumstances is best achieved by accepting lesser fulfillment of one or another liberty in the set. Then justice requires a trade-off between basic liberties. As one component of the equal basic liberties, the right to a democratic say might be subject to that sort of trade-off. The upshot is that there is very little room in the Rawls version of relational/democratic egalitarianism for compromising with the top priority justice requirement, that each member of society has a right to a democratic say.

3.2 Kolodny

As stated so far, the Rawlsian view of relational egalitarianism might seem insufficient to capture the social equality ideal of justice as non-hierarchy. We can imagine a society that fully protects the Rawlsian basic liberties yet is heavily larded with social hierarchy in many institutions and practices. Bosses might dominate employees, for example (Dahl 1985, Pettit 2014, Anderson 2017, Christiano 2022).

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A natural starting point is the thought that inequalities of power and authority are opposed to relational equality. But as Samuel Scheffler (2003) has commented, inequalities of power and authority are ubiquitous in modern society, and not all seem intuitively, on their face, objectionable. So evidently, we need an account of objectionable hierarchy.

Niko Kolodny (2014) provides orientation. He proposes there are three *prima facie* problematic relations of inequality: (1) some have asymmetric power over others (without being firmly disposed to refrain from exercising it for the reason that doing so would wrong those others), (2) some have greater authority than others, in the sense of being able to issue commands that others obey (without being firmly disposed to refrain from exercising it for the reasons just given), and (3) some are esteemed and revered more than others for having traits that either morally ought to attract no such response or that are the traits that make one a person and should attract the same esteem and reverence for each and every person). A society that achieves the ideal of social equality lacks (1)-(3), except that (1) and (2) can be rendered unobjectionable, or at least very much less objectionable, to the degree **that** they are (a) continuously avoidable, on the part of those who are getting the short end of the stick, by taking acceptable available exit options, or alternatively (b) are regulated by a democratic government in which all have equal opportunity for political influence.

Apart from its capacity to take away the badness of hierarchy it regulates, the democratic state is a crucial component of a society of equals. The state massively coerces its citizens, and in most circumstances, for most people, exit from the state is unfeasible or at least very onerous. **So**, if a subgroup of citizens dominates the state, there exists a pervasive social hierarchy. (It does not follow that an authoritarian or monarchical state cannot in any circumstances be bringing about the greatest **fulfilments** of the society of equals ideal that can be achieved. Imagine a ruler with unchecked political power who sets in place rules and policies that bring about a flat non-hierarchical society whose members all relate only as equals - except that all are under the thumb of the unchecked ruler. But this is an outlier possibility.) In expectable situations a non-hierarchical government would be a crucial component of the closest approximation to the non-hierarchical society that we can bring about.

Kolodny (2014) is discussing the justification of democracy, not presenting a theory of justice. But (here I follow Kolodny, forthcoming) I submit that his ideas fit Rawls' theory of justice hand to glove. In particular, they explain how protecting the equal basic liberties eliminates objectionable social hierarchy in all institutions and social practices. When the Rawlsian equal basic liberties are fully secured, any social hierarchies such as boss-worker or doctor-patient are regulated by a democratic government in which all have equal opportunity for political influence (EOPI). (Even if there is zero

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regulation in place, this is the level of regulation democratic government enacts).

Kolodny social equality is also consistent with the existence of inequalities of power and authority that are continuously avoidable by those who are getting the short end of the stick. Having genuine exit options takes the sting of evil from inequalities of power and authority. Even if EOPI fails to fully obtain, genuine exit options make such non-political inequalities acceptable. Genuine exit options to a relation of inequality obtain only if one has viable alternatives. The project of sustaining viable alternatives centrally involves having adequate resources: if I can't meet my basic needs unless I continue to submit to lesser power and authority in employment and marriage, for example, I don't have the viable option of exiting these relations of inequality. This 'continuously avoidable' component of the ideal of social equality puts pressure on Rawls's strict priority for equal basic liberties over the lesser-ranked norms regulating inequalities in people's access to social and economic resources. After all, fulfillment of these norms is arguably just the ticket to ensure that relations of inequality are continuously avoidable, thus helping to ensure we are relating as equals, living in a society free from objectionable social hierarchy. So, let's drop the strict, absolute priority relations among the components of Rawls's theory of justice. Equal basic liberties are the jewel in the crown of this ideal, but this jewel, though very important, can be sacrificed sometimes to enhance other features of the crown. Henceforth in this essay we shall consider relational/democratic egalitarianism as plausibly exemplified in the amalgam Kolodny-Rawls theory of justice for institutions and social practices.

3.3 The implications of relational egalitarianism for wealth and power

Inequality of wealth is inherently menacing to the goal of sustaining a society in which people relate as equals. The problem is that inequality of wealth threatens this fundamental condition of equal opportunity for political influence. Either wealth inequality must be squashed or it must somehow be insulated from the political process, so it does not deprive some citizens of EOPI.

This implication of relational egalitarian justice for the wealth and power problem is obvious, and obviously practically important, but should not be overstated. Complete fulfillment of relational egalitarian justice would obtain only if each member of society enjoys a right to a democratic say incorporating equal opportunity for political influence. But other social conditions besides the impact of wealth inequality can and do block the fulfillment of this right to a democratic say. More importantly, it can also happen that inequality of wealth, and wealth's influence on political decision-making, counteracts these other impediments to guaranteeing for all the right to a democratic say — or more specifically, its EOPI component. In possible and likely circumstances, when we are not able to achieve complete fulfillment of

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relational egalitarian justice no matter what we do, the closest we can come to achieving this ideal will involve tolerating unequal wealth and wealth's impact on politics because seeking to reduce them would exacerbate other conditions that are inimical to relational egalitarianism.

Here's one example illustrating this abstract possibility: suppose that attempts to reduce the political influence of the wealthy would strengthen the political power of a majority coalition of voters bent on pursuing their interest, so that this majority becomes rigidly stable over time and turns into majority tyranny (see section 7 for elaboration).

Here's another example: compression of holdings of wealth beyond some point brings about increased opportunity to influence political outcomes accruing to the political class in society, comprising especially incumbents in office who can use winning office to gain electoral advantages for themselves and the network of advisors and collaborators they cultivate. At an extreme, a group of incumbents and their cronies might succeed in giving such electoral advantages to themselves that even though democratic elections continue to be held, in practice none but the de facto authoritarian rulers have any chance of being re-elected, and re-elected again, and forming a dynasty that endures long-term (Levitsky and Way 2010). Or by this process even the forms of democracy might eventually be discarded.

Another possible scenario involves a party in power that espouses a social justice agenda in which equalising ownership of wealth looms large, firmly opposes the wealthy as enemies of social justice, but ends up tightening its grip on power independently of whether or not the wealth equalisation agenda is stably advanced (Corrales and Penfold 2015). Another scenario involves increased power accruing to an entrenched state bureaucracy. For example, imagine a regime in which the top military leaders have great leverage. Their implicit threat is: 'don't mess with us or there will be a coup.' Yet another example involves not the formation of a permanent stable majority that rules, but shifting majority coalitions, from which some voters regarded as pariahs by the rest are always excluded. The pariahs might be a despised racial or ethnic group or adherents of an unpopular religion.

4. Equal Opportunity for Political Influence

The idea of equal opportunity for political influence stands in need of clarification (see also Kogelmann 2022). Picture a democratic society in which a stable majority of voting citizens votes for its own interests and persistently wins. This problem case is often described as the problem of permanent minorities. Suppose wide freedom of speech and freedom of organisation prevails. Each adult citizen has an equal democratic say in the form of a vote that counts the same as anyone else's in free elections. But the same individuals form a majority

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coalition, over and over again. The voters who are not part of this coalition never have any chance of being part of a winning coalition that is able to enact laws to its liking. Given this characterisation of the circumstances, does equality of political influence prevail here?

Rawls formulates EOPI (which he refers to as the fair value of the political liberties) in ways that seem to identify it with equal chances to exert control over the content of political decisions among those equally ambitious to gain such control and equally politically talented. When the fair value of the political liberties obtains, citizens similarly gifted and motivated have roughly an equal chance of influencing the government's policy and of attaining positions of authority irrespective of their economic and social class. (Rawls 1996: 358; also Rawls 2001: 149).

But a gifted and motivated agent seeking to have political influence might have far less of it than others over the long run simply because her views are unpopular. Not having the same chance as others of getting one's way does not intuitively make it the case that one has unequal opportunity for influence. Kolodny accordingly interprets EOPI as requiring that the equally politically talented and ambitious would have had the same chances of being decisive in controlling political decisions if any pattern of political opinion among voters were as likely as any other. Or we might say that EOPI requires that one should have the same chance of making an impact on the choice of laws and policies as anyone else with comparable levels of political ambition and talent, and whose political views are (at the outset) exactly as popular among voters as one's own.

However, so formulated, EOPI could obtain even in the scenario in which a stable majority just votes its interests and exploits a stable convergence of interests to get its way. Consider again a stereotypical example of tyranny of the majority. A stable majority of voters recognises that they have common interests and uses the power of the ballot to promote their interests by winning elections over and over.

Oddly, Kolodny EOPI might be satisfied in this situation. There are two stylised possibilities. In one, no voters are open to being influenced by others, and everyone has the same opportunity for political influence: zero. In another possible situation, members of the stable majority might be open to influence from others in a degenerate sense: anyone who raises considerations as to where the self-interest of the majority lies will get a hearing from majority voters and will have an equal chance of swaying minds. Each is perfectly willing to entertain arguments from any voter as to how the stable majority's interests might best be understood and pursued. And members of the out-groups, the permanent minority, are open to persuasion by all others, as to how their interests might be best advanced. But we should not count these scenarios as fulfilling EOPI in any normatively attractive sense.

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There is nothing mysterious or latently paradoxical in the idea that a democracy can be a tyranny. Having a vote that counts the same as everyone else's vote in political elections that will decide how society is to be governed is having a little bit of power over others. If many people pool their bits of political power, the result can become some just exercising naked power over others. The franchise can function as a club or gun. To reiterate, the problem is not merely that elections are resulting in some always winning and some always losing. And the fact that these scenarios sketched might be unlikely does not detract from their force as challenging the notions of EOPI currently on offer.

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It seems the formulation of EOPI should incorporate a motivational component: in a true democracy, citizens seek to discern what policies would be fair, are disposed to consider anyone's arguments regarding what policies meet that standard, and cast their ballots for whatever they end up believing after considering arguments. The rough idea is that each has equal opportunity for making a contribution to the discussion, which others evaluate by their own lights.

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The degree to which one's views resonate with others and affect their views, or not, does not diminish EOPI, but the degree to which other factors such as social status or one's ability to pay for billboards and TV ads affect one's impact on people's uptake of one's views does diminish EOPI. This suggestion is in the spirit of a comment by Jeremy Waldron to the effect that when citizens are committed to respecting people's rights and disagree about what rights people have, majority rule is the fair political procedure (Waldron 1996).

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Nor would it be problematic if the society described fails to be an ideal deliberative democracy, in which all citizens are committed to voting on the basis of sustained deliberation and the deliberation is rationally conducted, with political proposals correctly assessed according to their merits. Perhaps few exercise their opportunities for influence and deliberation languishes. Perhaps deliberation is inept. Neither situation is tantamount to establishing a regime of social hierarchy. But EOPI (reasonably interpreted) requires that all must be disposed (a) to attend in an even-handed way, time permitting, to anyone who wants to offer moral arguments for policy choice, and (b) to evaluate by their own lights any arguments offered. Notice that such deliberation as occurs under EOPI need not be high quality rational deliberation. What is required is that those seeking to influence political decision-making make sincere appeals, according to their own beliefs about what ought to be done and why, and those addressed make sincere attempts to evaluate these arguments according to their own deliberative standards, and people vote according to their political opinions so formed.

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If we accept this construal of EOPI, we will see this norm as multidimensional, as is the broader idea of a political decision process being democratic (recall section 3 of this essay). Political decisions

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might be reached against a backdrop of ~~more or less~~ free speech and association, more or less unequal influence in the hands of the wealthy, the party in power, or the entrenched state bureaucracy, with voters regarding ~~their franchise more as~~ a bit of power ~~or more as a~~ responsibility to promote fair policy choice by their lights, and so on. The influence of unequal wealth on the political process is one threat to true, social equality democracy among others.

5. Contrasting Implications

As just characterised, welfarist and relational egalitarianisms approach the problem of wealth and power in a very different spirit. For the welfarist, inequalities in power and authority are in themselves from the moral standpoint a 'don't care' - they matter not even a little, as tiebreakers between policies otherwise evenly balanced. Of course, these inequalities as we know are supremely important in instrumental terms, and the historical record of aristocracies, monarchies, dictatorships, and tyrannies assessed by egalitarian welfarist standards is generally abominable. Since relationalists and welfarists will assess instrumental effects by different standards, the impact of these effects on policy recommendations will sometimes push the practical policy recommendations of these contrasting approaches further apart. Liberals of these different stripes may find themselves fighting on opposite sides of the barricades, the one opposing a political regime the other supports.

To illustrate the divergence, two stylised hypothetical examples will be considered. I believe the divergence will show up in real-world events, but showing that will not be attempted in this chapter. The upshot of the two examples is that the divergence between the two liberal egalitarian perspectives is far ~~starker~~ when we shift from focusing on what social justice requires within a single country and focus more broadly on justice across the globe. So further reflection on global justice will help clarify which if either perspective should attract our allegiance. A further upshot is that if the shift to a global justice perspective is morally required ~~and~~ if we are concerned about the wealth and power issue, we had better pay less heed to wealth and power considered country by country and give more weight to global governance issues.

Picture an imaginary social democratic capitalist country, call it Norway*. Its institutions do not seek to equalise wealth, and any attempts to insulate wealth from power are perfunctory. Looking at their effects, the impacts of wealth on power are not detrimental in welfare terms. Norway*'s government collects a large fraction of citizens' earned incomes at not especially progressive rates, and expends these funds in ways that are pro-poor - compressing the distribution of post-tax income, eliminating poverty, providing health care, old-age pensions, and unemployment compensation, ~~etc.~~ By measurable proxies for individual well-being ~~such as~~ longevity, good

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health over the life course, income, ~~and~~ schooling attainment, Norway's ~~worse-off~~ citizens score well compared to those of other economically developed and wealthy countries.

I submit that if we are evaluating the impact of Norway's policies on its citizens, these policies taken together qualify as tolerably just by welfarist egalitarian standards (Kenworthy 2020 and forthcoming). This is unavoidably a vague judgment call, which others may contest.

Norway* is perhaps an ideal capitalist welfare state. But from a Rawls-Kolodny relational egalitarian perspective, this regime falls short. To be sure, Norway* as described protects several equal basic liberties. ~~Its~~ transfer policies that get basic resources in the hands of citizens in the lower deciles of the income distribution will register in relational egalitarian ~~terms~~ as increasing the extent to which citizens enjoy real ~~and~~ not merely formal freedom to pursue self-chosen aims. (One has real freedom, for example, to travel to Paris, if there is some course of action one can choose and execute that would bring it about that one actually gets to Paris.) More resources in the hands of impoverished and vulnerable citizens mean that they have greater continuous freedom to exit relations of inequality if they have a mind to do that. But it clearly fails to secure EOPI, and clearly more could be done to secure it. Nor is strong equal opportunity for competitive success, (ranking just below equal basic liberties in priority for the relational egalitarian), as close to ~~fulfilment~~ as ~~it could be~~.

But whether all things considered, relational and welfarist egalitarians should arrive at very different assessments of the justice of Norway* is a subtle matter. Greater EOPI ~~fulfilment~~ might directly or indirectly have a positive impact on the quality of life of the Norwegian* people, especially those worse off. ~~The same~~ goes for greater ~~fulfilment~~ of Rawlsian strong equal opportunity. Having increased freedom to exit from relations of inequality will register as valuable for its own sake in relational assessment and as instrumentally valuable in welfarist assessment. This might in a wide range of circumstances come out about a wash. And recall, Rawls-Kolodny social justice relaxes the stringent Rawlsian priority relations, so some large boosts to making the worst off better off can compensate for a slight restriction of freedom of speech.

In passing, I note that the welfarist will not attach great normative significance to the degree to which relations of inequality in social life are regulated by a democratic state over which all have equal opportunity ~~for~~ influence. Just suppose Norway* does as well as can be done in this respect. Suppose I am a worker under the thumb of a tyrannical mean boss or a woman stuck in a marriage to a ~~man~~ who is a dominating jerk. Suppose the laws are not useful in mitigating my plight, nor in prohibiting ways of domination that are especially worsening my life. Why does it ease and at an extreme extinguish the moral badness of the oppression I am enduring, that these relations of inequality are regulated by a democratic state in which EOPI prevails?

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Suppose we could work either to enact social arrangements that free me from bad hierarchy or instead work to make the political decision-making process a bit closer to satisfying EOPI (without any helpful regulation actually being passed)? But the scenario depicted here might be empirically farfetched, so not likely to actually arise.

The second example contrasting the implications of welfarist and relational versions of egalitarianism involves global justice and assumes that relational egalitarian principles apply with force among people sharing dense social relations and in particular shared state membership. Suppose Norway* as so far described faces border control issues. It must decide whether to have loose or tight immigration restrictions, at the limit open borders for those seeking entry for purposes of settling permanently on its territory. It also faces issues concerning whether to allow temporary migrants from abroad who seek to be guest workers on its territory taking paid employment for periods of months or years.

Facing these issues, welfarist egalitarianism, counting at the same moral value the effects of its border control policies on all who might be affected, favours policies whose long-run impact do most to increase equality-weighted individual well-being. Suppose a candidate border control policy would have a negative welfare impact on current citizens, but a positive impact on outsiders seeking admission. Adjusting for the welfare impact of these migrants on the welfare of people in the home countries they leave behind, (and other indirectly affected people elsewhere), cosmopolitan welfarist egalitarianism, over the long run, judges the candidate policy favourably. If another candidate policy does even better in its overall impact on equality-weighted well-being levels, welfarist egalitarianism opts for this alternative, and so on. Welfarist egalitarianism takes the same line in evaluating the subset of possible border control policies that are politically feasible in the sense of being capable of gaining selection in democratic politics.

Let's stipulate a further stylised empirical fact. Suppose that the border control policies that might be enacted have differential effects on the wealthy and the non-wealthy in the economically developed country (here, Norway*). Negative impacts of policies more toward the open-borders end of the spectrum would fall entirely on the non-wealthy current citizens. This might be so due to various causal links. Non-wealthy voters facing border control issues might fear that admitting poor but ambitious outsiders will lessen the economic prospects of current non-wealthy citizens due to competition for employment. Or non-wealthy voters might have attachments to current cultural practices and folkways that they reasonably fear will undergo undesired shifts with a substantial influx of foreigners. Or the non-wealthy voters might fear that the social changes resulting from an increased immigrant population in the nation will erode political support for generous welfare state policies and in this way lower their own economic prospects.

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In this hypothetical - or maybe not so hypothetical - scenario, a wealthy society fails to attain EOPI, and so to be just by relational egalitarian standards. However, it would be benign according to egalitarian welfarism, insofar as the wealthy have disproportionate influence and use it to enact more just border control policies, thereby doing better according to cosmopolitan welfarist egalitarian standards. The politically feasible set of policies is expanded to include more just policy options. This will be an instance of relational inequality bringing about greater justice by welfarist egalitarian lights.

Moreover, if relational egalitarianism requires no social inequality in each separate political society taken one by one, then inequality of wealth, prosperity and individual well-being between countries is no bar to fulfilment of social equality across the globe. As Rawls notes, the material requirements for democracy and even the genuine democracy that sustains EOPI are modest (Rawls 1999b, 105-111). Poor citizens can build and sustain democracy. Once a country is not disabled by extreme poverty from being able to sustain democracy and relations of equality across its members, further economic growth and prosperity are not required by justice. A qualification to this picture is that weak interactions between politically sovereign nations and their people must not be such as to amount to one nation dominating another and exercising power over its poorer and weaker neighbours. But Norway*'s simply having greater material wealth per capita than, say, Botswana* (and not sharing it) does not violate relational egalitarian justice.

So, from a global justice perspective, what sort of global governance do we need, and what steps now would be best to take, to make progress along this front? How does the wealth and power issue shed light on what sort of world we should be working to build? If the domination of poor countries by rich countries, and their holding fast to their far greater prosperity and hence flourishing, strike us as manifestly unjust, what principles of justice best explain and justify this conviction? Does liberal egalitarianism in some version offer sound guidance? These are good questions, so it seems anyway to me.

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¹ A related issue concerns the private financing of state debt, on which see [Wiedenbrüg and Lopez-Cantero 2022 in this volume](#).

² A large issue needs to be flagged here. Ronald Dworkin, a prominent liberal egalitarian, affirms both that treating people as equals centrally involves issues of fair distribution of resources, and denies that our justice standards for fair distribution of resources should register at all the well-being outcomes or opportunities that this distribution generates (Dworkin 2000 and 2011). In his view personal responsibility issues drive us to this view. A full discussion of liberal egalitarianism must reckon with arguments advanced from the Dworkin family of views.

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