GLOBAL JUSTICE
RESPONSIBILITY AND NATIONAL

OXFORD POLITICAL THEORY

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of type 4, a reasonable view would be that all obligations of social justice towards fellow-nationals should take precedence over international obligations that arise from failures of responsibility by third parties—this despite the fact that the condition we are responding to may be much worse in the case of outsiders. How can this view be defended? It relies on the idea that the strength of a duty depends not only on the urgency of the demand it responds to but also on the role played by the agent in question in bringing that situation about: I have a much greater responsibility to rescue a child I have carelessly pushed into the river than to rescue a child somebody else has pushed in, particularly if that somebody else could now perform the rescue with relative ease.  

We need of course to show that similar considerations about agency and responsibility apply to collectives, especially to nations, as they do to individuals, and that will be one of the main tasks of the present book. But for present purposes I hope I have said enough to indicate how weak cosmopolitanism may be compatible with a split-level view of agents' responsibilities. No human being's claims are ever discounted entirely, but the strength of the duties they impose on us, as particular agents standing in relationships to other agents, is quite variable, and the resulting picture of global ethics is a complex one.

I have shown that strong cosmopolitanism is not entailed by weak cosmopolitanism; but I have not yet tried to show what exactly is wrong with strong cosmopolitanism, other than that it conflicts with an intuitively plausible picture of agents' responsibilities. So it would still be possible for someone to present an independent argument to the effect that justice requires a strong form of equality at global level, and that our understanding of special responsibilities therefore needs to be reshaped to become consistent with such a requirement. In Chapter 3, accordingly, I examine global egalitarianism as a freely-standing conception of global justice and provide some reasons for rejecting it.

Again it is important to stress that I should rescue the drowning child if the person who pushed him refuses to do so, so long as the rescue does not expose me to significant levels of risk. But the fact that I am not responsible for the child's plight makes a difference to the level of risk I can be asked to bear as well as to other morally relevant aspects of the situation—for instance I may use reasonable force to make the pusher carry out the rescue himself, may demand compensation from him if my clothes are damaged in the course of the rescue, and so forth.

CHAPTER 3

Global Egalitarianism

Anyone surveying the current state of the world's peoples cannot help but be struck by the vast disparity in living standards and life prospects between the global rich and the global poor. Some of the most revealing figures are those contained in the Human Development Index (HDI) published annually by the UN, which ranks countries using three basic criteria: life expectancy, level of education (adult literacy plus school enrolment), and per capita gross domestic product (GDP), adjusted to take account of purchasing power differences (which gives a reasonable estimate of average income). At the top of the scale we find a cluster of European and other developed societies where life expectancy is around 80 years, educational ratings are close to 1, and per capita GDP stands somewhere in the region of $30,000. At the bottom there is a group of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, in which life expectancy at around 40 years is only half that in the developed world, educational ratings run between about 0.2 and 0.6 (corresponding to adult literacy figures that range between 13% at the bottom to 70% at the top) and per capita GDP averages around $1,000, with many countries falling well below that figure. It is hard to grasp the significance of differences like this in human terms. Moreover, over the last few decades the gap between rich and poor countries has tended to widen rather than close, and there is little sign of an upward trend overall among the countries

that score the lowest (the position has improved slightly in some, but got worse in others).

Global egalitarianism is fuelled by evidence such as this about the extent of global inequality. How can we be living in a just world when people living in one region have average incomes some thirty times larger than those living in another (because the figures are averages, they seemingly cannot reflect individual features like how talented people are or how hard they work), and can also expect to live for twice as long? And how much would those from the richer societies have to give up in order to raise the position of those living on a dollar or so a day to give them something we would consider a decent life? These are good questions, and our theory of global justice must provide answers. But it is important to see that we do not have to leap to the conclusion that what justice requires is some form of global equality. The reasons we have for thinking that the existing distribution of life expectancy, education, and income is unjust might not be egalitarian reasons.

To canvass some alternatives: we might think that global distribution is unjust simply because of the low absolute position of those living in the poorest countries. We might in other words think that every human being should expect to live for something close to 80 years, should expect to have at least secondary education, and should be able to earn an income sufficient to buy a range of necessities such as food that provides adequate nutrition. This would set a threshold that everyone as a matter of justice must reach, but inequalities above the threshold would not be unjust merely by virtue of being inequalities. Or we might think that global inequalities are unjust by virtue of the way they have arisen—because the wealth of the richer countries is in some way responsible for the poverty of the poorer countries. We may think that the developed West has exploited the rest of the world historically, and that current inequalities are largely a result of that fact. Had the same inequalities arisen in a different way, not involving exploitation, they would not be unjust.

These are not the only reasons we might have for condemning the huge disparities we see in the world today. The problem they are meant to illustrate is that our reactions to global inequalities may be overdetermined, and this is a problem if we are going to use those reactions to help build a theory of global justice. My aim in this chapter is to show that egalitarianism is not the right theory: what global justice requires is not that people everywhere should be made equal in certain material respects (resources and opportunities are the two ‘currencies’ I shall consider). But that by no means entails that existing inequalities are unproblematic from the point of view of justice; on the contrary, it is clear to me that a just world would also be a world in which disparities between rich and poor countries would be far smaller than those that now exist. Why this is so will emerge in due course. For now, the task is to break the hold that global egalitarianism has had on our thinking about global justice.

Many people have been drawn to this view because they assume that what justice requires is always and everywhere a certain kind of equality: since justice requires equality within societies, it must also require equality between them (or between people who live in different societies). But this assumption is mistaken. The only kind of equality that justice always requires is formal equality: equality between people who are in all relevant respects the same. If there is nothing of any significance to distinguish between two people, then they should be treated in the same way as a matter of justice. Everything then turns on what should count as a relevant difference. I shall suggest that substantive rather than formal equality—people actually receiving the same bundle of rights, or resources, or whatever it is whose distribution is at issue—is only required by justice in certain quite specific circumstances. In other circumstances, a fair distribution may be one in which what people get depends on their deserts, choices, or needs; it may be one that simply guarantees everyone a certain minimum level of resources; it may be one that comes about through fair procedures—for instance a lottery that people have voluntarily chosen to enter. It is fruitless, as I suggested in Chapter 1, to try to specify what justice requires without considering the context in which the distribution is taking place—who is distributing what to whom and under what circumstances. So when should we say that what justice requires is substantive equality?

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2 Can such a threshold be defined in a non-arbitrary way? I discuss this issue in some detail in Chapter 7.

3 For a fuller statement of the position set out in the following paragraphs, see my Principles of Social Justice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), ch. 11.
One circumstance is where there really are no relevant differences between the people among whom the distribution is being made, or, more likely perhaps, where it is impossible to obtain reliable evidence about differences that might be relevant if they were revealed. Imagine having to allocate a supply of food between ten people about whom you are given no information at all. There are various reasons that would tell in favour of sharing the food equally. Some of them might be malfeduced, and by giving each an equal share you would minimize the risk of leaving anyone still hungry. Even if they are all adequately nourished, an unequal distribution is likely to benefit the winners less than it harms the losers. Moreover, given that food is an all-round benefit to human beings, and given the absence of any information about the ten, perhaps each has a claim to the benefit that only an equal distribution can meet. How robust this claim is can be disputed: might it be enough to distribute the food using a fair procedure such as a lottery which gave each person an equal chance? Would that be a strong enough form of equality to satisfy justice, leaving aside the other grounds favouring an equal distribution? Let us just say that the absence of known relevant differences can sometimes be sufficient to ground a substantive and not merely procedural claim for equal treatment. Some have thought that this argument can be applied to the earth's natural resources, and have used this to justify a form of global egalitarianism. I shall consider this position shortly. But before that I want to consider a second set of circumstances in which justice may require substantive equality.

These are cases in which the claim for equal treatment stems from membership of groups of various kinds. These are groups constituted on the basis of equality—people who are admitted to or are admitted as equal members, people with the same status as others among them. To preserve this equality, basic rights within the group must be equally assigned, and members who are denied equal rights can legitimately complain of unjust treatment. It is not necessary that all benefits that the group creates or provides should be allocated in this way; the claim for equal treatment applies only to those rights and opportunities that are fundamental in the sense that they serve to define a person's position in the group. The most familiar example of this phenomenon in the contemporary world is the form of membership provided by citizenship in nation-states.

Although citizenship has not always been understood as requiring all citizens to be treated as equals—earlier conceptions sometimes made room for two or more classes of citizen—this understanding has now become definitive of the very idea. It then follows that to introduce inequalities in basic rights—for instance to opt for a form of plural voting of the kind once advocated by John Stuart Mill, or to create a two-tier system of welfare provision—would be to act unjustly towards those with lesser rights, who would justifiably regard such policies as denying their equal status as full members of the community in question.

Principles of equality based on membership are important components of distributive justice, but their obvious limitation is that their scope is restricted to those who are already members of the group or community in question. There is no injustice in the fact that a French citizen enjoys rights that I as a British citizen do not have and vice versa. To prove that such an inequality was unjust, it would be necessary to show that we are both members of some larger community and that our status as equal members was being undermined by the different sets of rights we enjoyed. This might in due course come to pass (say as cultural and political integration within the EU increases), so it is important to say that the scope of egalitarian justice based on membership is not fixed for all time. On the other hand, it does not seem that a membership-based case can plausibly be made for global egalitarianism. The idea that we are all members of a world community and that our status as equal members is being damaged by the unequal rights that we enjoy seems far-fetched as things now stand. I commented in Chapter 2 on the implausibility of presenting 'cosmopolitan citizenship' as simply an enlarged version of national forms of citizenship, given that the latter rely on cultural and political ties among citizens that stem from their common national identity. So it seems that any defence of global egalitarianism cannot rely on arguments that make sense only when applied to those who belong to groups of a certain kind.

We must therefore conclude that global principles of equality can only be defended in the first way, by showing that there are no relevant differences between people belonging to different societies when it comes to the distribution of resources (understood in a broad sense). People have equal claims, because there is nothing that serves to distinguish between them. But equal claims to what? I
shall consider two candidate principles of global equality that have found defenders among theorists of global justice, equality of natural resources, and equality of opportunity. Each principle, I believe, is subjected to the same two basic objections. The first I shall call the metric problem: the problem of establishing a global measure of resources or opportunities that would allow us to determine whether two people do in fact have equal resources or opportunities. The second I shall call the dynamic problem: the problem posed for global equality by the fact that people belong to independent political communities which make decisions that influence the future availability of resources and opportunities. The next three sections of this chapter develop these objections.

II

It is easy to see why an equal entitlement to natural resources has proved popular as a principle of global equality. On the one hand, having access to natural resources of greater or lesser value—fertile land, mineral wealth, and the harvests of the sea—is one important factor that determines the overall wealth or poverty of the people who enjoy it. On the other hand, such access is very unequally distributed between nations. It is not as though nations have bid for the territories they inhabit through some kind of global auction in which each person is given a chip of equal value. Territories have been acquired historically by more or less dubious means, and often without foreknowledge of the future value of the assets they contained. That a nation's territory should turn out to contain oilfields, or to be particularly suitable for growing a grape favored for winemaking, is therefore a piece of good fortune that may nonetheless have significant consequences for the living standards of the people in question. Being born into a country with a relatively high level of per capita natural resource values seems like a morally irrelevant form of advantage that is ripe for correction by egalitarian redistribution.

One might of course challenge the empirical assumption being made here that having access to valuable natural resources always or usually contributes positively to the wealth and welfare of nations. Later in this book I shall present some evidence that supports this challenge. But for the moment I shall continue to accept the assumption that having natural resources is normally a source of relative advantage. Should we conclude that global justice requires a redistributive scheme whereby, for example, resource-rich countries are taxed to support the resource-poor?

It is important here to distinguish between two different motivations that we might have for introducing such a scheme. We might on the one hand be looking for a way of raising funds that can be used to support a global minimum for people everywhere: we think that all human beings are entitled as a matter of justice to resources that will enable them to lead minimally decent lives, and that those who have a surplus of resources are obliged to contribute to this goal. A scheme that targets the ownership of natural resources is attractive partly because their presence is relatively easy to identify, and partly because their distribution seems morally arbitrary for the reasons just given. Thus proposals such as the Global Resources Tax favored by Thomas Pogge, which would tax extracted natural resources at a fixed rate, may seem a plausible way of helping the world's poor, as well as slowing the rate at which natural resources are used up. Such proposals are not, however, egalitarian in inspiration: they do not seek to equalize access to natural resources. So although they still require some answer to the question I shall be raising in a moment, namely how are we to attach a value to natural resources of different kinds, that question is less troublesome precisely because the aim is not to achieve equality in any form. Some rough and ready way of valuing extracted resources might be sufficient for the purposes of the Global Resources Tax.

A proposal that is genuinely egalitarian, by contrast, is Hillel Steiner's Global Fund. Starting from the premise that each person is entitled to an equal share of the world's unimproved natural resources, Steiner proposes that a nation's natural resource holdings should be computed by aggregating the property values of all the

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sites that fall within its domain: nations whose holdings per capita are above the global average would pay into the fund, and nations whose holdings fall below the average would draw out of it. In other words, resource-rich nations would be taxed according to the per capita value of their landholdings; resource-poor nations would draw from the fund according to the size of their per capita shortfall.

The question we must ask is how these property values are going to be calculated, bearing in mind that Steiner wants to distinguish "raw" natural resources from the improvements that have been wrought by human labour: if a site has a skyscraper built upon it, what counts is the value of the site without the skyscraper, not its current value. These values cannot be determined simply by looking at the physical characteristics of a particular parcel of land. For one thing, location clearly matters, as Steiner concedes himself:

Evidently the ownership of an acre in the Sahara Desert is of a different value, and consequently attracts a different payment liability, from the ownership of an acre in downtown Manhattan or the heart of Tokyo. Similar things can be said about real estate in the Saudi oil fields, the Amazon rain forests, the Arctic Tundra, the Iowa corn belt, the Bangladesh coast and the City of London.6

Steiner's examples might lead the unwary reader to think that what matters in determining these property values is primarily the physical features of a site such as the presence of oil underground or the fertility of the soil. But though these features certainly do matter in some cases, equally or more important is location itself: an acre of ground in central London or Tokyo might have physical features not all that different from an acre in the Iowa corn belt, but a vastly different economic value, as indicated by the selling price of the site or the rent that could be charged for occupying it (Steiner's own suggested indicators). So how are these values determined?

Physical features aside, three types of factors seem important. The first is the set of rules and conditions under which the site is to be held. Is it to be held as private property or under some form of communal ownership? If as private property, how restrictive are the conditions on what may be done with the site, for instance the kinds of building that can be erected there, or the productive uses to which

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6 Steiner, "Territorial Justice", 146.
conditions: wine-growing may be legally permitted, but it will not occur if the local population has strong religious convictions that prohibit the production and consumption of alcohol.

Third, we need to consider what we can call neighbourhood effects on site values. What a particular site is worth may be heavily dependent on what is already being done on sites close by. Why, after all, is a site in central London or Tokyo worth so much more than a site twenty or thirty miles away on the edge of the city? Not primarily because of different legal rules, or the differential availability of willing producers and consumers. City centre sites are worth a lot simply because they stand next to others on which various business activities, producing or consuming, are being engaged in, and from which therefore people can easily move to the site in question. Imagine for a moment that it became widely believed that a particular city centre was polluted with a chemical that was dangerous to human health, as a result of which very few people were willing to shop or work there. Clearly, the value of all sites in that district would plummet as economic activities sharply declined. Putting the other way round, the value of an acre in downtown Manhattan is primarily determined by the ongoing practice of very large numbers of human beings who see it as being in their interest to go there to produce and consume, and who thereby generate a level of activity which means that a firm deciding where to conduct its business has a large incentive to locate there.

The upshot of all this is that natural resource values—these values of unimproved sites—are not set by nature itself, but almost entirely by human decision and behaviour. If we are looking at the wealth of nations, then, aggregate property values depend on political decisions about the rules and conditions for holding sites, cultural values that affect skills and preferences, and forms of human behaviour that determine the character of particular neighbourhoods. It would be wrong to say that the physical availability of resources makes no difference at all, but the point is that even a resource such as an oilfield only becomes valuable when located within a human environment that allows the oil to be extracted and sold.

Steiner's proposal to tax nations according to the aggregated property values of the sites they contain therefore appears arbitrary. The rationale for the tax is that it serves to correct the unequal per capita distribution of natural resources between nations. But we can now see that property values, even of unimproved sites, are to a large extent an artefact of human choice and human decision. Nations contribute to the creation of their own aggregate property values in at least the three ways we have just traced. So if they are taxed on that basis, they are to a considerable extent being taxed according to the values they adhere to collectively and the choices they have made, which is certainly not what Steiner intends. Indeed, the line that he draws between the 'raw' natural resource values of sites and the improvements made by human agency now looks untenable. If a building is erected on a site that increases the value of that site, the tax basis is still supposed to be the prior unimproved value; but if buildings are erected on five neighbouring sites, and this also increases the value of the original site, it is the enhanced value that is used for tax purposes.

More generally, the idea of global equality of resources remains indeterminate in the absence of a non-arbitrary way of determining resource values. When Ronald Dworkin famously proposed using the device of a hypothetical auction as a way of identifying an equal distribution of heterogeneous resources among a set of persons with equally heterogeneous tastes, he made it clear that prior to the auction decisions have to be made about the principles according to which lots are going to be divided up and about the publicly enforceable rules that will govern the use of items acquired through the auction. Until these things are decided, no one is in a position to judge how valuable a particular resource might be to him or her. Starting from a liberal ideal of freedom of choice, and arguing that the auctioneer must provide bidders with the greatest possible opportunity to use the resources they acquire in the way that they wish, Dworkin defends principles that are likewise liberal—thus he advocates rules governing the use of items that would broadly support a free market.

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8 Dworkin, 'The Place of Liberty', sections III–IV.
religion restrictions on the use of resources are excluded as illegitimate: anyone planning to bid for a potential vineyard knows that he will be permitted to make and sell wine if he chooses. But this makes it inappropriate as a way of defining equality of resources at global level in circumstances where not all cultures embrace these liberal ideals. So even if we were convinced that global justice is best understood in terms of a principle of equality (pace the arguments in the first section of this chapter), and that equality of resources would be the right way to cash this out, we are left with no way of determining when, in fact, a distribution of resources qualifies as an equal distribution—and therefore no way of implementing egalitarian proposals such as Steiner’s Global Fund.

III

One might in any case come to think that equality of (unimproved natural) resources is too narrow a conception of egalitarian justice, regardless of whether its scope is national or global. How well a person’s life goes is determined by many factors besides his or her entitlement to natural resources. In domestic contexts, the relevant conception is often taken to be equality of opportunity. An influential statement of this principle is by John Rawls, who defines ‘fair equality of opportunity’ as follows:

...those who are at the same level of talent and ability, and have the same willingness to use them, should have the same prospects of success regardless of their initial place in the social system, that is, irrespective of the income class into which they are born. In all sectors of society there should be roughly equal prospects of culture and achievement for everyone similarly motivated and endowed.9

Several authors have proposed that global justice should be understood in similar terms, as requiring that people of similar talent and similar motivation should have the same life chances (in particular access to educational and job opportunities and the rewards they bring) no matter which society they were born into.10 This is clearly a demanding principle, but so too is its domestic analogue, which has nevertheless proved important as a guiding beacon for public policy. So is global equality of opportunity the best interpretation of global justice?

We must begin by asking what it means, more precisely, for opportunities to be equal at global level. Does it require, for instance, that people with the same talent and motivation should have identical opportunity sets no matter which society they are born into? This seems to be the implication of Moellendorf’s claim that ‘if equality of opportunity were realized, a child growing up in rural Mozambique would be statistically as likely as the child of a senior executive at a Swiss bank to reach the position of the latter’s parent.’11 But surely such a requirement would be too strong. It would, for instance, require unlimited rights of migration coupled with unrestricted admission to citizenship, given that some positions, such as chief executive of Credit Suisse, or president of the USA, presuppose membership of particular societies. Moreover even leaving aside the difficulty of being able to apply formally for certain positions, the child from rural Mozambique would be less fluent in German, French, or Italian than his Swiss counterpart, and on that ground alone less likely to succeed in the competition to become a Swiss banker.12 So unless advocates of global equality of opportunity envisage a borderless world in which everyone speaks Esperanto, it is more plausible to interpret the principle as requiring equivalent opportunity sets. It would be satisfied provided the child from rural Mozambique had the same chance to attain an executive post in


11 Moellendorf, Cosmopolitan Justice, 49.

12 This issue is raised by Bernard Boxhill in ‘Global Equality of Opportunity and National Integrity’, Social Philosophy and Policy, 5 (1987), 143–68. Boxhill discusses the implications of cultural diversity for global equality of opportunity without distinguishing as sharply as I would wish between culture’s role in defining ‘success’ and culture’s role in motivating people to strive for success, however defined. In the present discussion, I am bracketing the issue of motivation by defining equal opportunity as opportunity for people of similar talent and motivation. It may well be the case that children in rural Mozambique are not taught to aspire to be bank executives, but for purposes of argument I am assuming that we have a child with the appropriate motivation, and asking under what circumstances such a child could be judged to have equal opportunities with his Swiss counterpart.


a bank somewhere, perhaps in Mozambique itself, with the same salary and other benefits as the position aimed at by the (equally talented and motivated) child of a Swiss banker.

By taking this specific case, we can understand what it would mean for two opportunity sets to be equivalent but not identical. But now consider more fully how we might apply this idea. In order to decide whether two opportunity sets are equivalent, we have to apply some kind of metric, and the metric we use can either be fine-grained or broader-grained. In the case just discussed, we found that the broader-grained metric ‘opportunity to become chief executive of a national bank’ was preferable to the finer-grained ‘opportunity to become chief executive of a Swiss bank’: we do not think that the Mozambique child is disadvantaged in any significant way by having a lesser opportunity to head a Swiss bank so long as he has a greater opportunity than the Swiss child to head a similar bank in Mozambique. So let us now consider, more generally, how fine-grained or broad-grained our metric of equality should be. If we make it too fine-grained, then we will get lots of meaningless results like the one just mentioned—equalities and inequalities that just do not matter because they are too specific to engage our ethical attention. But if we try to make it as broad-grained as possible, then we run into controversy about how, if at all, different components of our metric should be evaluated relative to one another.\(^{13}\)

Let me attempt to make this clearer through an example. Suppose we have two relatively isolated villages, broadly similar in size and general composition. Suppose that village A has a football pitch but no tennis court, and village B has a tennis court but no football pitch. Do members of the two communities have equal opportunities or not? In the morally relevant sense I think that they do: football pitches and tennis courts seem to fall naturally into the broader category of ‘sporting facilities’, and measured in terms of this metric the two communities are more or less equally endowed. It would seem morally perverse for members of B to complain of injustice by using ‘access to football pitches’ as the relevant metric. But now suppose also that village A possesses a school but no church, and village B possesses a church but no school. Can we still say that people in these two villages enjoy equal opportunities? I think almost all of us would say that they do not. We think that the opportunities provided by a school and a church are just different, that if someone were to suggest a metric such as ‘access to enlightenment’ in terms of which the two villages should be judged as equally endowed, this would just be a piece of sophistry. It is also worth noticing that while most of us would judge that the villagers in A were better off by virtue of having a village school, those who thought that having a church was more important would also resist the idea that there was some overarching metric in terms of which the two villages could be judged. They would not think that the religious deprivation suffered by people in A could somehow be compensated for by their educational advantages.

Now the question is: how are we able to judge that in the football pitch/tennis court case there is no significant inequality between A and B, whereas in the school/church case there is significant inequality? The answer must be that we have cultural understandings that tell us that football pitches and tennis courts are naturally substitutable as falling under the general rubric of sporting facilities, whereas schools and churches are just different kinds of things, such that you cannot compensate for not having access to one by giving them access to the other. The cultural understandings tell us that the broader-grained ‘access to sporting facilities’ is a better metric than the finer-grained ‘access to football pitches’ while the finer-grained ‘access to schools’ is a better metric than the broader-grained ‘access to enlightenment’ which I suggested is what someone would need to invent if they wanted to argue that the two villages were equally endowed in the second case.

If we look at how this question is answered within nation-states—in other words at how the general idea of equal opportunity is
cashed out in terms of more concrete forms of equality—then what we find is that a number of specific types of resource and opportunity are singled out as significant, and these are not regarded at substitutable. Included in the list would be personal security, education, health care, mobility, and so on. Finer-grained distinctions within these categories are not regarded as relevant. So, for instance, while it is regarded as an essential part of the educational package that every child should have the opportunity to learn foreign languages, it is not regarded as a source of inequality if one school offers Russian and another offers Italian. Mobility opportunities might mean underground trains for some people and rural buses for others, and so forth. At the same time, any attempt to use a broader-grained metric—to suggest, for instance that poorer health facilities could be compensated by better educational facilities when opportunities are measured—would be strongly resisted. The public culture marks education and health out as different kinds of goods in respect of each of which citizens should have equal opportunities.

What happens if we try to carry this understanding of equality across to the global level? We run into serious difficulties created by the fact that we can no longer rely on a common set of cultural understandings to tell us which metric or metrics it is appropriate to use when attempting to draw cross-national opportunity comparisons. We face difficulties both within the familiar categories and across them. If education, for instance, takes different forms in different places, how can we judge whether a child in country A has better or worse educational opportunities than a child in country B? And even if we can make judgements of that kind, how can we decide whether it is appropriate or inappropriate to merge specific metrics into more general ones? Suppose, for instance, that we can find a measure of education such that people in Iceland plainly have better educational opportunities than people in Portugal, but that people in Portugal equally plainly have superior leisure opportunities than people in Iceland (sunny beaches, swimming pools, etc.). Is it legitimate to say that people in one of these places are better off (in a global sense) than people in the other, or can we say only that according to metric E Icelanders are better off while according to metric L the Portuguese are better off, and nothing beyond this?

Global egalitarians faced with this challenge will probably respond that the most urgent cases are cases of gross inequality where no reasonable person could doubt that the resources and opportunities available to members of A are superior to those available to members of B. We are not primarily concerned about Iceland/Portugal comparisons, but about comparisons such as those I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, between, say, any of the more developed EU member-states, and any sub-Saharan African country. Two things are worth noting about this response. First, by taking countries as the opposite ends of the development scale, and using the components of the HDI as our metric, it may indeed be possible to conclude that the set of opportunities open to a typical citizen of Niger, say, is strictly smaller than the set open to a typical citizen of France—there is no basic dimension along which the former has greater opportunities than the latter. But this does not mean that in general we are in a position to make such intersocietal comparative judgements, either within the group of rich societies or within the group of poor societies, and so although we might be able to identify the most egregious forms of inequality, we remain unable to specify what equality (of opportunity) would mean. Second, we can agree that the existence of societies scoring very low on the HDI is a global injustice without agreeing about why it is an injustice—whether by virtue of the inequality between rich and poor societies, or simply by virtue of the absolute level of deprivation experienced by most members of the poorest societies. As I suggested earlier, our moral responses to the global status quo are overdetermined, and so we can agree in practice about what needs to be done most urgently to promote global justice without having to formulate explicitly the principles that lie behind this judgement.

I want to end this section of this chapter by stressing that the problem I have identified is not a technical problem of measurement: it is not that we lack the data that would enable us to compare societies in terms of the opportunities they provide for work, leisure, mobility, and so forth. It is essentially the problem of saying what equality of opportunity means in a culturally plural world in which different societies will construct goods in different ways and also rank them in different ways. The metric problem arises not just because it is hard to determine how much educational opportunity an average child
has in any given society, but because the meaning of education, and the way in which it relates to, or contrasts with, other goods will vary from place to place. We can only make judgements with any confidence in extreme cases; and in those cases, what seems at first sight to be a concern about inequality may well turn out on closer inspection to be a concern about absolute poverty or deprivation, a concern which suggests a quite different general understanding of global justice.

IV

I have argued in the last two sections that neither equality of resources nor equality of opportunity represents a workable principle of global justice. In neither case can we measure the resources or opportunities available to people in different societies in a way that is neutral as between cultures—and such neutrality seems indispensable in a global principle of justice. But now I want to turn to the dynamic problem: the problem of whether substantive equality of any kind is a defensible principle for a world made up of separate societies each of which aspires to be self-determining. For this purpose, I am going to assume that we have discovered some neutral currency—I shall refer to it simply as ‘advantage’—in terms of which a principle of global equality can be couched. Suppose, then, we could bring it about that at a certain moment people everywhere had equal access to advantage: no matter which society a person belonged to, he or she would have the same rights, opportunities, resources, etc.—all the various components that together make up advantage. What happens as we move forward in time, on the assumption that rights of cultural and political self-determination allow societies to make choices and decisions that will affect the level of advantage their members can enjoy in the future? To illustrate the problem, I imagined, in an earlier discussion, two societies starting out from an equal resource base, one of which Affluenza, decides to use up its resource endowment rapidly to sustain a high level of consumption, while the other, Ecologia, chooses to conserve resources by adopting a strict policy of sustainable development; similarly I contrasted Procreatio, which encourages large families and whose population therefore grows rapidly, with Condominium, whose strictly enforced family planning policy achieves a stable population size. Assuming there are no other differences between these societies, the outcome must be that as we move forward in time, per capita resource levels will be greater in Ecologia than in Affluenza, and greater in Condominium than in Procreatio. Whereas at the beginning members of each of these societies enjoyed equal access to advantage, later on this cases to be true.

In introducing these examples, I am assuming that levels of advantage in each society are determined by domestic factors, and especially by the policies pursued by their respective governments. This is not, in general, a realistic assumption, and later in this book I shall be looking more closely at different explanations that have been given for the relative wealth and poverty of nations. The assumption is made here simply in order to probe what global equality might mean when applied to cases like this. So how could a supporter of global egalitarianism respond to these two-country stories?

One possibility would be to deny that there is any breach of equality, in the relevant sense, as the countries pursue their different paths of development. Provided that they were equally placed at the start, and the surrounding conditions are the same for each, what happens later does not destroy equality. This response corresponds to the version of egalitarianism favoured in domestic contexts by liberal political philosophers such as Dworkin, according to which equality is not compromised when individuals make choices as to how to use their equal initial share of resources, even though later on they are likely to enjoy different levels of resources: equality is satisfied so

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15 In my original discussion I used the two-society parables to challenge equality of natural resources as a conception of global justice, and, as Tim Hayward has pointed out, this is compatible with thinking that overall per capita resource levels—humanly produced as well as natural—will be maintained in Affluenza and Procreatio over time; see T. Hayward, 'Global Justice and Natural Resources', Political Studies, 54 (2006), 349-69. But the parables can easily be recast so that overall per capita resource levels in Affluenza and Procreatio decrease over time, as their citizens enjoy high levels of consumption and reproduction respectively, where 'resources' are all those things that constitute personal advantage. So recast, they present a general challenge to global egalitarianism, understood as requiring equal access to advantage.
long as final inequalities can be traced to preferences and decisions for which the individuals in question can rightly be held responsible. But there are obvious problems in transferring this liberal form of egalitarianism from individual to collective level. Even if all four of our imagined countries are democratically governed, individual citizens in Affluenza and Procracia may very well dissent from what they see as the prodigal behaviour of the majority of their fellow-citizens. Why, then, is it fair that their level of advantage should be diminished over time by decisions for which they are not personally responsible? And what of those who are not yet born at the time when the egalitarian starting gate is introduced? They enter a world in which the level of advantage they can enjoy has already been partly determined by the actions of their predecessors. In what sense is there equality between them and others who are born into societies that have chosen differently?

Of course these questions also pose a challenge to those like myself who want to defend the idea that nations can be held responsible for the levels of advantage their members enjoy, so in due course they will need to be properly addressed. I introduce them here to show that whatever plausibility initial-equality-qualified-by-choice may have as a conception of social justice, it does not transfer to a world in which collective choices remain an important determinant of the resource levels available to different societies. In this context, the proposal to implement an egalitarian starting point is simply far too weak as a conception of equality. So how else might global egalitarians respond to the two-country parables?

A second response is to say that justice requires redistribution from Ecologia to Affluenza and from Condominium to Procracia so as to preserve equal access to advantage over time. But this proposal seems open to two very serious objections. The first is that it leaves very little incentive for states and their citizens to behave in the responsible way that Ecologia and Condominium have done. People in these societies have foregone opportunities for consumption

and raising larger families on the grounds that it was important to conserve resources for the future on the one hand and to keep the population at a sustainable level on the other. But why do this, if profligate societies can expect to find themselves compensated from the stocks of resources saved or accumulated by societies that have shown themselves to be more prudent? Why be an ant, if the grasshoppers are guaranteed equal access to your store of winter provisions? A redistributive scheme of the kind proposed would undermine the responsibility a nation has for its own territory and other collective assets. But as Rawls remarks:

...an important role of government...is to be the effective agent of a people as they take responsibility for their territory and the size of their population, as well as for maintaining the land's environmental integrity. Unless a definite agent is given responsibility for maintaining an asset and bears the responsibility and loss for not doing so, that asset tends to deteriorate.

Connected to the first objection is a second, which holds that it is simply unfair to tax Ecologia and Condominium in order to restore Affluenza and Procracia to a position of equality. Citizens in the former societies have made sacrifices—they have consumed fewer natural resources, and raised fewer children than they would ideally have liked—in order to achieve policies that they see as either in their own long-term interests or as in the interests of their successors. They are now being asked to subsidize the shorter-term preferences of the members of Affluenza and Procracia, who have meanwhile been enjoying their consumption bonanza and their larger numbers of offspring respectively. But justice does not seem to require transfers when inequalities in advantage can be traced back to preferences, whether individual or collective. The only people with a prima facie claim for compensation appear to be those citizens

16 See Dworkin, 'Equality of Resources', esp. 304-6 (Sovereign Virtue, 83-5).
of Affluenza and Procrea who can demonstrate that they have consistently opposed the policies of their governments and would, if given the opportunity, have voted for and supported policies such as those adopted in Ecologia and Condominium (whether they do in fact have such a claim depends on how we understand collective responsibility for public policy, a topic I shall consider at length in Chapter 5).

Even if the current citizens of Affluenza and Procrea cannot complain of unfairness as their access to advantage dwindles relative to the citizens of Ecologia and Condominium, what about children born into the first two societies, who have clearly played no part in enacting the relevant policies? Why isn't it unfair that they begin life with lower material prospects than their counterparts in the second two? Notice that if such a charge of unfairness can be laid, it must be directed at the first place against their predecessors who have caused the shortfall, and only secondarily against the current generation in Ecologia and Condominium. But what would the charge be? Assume that resource levels have not fallen to the point where the rising generation are unable to secure minimally decent lives. The charge, then, is that their access to advantage is lower than it might be if the previous generation had pursued more prudent policies, of the kind prevailing in Ecologia and Condominium. But this is not a very weighty complaint: it does not seem to be a matter of justice that our predecessors should leave us with any particular level of per capita resources, so long as the level does not fall below that required to sustain the institutions that make a decent life possible. (Precisely where that level should be set need not concern us here; the point is that it does not depend on the level achieved by the two counterpart societies). The children of Affluenza and Procrea may, then, regret that their predecessors chose to act in the way that they did, but this by itself is not sufficient to give them a claim on the resources now enjoyed by the citizens of Ecologia and Condominium.

If wholesale redistribution to restore equality would not only create perverse incentives but also be unfair to those who are required to be net contributors, what other options are open to the would-be global egalitarian? One possibility would be to deny nations rights of self-determination in all those areas of policy that have an impact on levels of advantage. But since any policy decision of any significance will make some difference to a society's future resource and population levels, this is tantamount to doing away with self-determination altogether. Notice also that the position cannot be saved by requiring that each generation, at least, should be provided with an equal starting point. In this context, the idea that people belong to discrete generations, each of which passes certain benefits on to its successor, is in an important sense a fiction: the real picture is one of continual population replacement. So if we imagine once again a world in which each nation starts out from a baseline of equality, we cannot allow nations to make autonomous decisions over the course of one generation—thirty years, say—and then apply an international tax-and-transfer regime that restores equality for the next generation. In the meantime, all those reaching maturity in nations that pursue wealth-creating or resource-conserving policies will be materially advantaged relative to those reaching maturity in nations with other goals. And the same applies if we consider nations with contrasting population policies.

There is one final egalitarian proposal that we need to consider: we might permit nations to continue making autonomous decisions in areas such as resource conservation and population control, but then require them to provide free access to anyone who wants to join. So long as the costs of moving between societies are relatively small, equal access to advantage would be preserved. People who are born into societies with relatively low per capita levels of resources and the like would now have the choice of moving to better-endowed societies. It is easy to see, however, that this would also undermine self-determination, in any world that we can realistically envisage. For decisions about admission to citizenship are inseparable from other decisions about the kind of society one wants to build. Some nations setting out on a path of rapid economic growth may welcome all-comers, or at least everyone who possesses marketable skills. Other nations with demanding environmental objectives may pursue policies aimed at reducing population growth among their existing members to zero—policies which

Rides Again', in J. Burley (ed.), Dworkin and His Critics (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); and Dworkin's reply in the same volume.

For an argument in favour of freedom of movement along these lines, see J. Carens, 'Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders', Review of Politics, 49 (1987), 251–73.
would obviously be undermined if significant number of immigrants were permitted to enter. Yet other nations may want to preserve linguistic or religious aspects of their public culture, implying selection on these grounds among potential candidates for membership. An unlimited right to free movement would pre-empt policy choices of this kind, and in a different way hollow out the idea of national self-determination.\textsuperscript{21}

My objections to the last two ways of implementing global egalitarianism—abandon national self-determination, or undermine it by allowing an unlimited right of free movement—do of course depend on the assumption that self-determination is something to be valued and that free movement is not in any case a human right. I shall have more to say about these questions later in this book. But recall here that the dynamic objection to global egalitarianism takes its place alongside two others already advanced: that there is no a priori reason to assume that global justice must be expressed in the form of a principle of equality, and that at least two of the main candidate principles advanced by political philosophers suffer from intractable metric problems. If a coherent, culturally neutral, principle of global equality could be formulated, and if we had strong grounds for believing that such a principle should play a central role in our thinking about global justice, then we might be driven to conclude 'so much the worse for national self-determination'. But since neither antecedent condition has so far been fulfilled, and since people everywhere appear to have a continuing wish to control their own destinies as members of independent nations, the dynamic objection seems to me to have considerable force. Provided that we attach some value to the idea that, in a culturally diverse world, political communities should be able to determine their own futures, we have a good reason to allow significant departures from global equality.\textsuperscript{22} And this in turn is a good reason for rejecting global egalitarianism as our theory of global justice.

V

I began this chapter by reminding readers of the sheer scale of material inequality in the contemporary world, while at the same time cautioning that we might have a number of different reasons for finding such inequality objectionable. I have now expended some efforts to show why global inequalities should not automatically be treated as unjust, simply because they are inequalities. But I want to conclude this discussion of global egalitarianism by considering some other reasons we might have for wanting the scale of these inequalities to be reduced—reasons, in other words, that are not directly reasons of justice, even though they may involve seeing inequality as indirectly a source of injustice.\textsuperscript{23}

The first, and probably most powerful, of these is that material inequalities broadly conceived will naturally translate into inequalities of power, which then become a source of ongoing global injustice.\textsuperscript{24} This can happen in a number of fairly obvious ways. When rich countries or rich corporations interact economically with communities or individuals who are very much poorer, they can set the terms of exchange and/or employment largely in their own favour, simply because they are far better placed to withdraw from the exchange than are those they exploit. This phenomenon has been for example, creating global economic conditions in which their choices are almost completely constrained by the demands of economic survival. This need for a balance may justify transferring some powers—say over economic and environmental issues—upwards to international bodies. Valuing self-determination does not mean accepting national sovereignty in its traditional sense.

\textsuperscript{21} I shall explore this issue in much greater depth in Chapter 8.

\textsuperscript{22} As I shall point out in the next section, valuing self-determination also gives us a reason to limit global inequality, I assume here that an ethically acceptable form of nationalism must treat self-determination as a universal value. So, on the one hand, national communities must have the opportunity to set their own priorities in terms of economic policy, environmental policy, population policy, and so forth, even though such collective choices will inevitably generate inequality along particular dimensions over time. On the other hand, these decisions may not deprive other national communities of opportunities for self-determination by.

\textsuperscript{23} The more general ideas that equality can be valued for reasons independent of justice, and that inequality can serve as a source of injustice without being unjust in itself, have been explored in T. M. Scanlon, The Diversity of Objections to Inequality, Lindley Lecture, University of Kansas, 1996, now reprinted in T. M. Scanlon, The Difficulty of Tolerance: Essays in Political Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and insightfully applied to the global context in C. Beitz, 'Does Global Inequality Matter?', in T. Pogge (ed.), Global Justice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

widely documented, and all that I need to emphasize here is that the principle of justice that is violated by such interactions is not a strongly egalitarian one. To protest when workers in Third-World countries are employed in sweatshop conditions by powerful corporations, one does not have to believe that these workers ought to enjoy the same terms and conditions, or have the same opportunities, as their counterparts in the developed world. The injustice at stake is more rudimentary.

Next, gross inequality between nations makes it difficult if not impossible for those at the bottom end of the inequality to enjoy an adequate measure of self-determination, unless one imagines, counterfactually, that rich nations' interest in self-determination concerns only their own internal affairs, and not what happens in the world outside. In reality, we know that inequalities in wealth and military power place severe constraints on the policies that weaker nations can pursue. So if our vision of a just world includes the idea that each nation should have fair opportunities to pursue the particular goals that its members value most—the international equivalent of the domestic idea of toleration—then we are bound to be disturbed by inequalities on the current scale.

Finally, large inequalities in wealth and power also make it difficult to achieve what we might call 'fair terms of cooperation' internationally. Given that there are a number of areas in which nation-states need to cooperate with one another to mutual advantage—environmental policy is perhaps the most obvious—the distribution of costs and benefits in the agreements that emerges is likely to be determined largely by the relative bargaining power of the various parties. If rich countries refuse to cooperate altogether, poor countries have few sanctions that they can deploy to bring the recalcitrants back to the negotiating table. The refusal of the USA to sign the Kyoto agreement is a clear instance of this phenomenon. Since we cannot place the parties behind a veil of ignorance, procedural fairness in practice requires that they should stand to gain or lose roughly the same amount when cooperation succeeds or fails, and large inequalities make this condition impossible to satisfy.

In a domestic context, there are two possible ways of tackling inequality as a source of injustice: reduce the inequality, or prevent it from having unjust consequences. We employ a battery of measures designed to prevent inequalities of wealth, in particular, from creating injustice, ranging from the regulation of employment contracts, through limitations on the inheritance of wealth, to restrictions on the political uses of money. It is not so easy to envisage global analogues of such measures. So in this respect, we may have more reason to worry about global inequalities than about domestic ones. Of course, for the very same reasons that large global inequalities pose a threat to justice, they are also difficult to counteract. It is difficult to envisage rich states agreeing to narrow the gap in wealth and power between themselves and poor states. Perhaps the most hopeful prospect is of a world in which rich states, or blocks of rich states, compete with each other on roughly equal terms, and thereby also check one another's power vis-à-vis third parties. But rather than speculate further along these lines, I want to turn to two other reasons we might have for combating inequality, again drawing inspiration from domestic analogies.

One such reason is the value of what we may call equality of status or alternatively social equality. This is the idea of a set of social relationships within which people regard and treat each other as fundamentally equal, despite specific differences between them, and it is valuable because of the quality of the relationships in question: where it exists nobody has reason to feel subservient or deferential and on the other hand nobody has cause to be haughty or condescending. Now, whatever one thinks about this idea, it might seem that it can only apply within a bounded society and not to the world as a whole. On the other hand, since travel and communication have broken down perceptual barriers between societies, we do appear increasingly to be living in a world in which people are likely to compare their own positions with those of people in wealthier societies, and may find the comparison humiliating or degrading. Thus it seems that there may be a global version of equality of status, and that this would give us reason to be concerned about large inequalities, especially of wealth and income, along dimensions that give rise to perceived status differences.

Although there is something to this argument, I am inclined to be sceptical. Equality of status is important among people who are in daily contact with one another, and who share a common way of life.

25 I have explored this more fully in 'Equality and Justice', Ratio, 10 (1997), 222-37 and in Principles of Social Justice, ch. 11.
In so far as people belong to smaller communities and associations which form their main focus of identity, relationships between these subgroups matter less than how people are treated within them, since it is there that they will gain the sense of self-esteem that comes from being treated as an equal (or not as the case may be). Rawls makes this argument in the section of *A Theory of Justice* where he is responding to the objection that a society governed by the difference principle may still give rise to what he calls 'excusable envy':

...we tend to compare our circumstances with others in the same or in a similar group as ourselves, or in positions that we regard as relevant to our aspirations. The various associations in society tend to divide it into so many noncomparing groups, the discrepancies between these divisions not attracting the kind of attention which unsettles the lives of those less well placed.\(^{26}\)

If this argument applies domestically, it seems it should apply with greater force still internationally, since for most people national boundaries mark out salient spheres of comparison and non-comparison. Admittedly international society lacks one feature which Rawls sees as counterbalancing material inequalities, namely equal citizenship: there is no common public sphere in which global citizens encounter one another as equals. On the other hand, cultural differences between societies make it less likely that people will be drawn into comparing themselves with each other along a single dimension such as material wealth. We might aspire to an international version of Michael Walzer's 'complex equality', where people in different societies derived their self-esteem in part from their society's success in living up to its own standards, whether materialistic or anti-materialistic.\(^{27}\) I suggest this not in order to defend the existing global order, since extremes of poverty prevent national projects of all kinds from being pursued, but as a way of thinking about what social equality might mean in a culturally plural world.

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rejected them for that reason: maybe global justice *does* require us to transform our world in quite fundamental ways. I have rejected them instead for ignoring the special responsibilities we properly owe to our compatriots, for failing to take proper account of the value of self-determination, for insufficient sensitivity to cultural difference, and so forth— in other words for philosophical and not merely political deficiencies. But I have not yet begun to develop my own alternative view, or in particular to defend the idea of national responsibility which will play a central part in that view. This is the task of Chapters 4, 5, and 6 that follow.

CHAPTER 4

Two Concepts of Responsibility

In Chapter 1, I said that an adequate theory of justice, and especially perhaps of global justice, has to strike the right balance between two aspects of the human condition: between regarding people as needy and vulnerable creatures who may not be able to live decently without the help of others, and regarding them as responsible agents who should be allowed to enjoy the benefits, but also to bear the costs, of their choices and their actions. In this chapter, I want to explore the idea of responsibility in greater detail, and to see how it relates to each aspect. More precisely, I want to distinguish two senses of responsibility, the responsibility we bear for our own actions and decisions—I shall refer to this as ‘outcome responsibility’—and the responsibility we may have to come to the aid of those who need help, which I shall call ‘remedial responsibility’. Both kinds of responsibility have key roles to play in a theory of global justice, but their roles are very different and should not be confused.

My wider aim in this book is to explain and defend the idea of national responsibility. Does it make sense to hold nations, and their individual members, responsible for the benefits they create for themselves and the harms and losses they inflict on themselves and others? If it does make sense, how far does national responsibility extend, and when does it run out? National responsibility, clearly, is a species of collective responsibility: individuals share in it only by virtue of their membership of those large communities we call nations. Many people find the idea of collective responsibility, and thus national responsibility, puzzling or even abhorrent. They believe that someone can only be held responsible for what he or