“Does Equality Require Special Relations of Reciprocity?”

Kevin, Ka-Wai IP
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
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Abstract:

The “relational” view of equality maintains that distributive obligations more demanding than humanitarianism apply only to individuals who stand in a certain kind of relationship with one another. A variant of this view suggests that only the special relations of reciprocity in the mutual provision of certain collective goods can trigger egalitarian obligations of justice. This “reciprocity-based” argument is noteworthy for two reasons. First, this argument, if sound, is quite damaging for any egalitarian theory of global justice because if equality requires this special relation of reciprocity, which exists only among compatriots of the same state, then the scope of egalitarian justice must be restricted to the state. Second, a distinctive and morally significant feature of modern states is that they provide certain collective goods that are indispensable for individual autonomy.

My paper will critically examine this “reciprocity-based” argument. It will first argue that there is no unproblematic account of contribution for the reciprocity-based argument to work. Next, it will argue that the demand of reciprocity does not, in itself, ground the demands of egalitarian distributive justice. After casting some doubt on the relevance of special relations of reciprocity for egalitarian distributive obligations, the paper will sketch an alternative form of egalitarianism that appeals neither to the moral arbitrariness of inequalities nor to the demand of reciprocity. Instead, it appeals to the value of equality as a relational ideal, that is, an ideal about how human relations should be conducted. The paper will argue that this alternative form of egalitarianism can accommodate our central intuitions regarding the place of egalitarian ideals in our social and political life. The final section will consider some implications of my discussion for the global justice debate.
I. Introduction

The “relational” view of equality maintains that distributive obligations more demanding than humanitarianism apply only to individuals who stand in a certain kind of relationship with one another. One example of these relations is the relation of shared membership of a coercive organization.¹ This coercion-based argument has received a certain amount of critical attention² so in this paper I will focus on an alternative version of this relational view, advance by Andrea Sangiovanni, which argues that only the special relations of reciprocity in the mutual provision of certain collective goods can trigger egalitarian obligations of justice.³ This particular variant of the relational view of equality deserves our attention for two reasons. First, this argument, if sound, is quite damaging for any egalitarian theory of global justice because if equality requires this special relation of reciprocity, which exists only among compatriots of the same state, then the scope of egalitarian justice must be restricted to the state. Second, it draws on a normatively significant fact about the state that few can dispute. In modern sociology, the state is defined as a coercive organization that successfully monopolizes the legitimate use of physical force to impose its rules on all the members of some designated group of


people. Nonetheless, the states do not only coerce but also provide the background conditions necessary for individuals to develop and act on their plan of life and to pursue common purposes.

The reciprocity-based argument contains a normative and an empirical premise. The normative premise states that egalitarian obligations of justice arise only in presence of a certain property (e.g. the presence of a certain kind of relation) while the empirical premise states that such a property (or relation) is present in the domestic society but not in the global context. For the reciprocity-based argument, egalitarian redistribution is a requirement of *reciprocity* in the mutual provision of basic collective goods because only when people collectively contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of a state do they owe each other egalitarian obligations of justice as a matter of fair reciprocity. The empirical premise of a disanalogy argument argues that certain property (or set of properties) possessed by the domestic society is absent in the global order. The state—with its legal system, police, military, and administrative bodies—has the capacities to provide those collective goods that enable individuals to develop and pursue their

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respective plans of life, such as: (i) protection from physical attacks; (ii) access to a legally regulated market; and (iii) a stable system of property rights and entitlements (henceforth *basic collective goods*); (b) the global order, on the other hand, is fundamentally different because: first, it has only a narrow range of authority; and, second, it presupposes the existence of states without which it cannot effectively govern and regulate those delegated areas of its jurisdiction. Therefore, the reciprocity-based argument concludes that we have special obligations of egalitarian justice to fellow citizens and residents that we do not have with respect to noncitizens and nonresidents. To be sure, the reciprocity-based objection does not deny that there are some obligations of justice beyond the context of the state but these obligations, if any, cannot be egalitarian. Nor does it deny that there can be some relationships of reciprocity beyond the context of a state. Simply put, the reciprocity-based argument maintains that egalitarian principles of justice should not be adopted beyond the context of a state because equality is a requirement of reciprocity in the mutual provisions of certain important collective goods and such special relations of reciprocity exist only within states.

My aim in this paper is to show that equality does not “require” special relations of reciprocity in the sense that egalitarian obligations of justice could not exist in absence of such relations. The paper will proceed as follows. It will first argue that there is no unproblematic account of contribution for the reciprocity-based argument to work. Next,

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9 But these relationships of reciprocity are not of a kind that support or give rise to egalitarian obligations of justice because they do not involve the mutual provision of basic collective goods mentioned above.
it will argue that the demand of reciprocity does not, in itself, ground the demands of egalitarian distributive justice. In the fourth section, I will consider the moral significance of the basic collective goods provided by the state and argue that it does not give us reason to limit the scope of distributive egalitarianism. After casting some doubt on the relevance of special relations of reciprocity for egalitarian distributive obligations, the paper will sketch an alternative form of egalitarianism that appeals neither to the moral arbitrariness of inequalities nor to the demand of reciprocity. Instead, it appeals to the value of equality as a relational ideal, that is, an ideal about how human relations should be conducted. The paper will argue that this alternative form of egalitarianism can accommodate our central intuitions regarding the place of egalitarian ideals in our social and political life. The final section will consider some implications of my discussion for the global justice debate.

II. Contribution and Entitlements

Why do we owe a special obligation of egalitarian justice to our fellow citizens and residents? As Sangiovanni argues,

“What triggers the special presumption against arbitrary inequalities is not the idea that no one should be worse off than anyone else through no fault of their own. The basis is fair, rather than narrowly self-interested, reciprocity: others are owed a fair return for what they have given you, just as you are owed a fair return for what you have given others. More specifically, those who have submitted themselves to a system of laws and social rules in ways necessary to sustain our life as citizens, producers, and biological beings are owed a fair return for what those who have benefited from their submission have received.”(pp. 26-27)

This may mean egalitarian treatment is owed to the persons who contribute in the relevant sense to the maintenance and reproduction of their state. Presumably, by
adopting the formulation “fellow citizens and residents” Sangiovanni means to suggest that egalitarian obligations of justice do not obtain exclusively among fellow citizens because resident non-citizens may also contribute to the mutual provision of basic collective goods in various ways and thus have legitimate claim to egalitarian treatment. However, as noted by Chris Armstrong, this formulation is incompatible with the emphasis on contribution to one another’s enjoyment of basic collective goods as the basis of people’s egalitarian entitlements. It is because the range of persons who are contributing members of a state is not always equivalent to the range of persons who are either citizens or residents of that state.10 First of all, it is not the case that all citizens qua citizens are contributing members in the relevant sense. Non-resident citizens, for example, may not be contributing in any way to the state’s capacity to provide basic collective goods. Nor do they necessarily benefit from the provision of these goods by their original state. Second, if whether a person is contributing to the mutual provision of basic collective goods within a state is determined by her place of residence, then we should simply say that egalitarian obligations of justice obtain only between fellow residents of the same state rather than between “fellow citizens and residents”.

To be sure, it is entirely possible for Sangiovanni to accept the full implications of grounding egalitarian entitlements on one’s contribution to the provision of basic collective goods and adjust his original formulation accordingly. This seems to be the most sensible option. So he may now claim that contribution is the only relevant criterion for egalitarian entitlements and it corresponds to citizenship and residency contingently

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Nonetheless, if contribution to the provision of basic collective goods is the only possible ground for egalitarian entitlements, then there must be a sensible account of what such contributions are, which must meet two conditions: first, it must possess the kind of moral significance that triggers egalitarian obligations of justice, and, second, entail a division between contributors and non-contributors that roughly coincides with the boundaries of the state. But this is not as easy as it may first seem because any reciprocity theorist will have to face a dilemma: if the account of contribution is too thin, it is hard to explain how such contributions give rise to egalitarian entitlements; on the other hand, if the account of contribution is too stringent, the risk is that too many persons within the state will fail to measure up and are therefore not entitled to egalitarian treatment.\textsuperscript{11}

Now let us consider two accounts of contribution which can be found in Sangiovanni’s article. On the thin account, one contributes to the mutual provision of basic collective goods simply by “submission to a system of laws and social rules” of one’s society and that generates claims to equality.\textsuperscript{12} The stringent account goes beyond mere compliance and involves trust, resources, and participation. To be more specific, such contributions include taxation, participation in various forms of political activity,


\textsuperscript{12} Sangiovanni (2007): 26-27. As for those who are able but unwilling to work, he suggests that “if they continue to comply with the laws (and if they continue to pay taxes, assuming they have any to pay), they are participating and contributing to the maintenance of the state according to RBI [reciprocity-based internationalism], hence aiding to the mutual provision of a system of societal norms which allow me, along with others, to develop and make use of my talents and abilities. They are, therefore, rightful beneficiaries of equality as a demand of justice.” (p. 28n45)
and the full range of our everyday, legally regulated activity.13 (Ibid, 20-1)

An obvious advantage of the thin account is that it regards all law-abiding residents as contributing to the mutual provision of basic collective goods in their state, and therefore they are entitled to egalitarian treatments. Nonetheless, the thin account of contribution runs directly against the logic of reciprocity-based argument. The reason is that, if what triggers egalitarian obligations of justice is the demand of fair reciprocity, it is hard to see why someone who is able but unwilling to work should be entitled to egalitarian treatment because the person fails to perform his duty of fair reciprocity in the first place (i.e. he is not making appropriate or proportional contributions to the productive activities of his society).

The thin account suffers from a further problem of being insensitive to the moral quality of the existing laws and social norms with which individuals are expected to comply. If we adopt this thin account, submission to oppressive laws and social norms would also be required for one to be qualified for egalitarian treatment. To be sure, submission to the existing laws and social norms, however oppressive or unjust they may be, does contribute to the state’s ability to provide basic collective goods such as security and order to the people.

If the thin account is not satisfactory, one could turn to a more stringent account like Sangiovanni does elsewhere in his article. For instance, he states that contributions to maintenance and reproduction of the state are paid in the form of “compliance, trust, resources, and participation”. (pp. 20-1) This account seems to be a better way to

understand the kind of reciprocity that is at work in a normally functioning state because people do contribute to the provision of basic collective goods in their state through many activities other than mere compliance. With this more stringent account, it is perhaps easier to explain the moral significance of special relations of reciprocity within a state. However, the danger here is that too many citizens and residents, for example, those who are politically inactive, the untrusting, and the untrustworthy, will fail to meet such a heightened standard and are thus disqualified from egalitarian treatment.14

Moreover, on the stringent account of contribution, some citizens and residents do contribute more than others to the provision of the basic collective goods in their society. If people’s contributions to the provision of basic collective goods are so important to their claim to social and economic advantages, and people do contribute to various degrees, then why shouldn’t those who have contributed more have claims to a large share of resources than others?

Having discussed some problems with the thin and the stringent accounts respectively, let us turn to a specific problem with limiting luck egalitarian to those who stand in special relations of reciprocity—that is, it sanctions certain morally arbitrary inequalities which egalitarians would surely condemn. To see this point, it is instructive to consider how a reciprocity theorist may deal with the case of disabled persons. Sangiovanni makes a distinction between contributing and non-contributing disabled persons and suggests that the disabled who contribute to the provision of the collective goods necessary for society to function are entitled to engage with others on footing of equality in political and social life. More importantly, those who cannot contribute in the

required sense because of their disability have no claim to equality even though they have some claim of justice.\textsuperscript{15} It is, however, hard to imagine that any plausible egalitarian theory of justice would suggest that we should exclude some disabled persons from the scope of egalitarian justice on the ground that they are unable to contribute when such inability is a result of natural contingency. This problem is particularly important for those who maintain that the point of equality is to mitigate morally arbitrary inequalities because according to a luck egalitarian account of justice the non-contributing disabled (whose disability cannot be attributed to choice) would definitely be entitled to egalitarian compensation.\textsuperscript{16}

III. Reciprocity-based Egalitarianism?

Let us turn to consider the moral relevance of reciprocity to equality in this section. The idea is that if egalitarian obligations of justice are only be grounded in the demand of reciprocity in the relations of collectively sustaining a state, the demands of equality must be confined to the boundaries of such relations. According to the reciprocity-based argument, egalitarian redistribution which strives to mitigate the unequal influence of social and natural contingencies on people’s distributive shares is appropriate because we owe a fair return to our fellow compatriots for their contributions to the provision of basic collective goods.\textsuperscript{17} Note that such special relations of reciprocity are not to be understood

\textsuperscript{15} Sangiovanni (2007): 30-31. For example, these persons have claims to “the alleviation of suffering and pain, where possible”, that derive from their equal moral worth and dignity as human beings. (p. 31n50)


\textsuperscript{17} Sangiovanni (2007): 25-6, 35.
in a descriptive sense. Surely it should not be understood as saying that egalitarian obligations can exist only among those whose relations are reciprocal in the require sense because that would lead to some morally perverse outcomes such as allowing people to avoid their obligations by treating others unfairly. Alternatively, reciprocity is a normative requirement in the special relation of sharing of a state—namely, if you were to share a state with others and benefited from the collective goods it provides, you should make reciprocal contributions, and the reciprocity-based argument holds egalitarian obligations can only be grounded in this particular normative requirement.

There are at least two reasons for doubting that equality is a demand of special relations of reciprocity: first, it is far from clear how this special relation of reciprocity actually gives rise to egalitarian obligations of justice; second, appealing to fair reciprocity seems to be unnecessary in defending distributive egalitarianism. Let us consider these two points in turn.

To begin with, it is questionable that fair reciprocity alone can give rise to egalitarian obligations. To elaborate: an act of contribution is reciprocal in the sense that it is undertaken as an act of reciprocation for the goods one has received; and it is proportionate when the burdens it incurs are scaled to the benefits one has received or to one’s ability to contribute. For instance, the demand of proportionality is met when the system of law is sensitive to people’s ability to comply when giving out punishments, tax obligations are in general scaled roughly to people’s ability to pay, and conscriptions for military service is sensitive to the extraordinary burdens it might place on some people,
and so forth. In short, if a person is receiving some basic collective goods such as protection of personal security, access to market, legal protection of property rights, etc. from the state, fair reciprocity requires her to make appropriate and proportional contributions to the provision of such goods for her fellow citizens and it is unclear whether reciprocity in this particular relation would require her to do more than just that.

Perhaps the well-off citizen owes something more than provision of basic collective goods because one’s ability to win deferential social and economic advantages through one’s talents, efforts, and skills depends crucially on the participation and contributions of one’s fellow citizens in sustaining the state. For example, the market in which one’s talents are valued must depend on the legal background provided by the shared legal corpus of the state. Also, the very ability to develop and make use of one’s talents depends on the institutional framework that other citizens have sustained. Therefore, as a matter of fair reciprocity, the well-off should contribute to an egalitarian scheme of redistribution that mitigates morally arbitrary inequalities. However, the well-off citizens may respond by arguing that “it is indeed unfortunate that the worse-off citizens do not have talents or skills of high market values, but, due to our contributions they are similarly able to enjoy these basic collective goods and so they are able to win deferential social and economic advantages and to develop and make use of their talents.” It seems to me that the well-off would have fulfilled their duty of reciprocity simply by making reciprocal and proportionate contributions to the provision of basic collective goods.

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18 For this general account of reciprocity as the inclination to make reciprocate and proportional response to goods one has received, see Lawrence C. Becker, *Reciprocity* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986) 260-1. Although Becker takes reciprocity to be a kind of personal virtue, it does have implications for our social and political obligations.

goods because by so doing they also helps to sustain the background conditions under which one’s compatriots can make use of their talents and capacities to win social and economic advantages. So, in the end, it is a matter of luck, not reciprocity.

Moreover, if the point of equality is to mitigate morally arbitrary inequalities, there is a further problem with limiting the scope of egalitarian justice to special relations of reciprocity. Either we accept the presumption against morally arbitrary inequalities (in welfare or any other appropriate metric)\(^{20}\) that *no one should be worse-off than others through no choice of one’s own*, or we do not. If we do accept it, appealing to special relations of reciprocity to limit the scope of justice would be highly problematic because the membership of such relations is itself morally arbitrary. Being born into an affluent society or a poor society will determine one’s opportunity to engage in special relations of reciprocity with others but this is just part of the unchosen circumstances of a person that no one can claim to deserve, so that the resulting inequalities (from being excluded from the relations of reciprocity with some people) are morally arbitrary.\(^{21}\) The idea here is that, from a moral point of view, such inequalities are just as morally arbitrary whether special relations of reciprocity are present or not. Nonetheless, if one does not accept the presumption against morally arbitrary inequalities, appealing to special relations of reciprocity would not help to justify any egalitarian distributive commitment that aims at mitigating the influence of natural and social contingencies on people’s distributing

\(^{20}\) For a discussion of this issue, see G. A. Cohen, “On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice,” *Ethics* 99 (1989): 904-44; but the metric that one uses to measure equality should not affect my arguments.

Up to this point I have focused on the special relations regarding the mutual provision of basic collective goods (e.g. security, access to market, property rights etc.), but I have discussed other special relations of reciprocity. My objection to the reciprocity-based argument must be qualified in the following ways. First of all, when one is already living in a state with some egalitarian policies, it would be a matter of fair reciprocity that one also makes appropriate and reciprocal contributions to such policies that may involve egalitarian distributive commitments. However, in this case what trigger the egalitarian obligation are the benefits (direct or indirect) one receives from such policies and the similar sacrifice and contributions of one’s fellow citizens, not merely the enjoyment of basic collective goods. Moreover, relations of economic interdependence may give rise to duties of reciprocity and some may argue that they may involve egalitarian obligations. For instance, it may be the case that justice requires that people who engage in economic cooperation to comply with certain norms of fair reciprocity in regulating their relations to one another and that requires some egalitarian principles of justice to regulate the distribution of burdens and benefits arising from their collective endeavors. However, the special relation of economic cooperation is much more inclusive than the special relation regarding the mutual provision of basic collective goods. More important, in both of these two cases reciprocity is itself a demand of justice, not a necessary pre-condition for obligations of justice to arise. It means that if some party to these relations fails to do

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22 It has been argued that even the provision of basic collective goods extends beyond the context of a state, see Armstrong (2009) but I shall not pursue this matter further.

what is required by reciprocity in these relations, we should say that they fail to perform their more obligations but not that they do not have such obligations in the first place.

IV. The Moral Significance of Basic Collective Goods

The previous sections have questioned the claim that equality requires special relations of reciprocity in the mutual provision of basic collective goods. This section will try to cast further doubt on that claim by examining the reasons for attributing moral significance to the mutual provision of basic collective goods and arguing that none of them implies that egalitarian obligations of justice arise only with special relations of reciprocity.

1. Autonomy

Few would reject that belonging to a state is autonomy preserving because the state provides some collective goods that establish the background conditions under which individuals can develop and act on their respective plan of life. While this is a strong reason for attributing moral significance to the relationship of sharing a state, it hardly follows that egalitarian obligations of justice obtain only among those who help to preserve one another’s autonomy. It is because in some cases concerns of equality do apply to people who do not depend on each other for the preservation of their personal autonomy. Consider, for example, a case in which two persons worked a plot of land together, sharing fully in the business of tilling the land, growing the crops, and harvesting them. It seems to me that, in absence of countervailing reasons, the appropriate way to divide the fruit of their cooperation is to take equal shares.24 In this

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24 For this example, see Richard Norman, “The Social Basis of Equality,” Ratio 10 (1997); 245.
case, whether they are helping to preserve each other’s personal autonomy does not seem to affect our judgment regarding whether some standard of equality should apply.

2. **Impacts on people’s life chances**

A second reason for attributing moral significance to the mutual provision of basic collective goods appeals to the profound and pervasive impacts it has on people’s life chances. It seems to be a plausible reason for holding that this special relationship of reciprocity is morally significant. Nonetheless, it does not follow from this reason that the scope of egalitarian justice should be defined by our special relations of reciprocity. First, as far as impacts on people’s life chances are concerned, the domestic context is not so distinguishable from the global one. The global order, it has often been argued, would have the same kind of moral significance because of its profound and pervasive impacts on people’s life chances. Thus, this reason for attributing moral significance to the mutual provision of basic collective goods fails point out a morally relevant difference between the state and the global context. More importantly, if we think that egalitarian principles of justice should be adopted at the domestic level because the provision of basic collective goods by the state has profound and pervasive impacts on people’s life chances, then we should also think global interdependence has the same kind of moral significance because of the profound and pervasive impacts it has on people’s life chances.

3. **Special duties to fellow citizens**

It is common to think that mutual provision of basic collective goods is morally

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significant because it generates special duties among fellow citizens and residents. These duties are special, as opposed to general, because they are owed exclusively to those who depend on one another for these goods but not anyone else.  

However, one can affirm this point without holding that equality requires special relations of reciprocity. It should first be noted that this reason only tells us that we owe some special duties to our compatriots in virtue of our mutual dependence for the provision of some basic collective goods but it tells us nothing about the proper content of our obligations of justice to foreigners, let alone showing that these general obligations cannot be egalitarian. That is to say, the “specialness” of this duty does not, in itself, entail that the concern for substantive equality becomes relevant only in the presence of mutual reliance for the provision of basic collective goods. Moreover, it can be argued that our special duties to fellow citizens are acceptable only when certain background justice is upheld at the global level and this requirement of background justice might involve some egalitarian principles. Finally, it is possible and entirely consistent to maintain that people's just entitlements are defined by some egalitarian principles of distributive justice but we have special duties to secure these egalitarian entitlements for our fellow citizens.

V. An Alternative Approach to Global Equality

On an inclusive reading, the reciprocity-based objection is claiming that the special relationship of reciprocity in the mutual provision of basic collective goods is a necessary

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condition for any egalitarian conception of justice to apply. However, on a more restrictive reading, the reciprocity-based argument focuses on a narrower set of egalitarian theories that strive to mitigate the unequal influence of natural and social contingencies on distributive shares, and maintains that this form of egalitarianism can only be grounded in special relations of reciprocity.

For Sangiovanni, we should reject the non-relational globalist view regarding the scope of egalitarian justice because of its counter-intuitive implications. Consider the following example: the inhabitants in country A has just discovered a heretofore unknown people, B, who are twice as rich, twice as happy, and have twice as many opportunities for leisure, education, and gainful employment as the inhabitants of A have. Assuming that the inhabitants in A do not suffer from absolute deprivation, what obligations of justice do the inhabitants of B owe to them? The non-relational globalist view, argues Sangiovanni, would compel us to conclude that the inhabitants of A now have a claim of compensation against the inhabitants of B but that conclusion is highly counter-intuitive. On the other hand, his reciprocity-based view produces no such absurd conclusion because these inhabitants do not share a single scheme that provides one another with basic collective goods. Therefore, his own view is preferable to that of global egalitarianism.

However, this distinction between reciprocity-based internationalism and non-relational globalism is rather too crude and it ignores many other credible alternatives. To

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29 Ibid: 22-23.

see this, let us consider an alternative form of *relational* egalitarianism, which appeals to the value of equality as an ideal about how human relations should be conducted. Simply put, this form of relational egalitarianism argues that the proper goal for egalitarianism is to promote standing in relations of equality (as opposed to, say, relations of exploitation or domination) and distributive inequalities is morally objectionable to the extent that they are the result of some morally objectionable relations or tend to give rise to such relations. 31 The paper will argue that this alternative form of egalitarianism can accommodate our central intuitions regarding the place of egalitarian ideals in our social and political life. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full defense for this alternative approach to global equality, I want to make two points clear. First, this approach is relational in the sense that it is in equality as a normative ideal of how human relations should be conducted. It should also be noted that our relations to one another in the global context involve living under a set of shared institutions with profound and pervasive impacts on each other’s life prospects, and interactions sufficiently complex and intense to produce morally problematic outcomes. Second, the validity of the egalitarian reasons mentioned above does not depend on the prior existence of special relations of reciprocity. For instance, inequalities leading to domination are morally objectionable even in absence of any special relations of reciprocity. I shall also maintain that our relations to one another in the global context give rise to claims of distributive

justice for three reasons. First, as suggested above, the ways in which this relation is structured have profound and pervasive impacts on its participants’ life chances and they effect a distribution of benefits and burdens that would not otherwise exist. Second, the ways in which this relation is constructed are subject to collective control. This means the fundamental terms of global interdependence and interactions are alterable. Third, the successful regulation of this relation requires as an instrumental condition a set of institutions that would maintain the necessary background conditions for different agents to interact with each other. These conditions, taken together, imply that our relation to one another in the global context is subject to assessment according to principles of distributive justice.

To be more specific, my account of relational egalitarianism appeals to the following considerations in favor of a relation of equality among individuals: (1) supports the self-respect of each participant, (2) avoids domination of some by others, and (3) embodies fair terms of cooperation for common endeavors, which implies, negatively, the terms of their interactions must be free from exploitation (and there should be appropriate institutional arrangements to prevent people from being exploited by more powerful agents), and, positively, each participant in the cooperative scheme is to have fair access to the benefits resulted from their cooperation. Each of these aspects represents a way in which people can be related to one another as equals. Relational egalitarianism is concerned fundamentally with relational problems but it is not indifferent to the distributions of advantages among individuals. In this view, social and economic inequalities among individuals are morally objectionable to the extent that they give rise to relations that fail to respect our status as equal persons (e.g. they tend to undermine the
self-respect of the poor, give rise to relations of domination of the poor by the rich and the powerful, etc.), or they are the results of such morally objectionable relations (e.g. of exploitative practices).

Note, first, that these are egalitarian reasons for limiting inequalities and their validity does not seem to depend on the prior existence of any special relations of reciprocity. Consider non-domination: first of all, from a moral point of view, relations of domination are objectionable whether or not they obtain between compatriots. It is true that non-domination is closely related to the ideal of equal citizenship but not all reasons for rejecting relations of domination are bounded to the context of a single political community. For example, being subject to domination always undermines the ability of the dominated agent to pursue her rational plan of life in a way that cannot be justified to her. The fact that she is vulnerable to arbitrary power over which she has no control is morally bad whether the source of her domination come from within or beyond her own society. In fact, it is sometimes argued that being subject to arbitrary power of a foreign agent constitutes a greater moral evil. This is not to say that I am myself committed to this line of reasoning. But it has been said that being subject to a tyranny of one’s own nation is preferable to being governed by “some cautious, just, gentle, well-meaning administrator from outside.” Thus, we may actually have more, not less, reason for rejecting transnational domination. Second, as an empirical matter, domination can and does take place beyond the context of the state. As we have discussed in the previous chapter, people around the world are now living under a wide range of transnational

institutions that have profound impacts on their life-chances and welfare wherever they live without the possibility of opting out; in addition, the pattern of transnational interactions is sufficiently intense and complex to expose people living in poorer societies to the influence of alien forces which neither they nor their governments can control.\textsuperscript{33} Many governments of developing countries and local elites of these societies are in fact working with foreign governments or other transnational agents to maintain the relations of domination between these agents and their own peoples, and they receive benefits from doing so. At an institutional level, affluent countries and corporations often use their greater influence over the operations and decision-making of international organizations to shape the global rules and institutions to their own favor. These rules and institutions greatly restrict the choice of national economic policies of many developing states and in turn have profound impacts of the lives of many people living in these states.

To see how this alternative form of egalitarianism may better account for our intuition regarding place of equality, consider the case of contemporary welfare state: the idea of ‘organized and generalized’ reciprocity is a major motivational source for supporting, as well as a prominent argument for the emergence of the welfare state—the real world institution commonly associated with contemporary egalitarianism. Individuals are more willing to grant their consent to the policies and institutions in which burdens and benefits so generated are perceived to be widely and fairly shared and

less willing when public services are inconsequential or inefficient or when free-riding
and parasitism are rife.  

First of all, one reason to favor a welfare state because it reduces the vulnerability
of the poor to relations of domination and there is no need to refer to any special relation
of reciprocity. In fact, what motivates people to support the welfare state is the
expectation that other citizens are doing their fair shares so they would not be taken
advantage of in complying with these policies and institutions themselves. In other words,
it is not the provision of basic collective goods but other citizens’ compliance with the
practice of welfare state which gives rise to a duty of reciprocity. Therefore, it is doubtful
that this example cannot lend any support to the reciprocity-based objection.

Second, and equally important, one can concede to the descriptive claim that the
idea of reciprocity is a major motivational source for supporting egalitarian institutions
and policies without concluding that we owe egalitarian obligations of justice only to our
compatriots. A crucial assumption in this line of reasoning is that an agent has a certain
obligation only when she will actually be motivated to discharge it but this is highly
implausible. Imagine, for example, a state whose welfare system is rife with free-riding
and parasitism. In this case, it is unlikely that individuals would be motivated by concern
for reciprocity to comply with the egalitarian policies and institutions of their society.
Although it may be unreasonable to expect people to support the welfare state out of

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35 For this kind of justification of a welfare state, see Robert Goodin, *Reasons for Welfare: A Political

36 Christopher Heath Wellman, “Relational Facts in Liberal Political Theory: Is There Magic in the
reciprocity, it does not follow that egalitarian obligations of justice do not arise in the first place when excessive inequalities tend to give rise to morally objectionable relations.

VI. Conclusion

So, does equality require special relations of reciprocity? If “special relations of reciprocity” mean the special relation of collectively sustaining a state for the provision of some basic collective goods, the answer is “no.” If, on the other hand, they are referring to the other special relations of reciprocity such as those in economic cooperation, we must see that, first, such relations extend far beyond the context of a state, and, second, in these cases, reciprocity is itself a demand of justice but not a necessary pre-condition for obligations of justice to arise.

To sum up, this paper has argued that the scope of egalitarian distributive justice should not be restricted by the special relations of reciprocity in the mutual provision of basic collective goods. An implication of our discussion is that we need not choose between non-relational cosmopolitanism which holds that equality applies everywhere regardless of the relations people stand to one another and relational internationalism which holds that equality does not apply beyond the state.