

Vulnerability and Cosmopolitanism

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ABSTRACT

According to cosmopolitan egalitarianism, egalitarian norms of distributive justice apply to all human beings regardless of national boundaries. Many justifications have been offered for this view. There is, however, one possible justification that has been hinted at but not systematically explored. It proposes that egalitarian norms of distributive justice apply whenever people are vulnerable to each other's actions, that is, whenever their interests can be set back by other people's actions. If successful, this justification of cosmopolitan egalitarianism would avoid certain familiar difficulties that other justifications face. However, this paper argues that this possibly promising justification fails. Several hypothetical scenarios in which the existence of considerable vulnerability does not call for egalitarian distributions are introduced. These scenarios do not only establish that vulnerability is insufficient for the applicability of egalitarian norms, but also help explain why this is so.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, distributive equality, vulnerability, weak relational accounts

1. INTRODUCTION

Egalitarian philosophy has statist and cosmopolitan variants. Statists argue that egalitarian norms of distributive justice (henceforth 'distributive equality') apply only to fellow citizens, while cosmopolitans argue that they apply to humanity as a whole.¹ This paper focuses on a claim that

¹ When egalitarians condemn unequal distributions as unjust, they may invoke a telic standard of equality (according to which it is the state of affairs that is unjust) or a deontic standard (according to which it is the failure of certain agents to secure equal distribution that is unjust)

has been hinted at in the cosmopolitan literature, but which has not received sustained scholarly attention. The claim is that distributive equality applies whenever individuals are *vulnerable* to the actions of others. Following Goodin (1985: 110, 198–200), we can say that A is vulnerable to B if B’s actions can significantly set back A’s interests.

In today’s world, vulnerability is not constrained by national borders: the actions of people in one part of the world can set back the interests of people in other parts. Thus, if vulnerability is a sufficient condition for the applicability of distributive equality, there would be a powerful argument for cosmopolitanism. Moreover, a vulnerability-based argument, if successful, would avoid certain difficulties that familiar defenses of cosmopolitanism face (section 2). However, this paper argues that considerations of vulnerability fail to support cosmopolitanism, despite their promise. Hypothetical scenarios will be introduced to suggest that vulnerability does not trigger an obligation of distributive equality (section 3). Some reasons for vulnerability’s failure to do so will be explored (section 4). Finally, some similarities and differences between my argument and criticisms of cosmopolitanism that have been advanced by proponents of practice-dependent accounts of justice will be pointed out (section 5).

Before proceeding, a note about the debate between statism and cosmopolitanism is in order. There now seems to be more overlap between cosmopolitanism and statism than there used to be: some contemporary cosmopolitans attempt to accommodate national sentiment (Tan 2004), while some contemporary statist argue for demanding duties of global distributive justice (Blake 2001; Sangivanni 2007). Reflecting on these developments, de Bres (2016: 162) remarks that it seems that nowadays statist and cosmopolitans are “arguing over whether the revolution will occur on a Monday or instead a Tuesday”. However, while attempts to think beyond the statist/cosmopolitan dichotomy characterize much of the recent writing on global justice, there is a sense in which the dichotomy is still very much with us. The question whether an obligation of distributive equality applies globally has only one answer: yes or no. Regarding *this* question, cosmopolitans and statist hold mutually exclusive views. This paper evaluates one way of motivating a cosmopolitan position on this question.

(Parfit 1997). The telic interpretation is more natural for the current discussion. Note that even on a telic interpretation, agents can have an obligation to bring about a more equal distribution if they can do so (see Temkin 1993: 14).

2. THE PROMISE OF VULNERABILITY

According to ‘nonrelational’ accounts of distributive justice, individuals need not be associated in any way for distributive equality to apply to them.² Advocates of such accounts argue that the equal moral status of all people or the intrinsic unfairness of undeserved inequalities is sufficient to justify distributive equality (Arneson 1999; Barry 1982; Beitz 1983; Caney 2005; Temkin 1993). However, many egalitarian philosophers—cosmopolitans and statist alike—hesitate to endorse this view. Cases like the following motivate their hesitation. Suppose that in some remote galaxy there are rational creatures who are equal to us in moral status and have either more or less resources than we do. Nonrelational views would deem the inequality unjust, but many find this implication intuitively implausible. We seem to be *too* unrelated to these faraway creatures for inequality between us to matter at all.³

Egalitarians who are impressed by examples of this kind prefer a ‘relational’ account, according to which certain interactions or associations among individuals are necessary to trigger an obligation of distributive equality. According to some relational accounts, distributive equality is applicable only where a reasonably robust association obtains among individuals, such as cooperation for mutual advantage (Rawls 1971), liability to coercive institutions (Blake 2001; Nagel 2005; Risse 2006), reciprocal contribution to a shared institutional framework that supports autonomy (Sangiovanni 2007), social solidarity (Heyd 2007) or shared cultural identity (Miller 1999). We can refer to these views as *strong* relational accounts.⁴ According to these accounts, the kinds of relations that trigger an obligation of distributive equality require shared institutions, practices, or culture. Statists typically belong to this category. There are also cosmopolitans who subscribe to a strong relational account. They argue that humanity as a whole is associated in one of the robust ways just mentioned (Abizadeh 2007; Beitz 1999; Pogge 1989). Other cosmopolitans disagree. They are concerned that cooperation for mutual advantage, for

² The distinction between relational and nonrelational accounts follows Sangiovanni (2007: 5). It is similar to de Bres’s distinction between associativist and humanist accounts (de Bres 2016).

³ For a similar example, see de Bres (2016: 166–73).

⁴ This category corresponds roughly to what is sometimes referred to as *institutionalism*. It nonetheless differs from institutionalism by allowing pre-institutional associations based on social solidarity or shared identity to serve as sufficient conditions for egalitarian distributive justice.

example, does not exist on a global scale (Barry 1982), or that international institutions are not sufficiently coercive (Brown 2008: 443).⁵

Cosmopolitans who are impressed by these objections may try a third tack. They can require *some* relation among people for there to be an obligation of distributive equality, thus avoiding the different-galaxies objection, but will require only a relatively weak kind of relation, thus making it easier to argue that the relevant relation exists among all people. If a relatively weak relation is sufficient to trigger an egalitarian norm of distributive justice, cosmopolitanism will rest on secure grounds. Proposals of this kind can be referred to as *weak* relational accounts.⁶

The weakest relational account would regard any causal relation between people as a sufficient condition for the applicability of distributive equality. This would be enough to respond to the different-galaxies objection because people in different galaxies are not causally related: the actions of people in one galaxy have no effect on people in another. However, this weak relational account appears to be too weak. An example adapted from Arneson (1999) and Lippert-Rasmussen (2018: 128) can help illustrate this claim.

Suppose that people on Planet A live in a different galaxy than people on Planet B and are much wealthier than the people on Planet B (although the people on Planet B have enough resources to meet their basic needs). At t_1 , the actions of people on one planet do not causally affect people on the other planet in any way. Suppose also that there is some impartial and omniscient spectator that can transfer resources from A to B. If one rejects nonrelational accounts, justice does not give the spectator any justice-based reason to transfer resources from A to B. Now suppose that at t_2 a change occurs: it becomes possible for people on A to add or reduce a single skin cell from people on B. This does not seem sufficient to establish the kind of relation that would trigger an obligation of distributive equality. The causal relation described here seems too trivial and morally insignificant to have such dramatic normative consequences. If one rejects nonrelational accounts, a more substantial relation between the inhabitants of A and B is presumably needed for distributive equality to apply.

⁵ It is instructive in this context that Cohen and Sable (2006) and Valentini (2011), who argue that global coercion is more extensive than what statist usually allow for, nonetheless do not think that it justifies cosmopolitan distributive equality.

⁶ Another weak-relational view is developed by de Bres (2016), but it is not cosmopolitan.

Suppose, then, that at t_2 a more substantial change takes place. Now the actions of the As can profoundly set back the interests of the Bs and can do so over a long period of time. In this case, the Bs are not merely causally related to the As but are *vulnerable* to them. The proposal that at t_2 distributive equality applies between the As and the Bs is more initially appealing in this scenario, since the causal relation between the As and the Bs is morally significant. Also note that for the Bs to be vulnerable to the As, the As and the Bs need not be subject to the same coercive institutions, cooperate for mutual advantage, share a cultural heritage, or have any other robust kind of social relation. Vulnerability requires certain kinds of causal chains, but not shared social practices, institutions, or identity. Thus, invoking the vulnerability relation seems promising when developing a weak relational account of distributive justice.

For cosmopolitans, such an account would avoid certain difficulties of strong relational and nonrelational accounts. The claim that vulnerability exists on a global scale is less controversial than the claim that cooperation for mutual advantage, coercion, or solidarity do. This allows cosmopolitans to avoid certain objections to strong relational accounts. Vulnerability also requires causal relations that do not exist between people who live in remote galaxies. This allows cosmopolitans to avoid certain difficulties with nonrelational accounts. Justifying cosmopolitanism by appealing to vulnerability thus promises to avoid familiar objections to cosmopolitanism.

The idea that vulnerability is a sufficient condition for the applicability of distributive equality is suggested by Kok-Chor Tan:⁷

The fact of shared institutional arrangements makes justice consideration necessary; but the existence of such arrangements is *not* a prerequisite of justice. In other words, while a shared social scheme is a sufficient condition for justice, it is not a necessary one. On the contrary, that our actions or omissions have moral implications for others is a sufficient condition for others to make demands of justice on us. ... Broadly following Kant, considerations of justice come into being the moment our actions have implications for each other. ... To put it

⁷ It should be noted that this is not Tan's only argument for cosmopolitanism. It is singled out here as an example of a vulnerability-based, weak-relational justification of cosmopolitanism. Tan's other arguments for cosmopolitanism are of the nonrelational or strong-relational type.

differently, as long as others are vulnerable to our actions and omissions, we have certain duties of justice towards them. (Tan 2004: 33–34)

Tan further mentions the various ways in which globalization opens up causal channels through which individuals can influence each other's conditions. We live in a time "in which individuals' economic decisions and policies are felt worldwide" (Tan 2004: 34). According to Tan, globalization makes vulnerability global, and thus calls for global distributive equality.

Tan's normative argument for the egalitarian significance of vulnerability is not entirely explicit, but his remark about broadly following Kant invites the following reconstruction of his argument. Kant writes:

The concept of Right, insofar as it is related to an obligation corresponding to it (i.e. the moral concept of Right), has to do, *first*, only with the external and indeed practical relation of one person to another, insofar as their actions, as facts, can have (direct or indirect) influence on each other. (*MM* 6:230. Quoted in Tan, 2004: 33)

Following Kant, one can say that when one individual's actions influence another's condition, principles of justice apply. Kant, it should be noted, does not endorse cosmopolitan egalitarianism (or any kind of distributive egalitarianism, for that matter), which explains why Tan says he is only "broadly following Kant". What Tan appears to take from Kant is the idea that people who can influence each other with their actions are bound by norms of justice. To this Kantian foundation Tan adds distributive equality, since it is a part of justice. The result is a vulnerability-based, weak-relational account of cosmopolitan egalitarianism.⁸

⁸ Abizadeh (2007) identifies three elements in Rawls's idea of a basic structure: cooperation, pervasive impact, and coercion. Pervasive impact is not limited by state borders (Abizadeh 2007: 339, 341–5). This part of his argument can be construed as a vulnerability-based argument.

3. VULNERABILITY IS NOT ENOUGH

This section discusses three variations of a hypothetical case. The background conditions for all these cases are the same: Planet A and Planet B are far apart. At t_1 , the actions of people on Planet A cannot influence the interests of people on Planet B and vice versa. The As and the Bs are unaware of each other and cannot communicate with each other. All the people living on A are equally wealthy, as are all the people living on B, but the As are wealthier than the Bs. Despite their relative poverty, the Bs have sufficient resources to meet their basic needs, and perhaps even to live decent lives. The universe also includes an impartial and omniscient spectator who can transfer resources between the planets. For the purposes of this discussion, suppose that we reject nonrelational accounts of distributive equality, so that justice does not require the spectator to redistribute resources from the As to the Bs at t_1 . This is the starting point for the following three scenarios, all of which occur at some later time, t_2 .

1. Redistribution from Victims to Victimizers. Barry, who lives on B, is an amateur chemist. He experiments with developing new kinds of mild poisons. After developing each poison, he dumps it in the sink. Unbeknownst to him, the sink is connected to a (newly created) mechanism whose sole function is to spread poisons from B to A. The poison eventually reaches Aaron, who lives on A. Aaron develops a debilitating illness as a result and suffers greatly. He is unable to work for a while and loses some of his wealth, although he remains wealthier than Barry. The poison, in other words, has significant effects on Aaron's welfare and resources.

Suppose that this is a recurring event. Every year, Barry invents a new poison, and Aaron, just as he recovers from last year's illness, is exposed to the new poison. Aaron has become vulnerable to Barry. Suppose next that Barry and Aaron are not the only people among whom this pattern has been established. Indeed, many people on B are amateur chemists who enjoy developing new poisons. They pour poison into the sink and spread it unintentionally to A. As a result, many people on A suffer a loss of welfare and resources, although they remain wealthier than the Bs. In other words, the entire A-population is now vulnerable to the Bs.

This is the only change that has occurred at t_2 . The As and the Bs are still unaware of each other and are unable to communicate with each other. Relatedly, the Bs are not trying to influence the behavior of the As in any way. In other words, while the Bs are *harming* the As, they are not *coercing* them, nor do the As and the Bs now perceive themselves as belonging to

the same cultural group. It is fair to suggest that strong relational conditions of distributive equality are not satisfied in this case. For this reason, this is a good case for testing a vulnerability-based weak relational account.

We can then ask: has distributive equality become a valid norm of distributive justice between the As and the Bs? If it has, the impartial spectator should transfer some resources from the As (who are wealthier) to the Bs (who are poorer). But it appears to be counterintuitive that justice would now recommend such redistribution. If the As are vulnerable to the Bs, then, if anything, resources should be transferred from the Bs to the As. Given that the Bs are poorer and the harm they caused is unintentional, the Bs perhaps should be released from compensating the As. But surely resources should not be transferred from the As to the Bs simply because the As can now be harmed by the Bs!

This reveals the first problem in the claim that vulnerability triggers an obligation of distributive equality. Distributive equality is typically furthered by redistributing resources from those who have more to those who have less, but those who have more may be vulnerable to those who have less.⁹ It is implausible that such vulnerability would then trigger an obligation of distributive equality. This does not mean that the normative situation hasn't changed between the As and the Bs. As mentioned, the Bs should perhaps compensate the As and should stop poisoning them. These may even be duties of justice. But if there are newly acquired duties of justice in this situation, they do not seem to include an egalitarian duty of distributive justice.¹⁰

2. *Redistribution from Benefactors to Beneficiaries.* Aaron (who lives on wealthier Planet A) develops a new fertilizer that dramatically increases the yield of various crops. He pours the fertilizer into the sink. Unbeknownst to him, a newly created mechanism whose sole purpose is

⁹ This is not meant to imply that egalitarians believe that redistribution is the ideal method of achieving equality. Many egalitarians, including Tan, prefer a policy that establishes a just *ex ante* distribution ('predistribution') over an *ex post* redistribution. That should not affect the argument, however, since most egalitarians do not wish to completely replace redistribution with predistribution, and because it is hard to see how equality could be achieved without redistribution in the examples discussed here.

¹⁰ We can imagine a scenario in which Aaron and Barry are neighbors who are unaware of each other's existence but who affect each other in the ways just mentioned. One might then have the intuition that distributive equality should apply between them. However, intuitions in this case may be influenced by the thought that neighbors are related in the strong sense: they are typically citizens of the same state, pay taxes to the same municipal authority, etc. Imagining Aaron and Barry as living on different planets helps isolate the influence of vulnerability on our intuitions.

to deliver fertilizers between planets spreads the fertilizer on Planet B. Barry, who lives on poorer planet B, is a farmer. He benefits immensely from the fertilizer. Aaron pours the fertilizer into the sink every week for many years, and Barry benefits from Aaron's actions. Indeed, many As are doing as Aaron does and many Bs are benefiting as a result. However, despite the recurrent benefits, the Bs remain poorer than the As.

This is the only change that occurs at t_2 . The As and the Bs are still unaware of each other and are unable to communicate. While the As benefit the Bs, it would be odd to say that the As and the Bs cooperate for mutual advantage: they do not seem to cooperate at all and advantages here are not mutual.¹¹ Thus, there does not seem to be a strong relational condition of distributive equality that is satisfied at t_2 . For this reason, this is a good case to test a weak relational account.

We can then ask: has distributive equality become a valid norm between the As and the Bs? Should the impartial spectator transfer some resources from the As, who are wealthier, to the Bs, who are poorer? The answer seems to be No. The As are benefiting the Bs. If anything, the Bs might have a duty of gratitude to the As. If any resources should be transferred, they probably should be transferred from the Bs to the As. Perhaps the Bs can be released from this duty given the fact that they never asked for these benefits and that they are poorer. But it is unlikely that justice calls for distributing more resources from the As to the Bs just because the As are benefiting the Bs. This leads to the second problem in the claim that vulnerability triggers an obligation of distributive equality. Distributive equality is typically furthered by redistributing resources from those who have more to those who have less, but those who have less can be vulnerable to those who benefit them and who have more.

This is not to deny that the normative situation between the As and the Bs has changed in significant ways. The Bs may have a duty of gratitude to the As, and the As may have a duty to continue supplying the fertilizer if the Bs started relying on it. The latter (and perhaps the former) may even be duties of justice. But it is unlikely that the Bs now have a legitimate claim

¹¹ In his survey of definitions of cooperation, Tuomela (2000: 21–2) mentions several common themes: joint venture (having a collective goal or intention), acting together in a coordinated way, trust, and a belief that others will do their part. None of these characterizes the As and the Bs at t_2 .

on *further* resources the As possess. In other words, it is unlikely that distributive equality now applies between the As and Bs.

Someone could deny that this case involves vulnerability, since vulnerability, as defined above, means susceptibility to harm, not susceptibility to benefit. However, if vulnerability is invoked as part of a Kantian framework that emphasizes circumstances in which people “have (direct or indirect) influence on each other”, perhaps the definition of vulnerability should be broadened to include benefits. That being as it may, the more important point to make here is that the Bs are susceptible to harm from the As. If the As stop pouring the fertilizer into the sink, the Bs will be made worse off than they were during the years in which the fertilizer was supplied and worse off than what has become normal for them. It is thus reasonable to describe the Bs as vulnerable to the As in the ordinary sense in this scenario. Still, it would be odd to suggest that distributive equality now applies between the As and the Bs.

3. *Redistribution from victimizers to victims.* Aaron (who lives on wealthier Planet A) has 10,000 sheep while Barry (who lives on poorer Planet B) has only four. Aaron is an amateur chemist, and he enjoys developing new poisons which he pours into the sink once he is done with his experiments. Unbeknownst to him, the sink is connected to a newly created mechanism whose sole function is to spread poisons from A to B. The poison makes its way to B, and as a result, two of Barry’s sheep die. This constitutes a significant loss of welfare and resources for Barry.

This is an ongoing situation. Just as Barry manages to replenish the number of his sheep, poison arrives from A and kills two of them. Indeed, many people on A have 10,000 sheep and many of them are amateur chemists who enjoy experimenting with new poisons. They all dump their poisons into the sink when they are done with their experiments. Many people on B have only four sheep, and they frequently lose two of them because of the poison arriving from A. In other words, the Bs became vulnerable to the As. This is the only change that occurs at t_2 .

Does distributive equality now apply between the As and the Bs? If it does, the spectator should transfer somewhere around 5,000 sheep from each person on A to each person on B. But this does not seem to be a reasonable response to the vulnerability of the Bs to As. Instead of equality, justice would probably require the As to discontinue harming the Bs, and to compensate them for their lost sheep. Justice might even be more generous and call, for example, on the spectator to transfer three sheep from the As for every two sheep lost by the Bs. However, after

such a (generous) compensation scheme is put into place, there does not seem to be anything further that justice would require in response to the harm suffered by the Bs.

In other words, it appears to be disproportionate to require distributive *equality* between A and B given the harm to which the Bs are now vulnerable. This reveals a third problem in the claim that vulnerability triggers an obligation of distributive equality. If vulnerability triggered an obligation of distributive equality, vulnerability to harms of a certain scale would suffice to justify redistributions at a much larger scale, and that does not seem right.

Again, the normative situation between the As and the Bs has changed. Bs' vulnerability requires that the As cease to pour poison into the sinks, and that the As fairly (and perhaps generously) compensate the Bs for whatever damage they caused. These can even be thought of as duties of justice. But it seems to be an excessive response to the harm to which the Bs are now vulnerable to require distributive equality between the As and the Bs.

In sum, we can construct three cases in which considerable vulnerability exists, and in which distributive equality does not appear to be a fitting response. Other demands of justice appear to be more fitting: an obligation not to harm and an obligation to compensate for harms done (and perhaps an obligation to continue supplying a benefit, or a duty to benefit one's benefactor). These demands of justice are likely to affect the distribution of resources, but they are not norms of *distributive* justice, let alone egalitarian norms of distributive justice. It is obligations of this kind, rather than distributive equality, that appear to be triggered by vulnerability.

4. WHY VULNERABILITY IS NOT ENOUGH

Why is it that vulnerability is not enough? The above examples suggest an answer. Kant was right to note that the ability to influence another's interests triggers certain norms of justice. But justice is not a package deal: certain norms of justice can be triggered without triggering others. Nonegalitarian norms of justice seem to suffice in response to vulnerability. In the above examples, adding distributive equality does not promote justice and may even seem unfair.

Where does the reconstructed argument I attributed to Tan go wrong? It takes distributive equality to be applicable where other norms of justice are applicable. But even if two people are bound by duties of justice, distributive equality may not be one of those duties. This is not

because distributive equality is not a part of justice, but because it belongs to a different part of justice.

Suppose that a cosmopolitan argues that some different kind of vulnerability triggers distributive equality. She would then have to specify the relevant kind of vulnerability and show that it exists globally. This may not be easy to do. For example, Miller (1999) holds that vulnerability to exploitation triggers a norm of distributive equality. But this narrower form of vulnerability, while transcending state boundaries, does not seem to be as universal as the more general vulnerability to harm, and indeed Miller does not infer a cosmopolitan conclusion from this type of vulnerability. Similarly, perhaps certain forms of structural state-induced vulnerabilities are sufficient to trigger an obligation of distributive equality, but they will not have the advantages of a weak relational account, as they require state-like structures.

5. PRACTICE DEPENDENCE

My critique of a vulnerability-based, weak-relational defense of cosmopolitanism overlaps with certain practice-dependence critiques of cosmopolitanism (Meckled-Garcia 2008; Ronzoni 2009; Sangiovanni 2007). A commitment we both share is a denial of the view that justice is a package deal. We do not take the existence of certain duties of justice in certain circumstances as indications that other duties of justice are also applicable in these circumstances. It is worthwhile to highlight some differences and points of contact between my argument and these critiques of cosmopolitanism.

According to practice-dependent accounts of justice, duties of justice do not exist independently of practices (Ronzoni 2007; Sangiovanni 2008). My argument does not require this commitment. My view is that (a) vulnerability may trigger *some* duties of justice and that (b) vulnerability is not a practice. A practice is something that has a *point* or *telos*: it expresses certain values and makes available certain goods (Meckled-Garcia 2008: 250). Practices are governed by formal or informal rules (Sangiovanni 2008: 143). Relations of vulnerability, on the other hand, can be entirely bad and pointless. There may be no formal or informal rules governing them. Thus, my argument does not rely on the view that all justice norms are practice dependent. That said, my conclusion is consistent with the view that an obligation of distributive equality is practice dependent.

It should be stressed that my argument does not aim to show that cosmopolitanism is false. Rather, it aims to show that one promising argument for cosmopolitanism fails. In this sense, it is less ambitious than some practice-dependent accounts. For example, I do not argue that a nonrelational account of distributive justice necessarily fails. Rather, I argue that *if* a nonrelational defense of cosmopolitanism fails, vulnerability will not help defend cosmopolitanism.

When arguing against cosmopolitanism, Meckled-Garcia (2008) points to the lack of a specified agent who can administer distributive equality globally and whose perfect duty it is to do so. My argument does not rely on this kind of anti-cosmopolitan claims. The impartial omniscient spectator in my examples can administer intergalactic justice, and it would be her perfect duty to do so. My examples suggest that even if such entity existed, vulnerability would not give her a justice-based reason to equalize resources between the planets.

Ronzoni (2009) offers an intriguing practice-dependent argument for the duty to create new institutions. She argues that certain practice-dependent duties may require that some new institutions be established to help agents obey their practice-dependent duties. These institutions, in turn, may have their distinct practice-dependent duties. Ronzoni argues that this “chain of justification” will result in more robust duties of global justice than statist usually acknowledge, but that cosmopolitan distributive equality is not one of those duties. In the examples above, it is less clear whether Ronzoni’s observations apply, because the duties triggered by vulnerability are not practice-dependent, and because an impartial spectator takes care of intergalactic justice, so there seems to be no need for new institutions. But suppose there was no such spectator, and that some intergalactic institution would have to be established to secure justice between the As and the Bs. What duties would govern this institution? Like Ronzoni, I believe that the answer is not cosmopolitan distributive equality. In my stylized examples, justice demands that inhabitants of one planet stop poisoning the inhabitants of another, and when they do poison, that some fair compensation be exacted from the poisoners. Justice might also require that certain ongoing benefits will be continually supplied, and perhaps that beneficiaries will benefit their benefactors. But it is not through an egalitarian distribution of resources between the planets that inhabitants of one planet will be prevented from harming the inhabitants of another. A fair compensation for harm or a continual supply of a benefit do not always take the form of an egalitarian distribution between victim and victimizer or between beneficiary and benefactor. Broadly following

Ronzoni, we should not expect vulnerability to trigger a duty to create institutions that will, in turn, have a duty to administer distributive equality.

6. CONCLUSION

If vulnerability sufficed to trigger distributive equality, the argument for cosmopolitanism would be a slam dunk. But vulnerability can't do the trick. In arguing for this conclusion, I have conceded that vulnerability is sufficient to trigger certain obligations of justice and that distributive equality is an obligation of justice (at least for certain groups of people). But justice is not a package deal. Different principles of justice should be expected to require different conditions for their applicability. At least in the context of distributive equality, vulnerability is not enough.

The failure of this weak relational defense of cosmopolitanism is instructive. It is not easy to think of a weak relational defense that does not appeal to vulnerability. If vulnerability is insufficient to trigger an obligation of distributive equality, then the prospects of a weak relational defense of cosmopolitanism are not encouraging. Debates about cosmopolitanism will probably have to remain in the familiar battlefields of nonrelational and strong-relational accounts.¹²

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