Cosmopolitanism as a Demand of Justice

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1. Introduction

The current debate on global equality is polarized between cosmopolitanism and anti-cosmopolitanism. Both camps are fundamentally liberal, in that they are concerned with equal respect and egalitarian principles of justice as a demand of equal respect. Anti-cosmopolitans (or statists) argue for equality on the domestic level and sufficiency on the global level. The relevant relations between citizens of a country or state which prompt the need for equality domestically, they say, do not exist at the global scale. Our duties to outsiders only go as far as to making sure that they have a set of fundamental rights that suffice for them to be able to live decent lives. Cosmopolitans, on the contrary, believe that global sufficiency is not enough. Instead, they argue, principles of domestic justice ought to be applied globally to ensure equality among all persons across the world.

The basis of any cosmopolitan view is a commitment to every person’s being a fundamental object of moral concern. Thomas Pogge, a highly influential cosmopolitan, states three elements central to any cosmopolitan view:

First, individualism: the ultimate units of concern are human beings, or persons . . . Second, universality: the status of ultimate unit of concern attaches to every living human being equally . . . Third, generality: this special status has global force. Persons are ultimate units of concern for everyone . . . (Brock, 3)

From this baseline position stems the idea that liberal egalitarian principles of justice, normally applied at the domestic level, should also apply globally. The scope of citizenship for cosmopolitans, one could say, is not within the state. Instead, cosmopolitans believe that we are all citizens of the world, and that egalitarian distributive schemes therefore should apply to all persons globally. As such, cosmopolitan views may differ in the types of principles of justice they endorse, just as domestic liberal theories may differ in the same regard. Thus, some may argue for a Rawlsian approach, others for a luck-egalitarian view, and so forth.

Furthermore, cosmopolitan theories may offer different views on why egalitarian principles of justice should apply at the global level. Relational cosmopolitans argue that duties of justice exist between persons due to them standing in a certain relation to each other, and that such relations exist on the global level (the global economy, for instance, is often argued to be one such relation.) Non-relational cosmopolitans
believe that global equality is a direct implication of regarding every person as a fundamental unit of moral concern, regardless of the existence of any type of relation.

In this paper I will discuss an argument against cosmopolitanism that Laura Valentini gives in “Cosmopolitan Justice and Rightful Enforceability.” (Brock, 92-107) For that purpose, I will focus on her understanding of cosmopolitanism as “the view that the egalitarian principles of justice which liberals believe apply at the domestic level should also apply to the world at large.” (Valentini, 95-96) This understanding of cosmopolitanism is narrower than the general commitment to persons’ being fundamental units of moral concern—yet still broad enough to encompass most versions of cosmopolitanism, including relational, non-relational, Rawlsian principles of strict equality and maximin, luck-egalitarianism, etc. Valentini aims her argument at cosmopolitanism understood in this broad sense, and I will discuss it from the same position. I will try to show that her conclusion is implausible and that cosmopolitan principles of global equality ought, in fact, to be regarded as principles of justice. Furthermore, I will argue that an emphasis on autonomy increases the validity of cosmopolitanism, and gives cosmopolitanism an advantage over anti-cosmopolitanism.

In section 2 I will present Valentini’s argument from the rightful enforceability of justice. First, I will give Valentini’s intuitive defense of justice’s special nature as a moral value alongside her argument presented as a trilemma. Then, in section 2.1 I will discuss the first prong of her two-pronged argument, the Intuitive Argument, and two cosmopolitan responses. In addition to presenting the cosmopolitan response that global equality and oligarchical global government may be principally compatible, in section 2.2 I will argue that global oligarchical government may bring us closer to the ideal of global equality than we are at present. I argue that these two ideas in combination lessen the force of the Intuitive Argument. In section 2.3 I present Valentini’s Systematic Argument and what she considers the upshot of her view. In section 3 I argue that a similar argument can be made to question the enforceability of domestic equality. To me, this seems to be a crucial implication that Valentini would not accept. In section 4 I propose a solution to both Valentini’s argument and its implication for domestic equality based on a view on justice as being potentially rightfully enforceable. This solution, I suggest, renders Valentini’s argument
implausible, and leads to the conclusion that cosmopolitan principles of global equality must be taken seriously as demands of justice. In section 5, I explore what liberals’ core commitment to autonomy entails for discussions about global equality.

2. Valentini’s argument

Laura Valentini makes an argument against cosmopolitanism based on the special nature of justice. Justice, she argues, differs from other moral values such as friendship or charity in that justice is *rightfully enforceable*. She then attempts to show that global equality is *not* rightfully enforceable, and hence not a demand of justice, thus concluding that cosmopolitanism is a faulty view. The upshot of her discussion is that a good liberal theory needs to comprise two components: one outcome component and one procedural component. In what follows I will dissect Valentini’s argument and discuss its plausibility.

As intuitive evidence for the special nature of justice, Valentini gives an example including three scenarios where moral values are at play. (94-95) They go, roughly, like this:

Scenario A: Bob meets John outside a gas station. John, having recently been left by his girlfriend, has recklessly gambled all his possessions away. John tells Bob about his situation, and out of compassion Bob decides to give John 500 dollars to get back on track.

Here Bob’s act is one of charity. Certainly, neither the state nor John has any right to force Bob to give away 500 dollars. Bob may decide to give or not to give John money on his own volition. Charity, as a moral concern, is not rightfully enforceable.

Scenario B: Janice is about to go out partying with some friends when Mary calls her in tears. Mary’s boyfriend has left her, and she is in shambles. Mary has been a loyal friend to Janice for many years. Under these circumstances, Janice no longer feels it is appropriate to go out partying and decides to comfort Mary instead.

In this case Janice acts out of a duty of friendship. We may even say that Mary has a *right* to be comforted by Janice, and not the store clerk across the street. It is, however, a *non-enforceable* right. It would be absurd to say that Mary, or the state, may legitimately force Janice to disregard the party and comfort Mary. “Right” here is to be understood in a looser sense, along the lines of “ought to due to the nature of friendship”; Janice *ought to comfort* Mary, but she cannot be *made to* do so.

Scenario C: Alfred has purchased a valuable clock from an antique shop. But the shop manager, Bill, pretends to have no recollection of the transaction. Alfred insists that he is
rightfully entitled to the clock, and that Bill is contractually obligated to fulfill the transaction. Alfred may threaten to go to the police if Bill does not comply with Alfred’s demand.

The moral concern in Scenario C is one of justice. More specifically, it is concerned with material rights. Alfred has a right to the clock and may legitimately ask the state to enforce this right. Justice demands that Bill give the clock to Alfred out of respect for property rights. The special nature of justice, intuitively illustrated by the differences in these three scenarios, is crucial to Valentini’s argument. She presents her argument in the form of a trilemma:

(a) The demands of justice are rightfully enforceable.

(b) Justice demands global equality.

(c) Global equality (qua global equality) is not rightfully enforceable. (Valentini, 93)

Claim (a) gains intuitive support from the example above. There seems indeed to be a difference between what is of moral concern in Scenario C and the moral concerns of A and B. We would not say of Bob, if he did not give any money to John, that his action was unjust. Neither would we think that Janice, should she disregard Mary and proceed to the party, disregards what justice demands of her. We do, however, think that justice demands that Bill give the clock to Alfred, and that Bill can be rightfully forced to do so.

Claim (b) is a statement of the cosmopolitan position: a commitment to global equality stemming from the belief that all persons are morally equal. According to cosmopolitans (b) is true, according to non-cosmopolitans (b) is not true.

Claim (c), that global equality is not rightfully enforceable, is the focus of Valentini’s argument. If, as she argues, (c) is true, it is bad news for cosmopolitanism. On her view, (c) being true implies that global equality is not a demand of justice, which subsequently means that the principles cosmopolitans put forth are not principles of justice. Conversely, (c) being true may also imply that (a) is false; that the demands of justice are not rightfully enforceable in the way Valentini thinks. I will return to this view in section 4, where I discuss the idea of potential rightful enforceability.

Let us now turn to why global equality is not rightfully enforceable on Valentini’s view. Her argument for this is two-pronged. First, there is what she calls the “Intuitive Argument” against cosmopolitanism, which draws on our intuitive response to the fact that cosmopolitanism may, in theory, endorse a global oligarchy if such an institution would be
best suited to realize global equality. Intuitively, she argues, we are inclined to believe that such an institution would fail in realizing global equality. Second, she offers a “Systematic Argument” against cosmopolitanism. This argument draws on the fact that there seems to be reasonable disagreement among those who are genuinely committed to global equality as to how global equality should be realized. (Valentini, 97-98) Let us examine these two arguments in turn.

2.1 The Intuitive Argument

One “deeply unpalatable” implication of cosmopolitanism is that, if it would be possible to realize global equality only by instituting a “global dictatorship of the enlightened” (or global oligarchy), (or if instituting a global oligarchy was the best option), cosmopolitan justice would require the establishment of such an institution. Intuitively, however, such an institution seems ill fitted to realize global equality. An oligarchy may, for instance, be easily corrupted. But even if it were not corrupted, such a world would still not be fully just. There would still be a few (the oligarchy) who decide which distributive pattern to be followed by all. (Valentini, 97)

Valentini discusses two cosmopolitan responses to this objection. The first response is to say that a global oligarchy is indeed morally problematic, but not from the perspective of justice. To be enforceable, principles of justice must be validated through fair decision procedures. Justice may require instituting a global oligarchy, but due to the oligarchy not being validated through a fair procedure, it is not rightfully enforceable. (Valentini, 97) As I understand this response, principles of justice may require something (the institution of global government, for instance), but for it to be rightfully enforceable it must be validated through fair decision-making procedures. As an example: if a demand to institute a global government was not validated through fair decision-making procedures, it would not be rightfully enforceable. Since a global oligarchy would likely not be validated through such a procedure, it would not be rightfully enforceable. Valentini argues that this response is not convincing from the perspective that justice is rightfully enforceable. On her view, principles of justice proper are distinguished by the fact that they are rightfully enforceable: “to say that a certain principle X is not rightfully enforceable is to say that it is not a principle of justice.” (Valentini, 97) As such, if cosmopolitan justice demands a global oligarchy, cosmopolitans must also hold that a global oligarchy is rightfully enforceable. But then the Intuitive Argument still stands; we still feel that a global oligarchy is at odds with the commitment to equal respect central to cosmopolitanism.
The second line of response available to the cosmopolitan is to try and explain away our intuition. They may agree that a global oligarchy seems intuitively at odds with global equality but suggest that our intuition is related to a reluctance to accept the empirical possibility of a just global oligarchy; that we know that de facto instantiating a global oligarchy most likely would not result in cosmopolitan global equality. However, they might say that, in principle, global equality may be realized in a world governed by a small elite. (Valentini, 98)

This response can be presented as the following argument:

(i) Justice (enforceable morality) demands equal respect;
(ii) Equal respect demands global equality;
(iii) Whatever maximizes our chances of achieving what justice requires is itself just.
(iv) Conclusion: If leaving a global elite in charge maximizes our chance of achieving global equality, then global elite government is just.

For my purposes in this paper, I will follow Valentini in not discussing the obvious concerns regarding premise (iii). Instead, in section 2.3 I will discuss Valentini’s Systematic Argument, which aims to defeat the above argument by targeting premise (ii). But before that I will briefly explore the idea that a global oligarchy may not be worse in terms of global equality than the global situation at present.

2.2 How “Unpalatable” is a Global Oligarchy?

In the current state of the world there is a large disparity between persons born in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. in Mozambique) and those born in Europe (e.g. Switzerland) in how well they will be able to live autonomous lives. Persons born in Switzerland have many more options on how to live their lives available to them, and more ways to realize those options, than persons born in Mozambique. (Of course, this comparison is of two countries on completely opposite ends of the autonomy spectrum; there exists quite a large disparity between persons born in the same country as well.) Now imagine the instituting of a global oligarchy tasked with achieving global equality. Let us suppose that, at first, the oligarchy works, and succeeds, in instituting a global distributive pattern. Which specific egalitarian distributive pattern does not matter but let us suppose that the oligarchy realizes a global luck-egalitarian distributive pattern in which inequalities that are due to brute luck, (i.e. not due to conscious choice or action), are to be neutralized. Let us suppose also the global oligarchy can enforce this distributive pattern on the world. The result, it seems, would be a more globally
equal world than the current. For instance, by realizing a luck-egalitarian distributive pattern, factors such as country of birth may be compensated for. Obviously, one does not choose where or under which circumstances to be born, so that under this system those born in countries which are worse off may have a rightful claim to compensation for their brute luck.

Now, this world ruled by a global oligarchy is clearly not perfectly equal. There is still the fact that very few govern over very many, and the likely chance that the oligarchy may be corrupted. Valentini states that “perhaps the distributively egalitarian world envisaged . . . is not fully unjust, but it is not fully just either.” (97) After all, it is obvious that oligarchical rule and equality do not sit well with each other. But is it wholly implausible that instituting such rule may lead to an improvement in global equality? If the oligarchy does indeed succeed in realizing a global distributive pattern it seems to lead to a more equal world than the current. All we must do to appreciate this is imagine a world where everyone is equal, (everyone is subject to the same distributive pattern) except a select few (the ruling elite). That does seem better than our current world where a great many persons enjoy less autonomy than others.

The possibility that oligarchical global government may be an improvement in global equality to the situation at present suggests that the Intuitive Argument is weaker than one might think. On reflection, it seems that a global oligarchy may not only be just in principle, but also that empirically, it may realize a world that is closer to the ideal of global equality than we are now. Global oligarchical rule may not be compatible with the “ideal of equal respect at the heart of the liberal understanding of justice” (Valentini, 97), but it may be better than the current situation. The seemingly “unpalatable” implication of cosmopolitanism may not taste as bad as Valentini suggests.

2.3 The Systematic Argument

Valentini’s Systematic Argument is aimed at the cosmopolitan claim that equal respect demands global equality. Her argument hinges on the fact that there is “reasonable disagreement” among those who are “genuinely committed to equal respect” as to what the claim “implies for our enforceable rights.” (Valentini, 98-99)

For such disagreement to be reasonable, Valentini says, it must be “limited in certain ways.” (99) For instance, holding the view that women, or members of a particular religious group, should not be allowed the same opportunities for education, for instance, that others have is unreasonable in discussions of equal respect. For two parties to have reasonable disagreement, their respective views must be reasonable themselves. For present purposes, the
views on which there is reasonable disagreement are theories of what equal respect entails for our enforceable rights. As such, the points on which those who take equal respect seriously disagree are: (i) “where exactly the boundaries of fundamental rights have to be drawn and (ii) what else equal respect demands” (Valentini, 99) In other words, “they (partly) disagree about the conditions under which a social system qualifies as just or unjust” (Valentini, 99).

Whereas there is disagreement on the specifics of what equal respect demands, there is agreement that a set of fundamental rights is a necessary condition for a social system to count as just. As to what else equal respect demands there are a multitude of reasonable views: that equal respect demands respecting persons’ free choices, thus entitlements should be left to be decided by the outcome of market transactions; that resources ought to be given to those who need it most to uphold or improve their autonomy; or that resources should be distributed in accordance with strict equality, luck-egalitarianism, or Rawlsian maximin, etc. (Valentini, 99) Because these are all reasonable views, instituting one view globally would go against equal respect itself. Valentini suggests that under these circumstances, which exist in the present world, what equal respect demands must be determined by what all these views have in common: a commitment to a set of fundamental rights.

This leads Valentini to conclude that a “good liberal theory of global justice” must include two components:

A. An outcome component which “establishes a set of fundamental rights giving each individual the opportunity to lead a decent life pursuing her ends and goals”

B. A procedural component which “establishes a set of fair procedures adjudicating between different understandings of what justice, beyond fundamental rights, demands.” (103)

On Valentini’s view, the outcome component is like anti-cosmopolitan principles in that it is “structurally sufficientarian.” (Valentini, 103) The set of fundamental rights is meant to give every person an opportunity to live a ‘decent’ or ‘good enough’ life. It does not, however, entail that each person ought to be equal in “life prospects or resource endowments.”

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1 The step from the conclusion that global equality is not a demand of justice to asserting the two necessary components of a good liberal theory of global justice is explained thoroughly in Valentini’s text. She arrives at the dual-component conclusion by comparing her view to Rawls’ heavily anti-cosmopolitan view in The Law of Peoples to show that the claim that global equality is not a demand of justice does not necessarily lead straight in to anti-cosmopolitanism (Valentini, 101-102). I feel it is unnecessary to include that step here.
Instead, a theory of global justice should aim for sufficiency in outcomes, contrary to the cosmopolitan aim of strict equality.

The procedural component, Valentini says, “moves away from some of the most prominent versions of anti-cosmopolitanism”, (i.e. Rawls’ view), “in that it requires egalitarian forms of political organization.” (103) It requires each country to be “broadly democratic” (Valentini, 103) because only then can they be said to honor a certain set of fundamental rights. It also requires “the establishment of egalitarian procedures at the global level, capable of adjudicating between different accounts of what justice—beyond respect for a set of fundamental outcome and procedural rights—requires.” (Valentini, 104) Importantly, the outcome of such procedures will be rightfully enforceable, but not because of its plausibility as an account of justice, but rather because it is the outcome of a certain procedure.

So much for Valentini’s view. Before I turn to discussing the Systematic Argument, it may be useful here to remind the reader of the two sides’ arguments.

(A) The cosmopolitan argument for extending egalitarian principles of justice globally:
   (1) Justice demands equal respect
   (2) Equal respect demands global equality
   (3) C: justice demands global equality

(B) The argument from the rightful enforceability of justice which says that global equality is not a demand of justice:
   (4) Justice is rightfully enforceable
   (5) Global equality is not rightfully enforceable
   (6) C: global equality is not a demand of justice

3. **Is domestic equality a demand of justice?**

An interesting point to make is that we seem to be able to make the same argument from the enforceability of justice to critique domestic equality. It would look like this:

(C) The argument from the rightful enforceability of justice which says that domestic equality is not a demand of justice:
   (7) Justice is rightfully enforceable
   (8) Domestic equality is not rightfully enforceable
   (9) C: domestic equality is not a demand of justice
It looks to me that the same reasoning that is behind premise (5) in the previous argument, can be applied in defense of premise (8) in this argument. As Valentini argues throughout, global equality is not rightfully enforceable due to the existence of reasonable disagreement as to what global equality entails for our enforceable rights. But cannot the same be said for domestic equality? Surely, there exists reasonable disagreement as to what domestic equality entails for our enforceable rights. We need only to recall Valentini’s interpretation of cosmopolitanism as “the view that the egalitarian principles of justice which liberals believe apply at the domestic level should apply to the world at large” (95-96) to realize that there are likely as many contested views on domestic equality as there are on global equality. Again, some may argue for luck-egalitarianism, others for a Rawlsian view, etc.

The implication of this is that Valentini’s argument seems to target egalitarian principles of justice broadly, and not only cosmopolitan principles of global equality. It is also an implication that Valentini would not accept. One way to avoid the implication is to abandon her own argument and acknowledge that global and domestic equality both are demands of justice. Of course, she would not want to do that. But, as far as I can see, there are no relevant differences between Valentini’s argument (B) and my argument (C). That both domestic and global equality are challenged by the enforceability of justice in this way probably has far-reaching implications. In what follows, however, I want to explore another way in which the cosmopolitan may respond to Valentini’s argument, and what it entails.

4. Potential Rightful Enforceability

Cosmopolitans may argue that Valentini’s account of the special nature of justice as being rightfully enforceable is incorrect; that justice is not rightfully enforceable in the way she claims. Richard W. Miller suggests as much. He states that “actual rightful enforceability is not a criterion of justice.” (Miller, 288, my italics) Instead, he suggests that “potential rightful enforceability is a plausible criterion” of justice. (Miller, 288, my italics) A principle of justice is potentially rightfully enforceable, I believe, for the same reasons that we may reasonably disagree about it: there are other reasonable principles promoted by others who genuinely care about equality. Any principle which is reasonable in this sense is also potentially rightfully enforceable. Hence, global luck-egalitarianism (or any other reasonable candidate view), is potentially rightfully enforceable, but not actually rightfully enforceable.

In response to Valentini’s argument, Miller says this: “If seekers of justice lose politically in a decision-making procedure that they regard as fair, they can quite coherently regard the
outcome as unjust, yet think it would be wrong to enforce their accurate assessment of demands of economic justice.” (288) According to this, instantiating a certain distributive pattern globally, including on those who can be said to reasonably disagree, is not unjust if the decision-making procedure that led to said instantiation is itself just. In other words, if there was a global democratic government in which we were to vote on how global equality ought to be realized, and everyone agreed that voting is a just decision-procedure, the result of the procedure would be just, regardless if there were those who reasonably disagreed on the validity of the winning principle. Those who disagree about the resulting global social system may well regard the outcome as unjust, but that does not mean that instituting a certain system is itself a violation of equal respect. This is because there is uniform agreement that the decision-procedure is just.

An understanding of principles of justice as being potentially rightfully enforceable renders Valentini’s argument implausible. On her account, global equality is not a demand of justice because no version of a global social system is uniformly accepted as the ‘best’ version. Hence, imposing any one system on disagreeing others is a violation of equal respect itself. But this does not hold if we discard the view that duties of justice are rightfully enforceable, or else they are not proper duties of justice. So, the cosmopolitan response to Valentini’s argument (B) may look like this:

(D) The cosmopolitan response from the potential rightful enforceability of justice:
(10) If justice is potentially rightfully enforceable, then global equality is a demand of justice
(11) Justice is potentially rightfully enforceable
(12) C: global equality is a demand of justice

I am here assuming that cosmopolitanism is a reasonable view after defeating Valentini’s argument against it. We may change the phrasing in premise (10) to “if justice is potentially rightfully enforceable, then any reasonable view on global equality is a demand of justice”. Why? Because any reasonable view has the potential to be enforced. Cosmopolitanism and sufficientarian anti-cosmopolitanism are both reasonable views and are therefore to be considered as demands of justice, but only if justice is potentially rightfully enforceable as opposed to strictly rightfully enforceable. On Valentini’s account of (strict) rightful enforceability, neither view can be considered a demand of justice, as her argument (B) and my argument (C) entail. (Argument (C) targets domestic equality; however, I am sure that one could rephrase it to target global sufficiency—there is after all reasonable disagreement
revolving that view as well.) For (D) to be convincing, then, we must prove that (11) “justice is potentially rightfully enforceable” is more plausible than (4) “justice is rightfully enforceable” in Valentini’s argument (B). In what follows I will try to do just that.

On reflection, it does seem more plausible that demands of justice are potentially rightfully enforceable than that they are strictly rightfully enforceable. Recall the fact that we seemed to be able to modify Valentini’s argument to say that principles of domestic equality are not demands of justice either (argument (C)). If global equality is not a demand of justice, as Valentini argues, then it seems that domestic equality is not a demand of justice either. The account of potential rightful enforceability, however, seems to solve both issues of disagreement, on the global and on the domestic level. One reason why Valentini may have overlooked the implication of her argument on the domestic level is that, domestically, issues of reasonable disagreement are solved precisely in the way Miller suggests; by fair-decision making procedures. Domestically, those who lose a political argument may think of the outcome as unjust, but they have no right to enforce their conflicting view because of this if the outcome is brought about by a fair decision-making procedure. After all, this is an everyday occurrence in political decision-making procedures in democratic countries.

Now, one may argue that there is a similarity between the upshot of Valentini’s discussion, that any good liberal theory of global justice requires an outcome component and a procedural component, and the view on demands of justice as potentially rightfully enforceable. In fact, Valentini argues for a procedural component to adjudicate between conflicting reasonable views on what global equality entails for our distributive rights. The outcome of such procedures she suggests is rightfully enforceable. Similarly, on Miller’s view, the outcome of a fair decision-making procedure is rightfully enforceable. What, then, are the relevant differences between the two views?

To begin with, we must remember that Valentini arrives at the dual-component view after concluding that global equality is not a demand of justice. Hence, on her view, cosmopolitanism does not state principles of justice, and therefore is not a plausible view. Should cosmopolitan global equality be the outcome of the adjudicating procedure, it would be enforceable. Before the procedural stage, however, cosmopolitan principles of global equality are not demands of justice. But if we instead adopt potential rightful enforceability as a criterion of justice we see that cosmopolitanism is a demand of justice. Contrary to Valentini’s view, on this view we acknowledge cosmopolitanism (and any other reasonable view) as a demand of justice before the procedural stage. Then, when one view is agreed upon
in the procedure, it’s potential enforceability becomes actual enforceability. The crucial difference from Valentini’s view, however, is that before the procedure, cosmopolitanism does state proper demands of justice (that are potentially rightfully enforceable), and therefore needs to be taken seriously as a view on global equality. Thus, adhering to potential rightful enforceability as the more plausible criterion of justice is a successful strategy for cosmopolitans to respond to Valentini’s Systematic Argument.

The idea of potential rightful enforceability also lessens the force of the Intuitive Argument by indirectly supporting the second cosmopolitan response to that argument. The Systematic Argument is supposed to show that the cosmopolitan response is not plausible. However, by showing that the Systematic Argument is faulty, the cosmopolitan response gains plausibility because we have eliminated one possible objection.

5. On Autonomy

Finally, I want to discuss the role of autonomy in considerations of global equality. Valentini emphasizes that the special nature of justice as being rightfully enforceable stems from “liberalism’s commitment to persons’ autonomy.” (Valentini, 95) She continues:

. . . liberals endorse the principle of equal respect for persons qua rational and autonomous agents. From a liberal point of view, a social system can be said to honor equal respect, if and only if each member possesses a space of choice within which to pursue her ends and goals without being interfered with by others. That is, the social order must be so designed as to allow each to enjoy the necessary social conditions to lead autonomous lives. Principles of justice are meant to set out what these conditions are. If an agent fails to act on those principles, i.e. if they fail to respect others’ space of choice, it is rightful to curtail their autonomy by forcing them to comply with what justice demands. The limits on autonomy imposed by enforcement are justified as a means of defending autonomy itself. (Valentini, 95)

In the current state of the world, every person does clearly not enjoy the same amount of autonomy. All persons do not have access to the same amount of valuable life choices. It is important here that we distinguish between “valuable choices” and mere “choices.” Simply giving a person more choices does not necessarily amount to more autonomy. For a choice to increase autonomy, it must be a valuable choice. For instance, removing penalties from committing certain immoral actions seem to give persons more choice, but having the option
to, say, murder without penalty does not increase one’s autonomy. More likely is that such a situation amounts to a decrease in autonomy for all members of that society.²

So, every person in the world does not have the same amount of valuable choices available to them. Now recall the crucial link between autonomy and justice; that “the limits on autonomy imposed by enforcement are justified as a means of defending autonomy itself.” There are two ways to interpret this in relation to global equality.

The first is that the limits on autonomy that a large part of the world’s population endure are not enforced; that the limits on autonomy, in other words, are not imposed by some authoritative institution or social system. It may seem reasonable that they are not, simply because there is no world-encompassing ruling institution or polity, a kind of “world-government”, that would be able to enforce such autonomy curtailment. An implication of this is that the limits on autonomy that de facto exist, but are not imposed by enforcement, are unjust, but for the wrong reasons; namely, that they are unjust because they are not enforced. More plausible is that there may exist injustice that is not due to direct enforcement, but instead due to circumstances or brute luck. This leads us to the second interpretation.

The second interpretation is that the limits on autonomy are enforced. The question then becomes how this enforcement is manifested, in the absence of a “world-government.”

On one view, the scope of egalitarian justice is relational. A relational view argues that we have duties of justice only to “co-members” of an association, e.g. to members of our political or economic association. Most commonly, such a view is used to defend a position that we have duties of justice towards our fellow citizens of the same state, but no duties of justice to those outside the state. However, a cosmopolitan may use the relational perspective to argue that all persons are part of a global association, predominantly a global economic association. On such a view we have duties of justice globally, to all those associated with the global economic order. (Brock, 5)

From the perspective of a global relational view we may be able to say that the autonomy curtailment of a large part of the global population is, in a sense, enforced. The immense

² Murder may of course be subjectively valuable to some persons and having the choice to murder would therefore increase their autonomy. This is not the place to discuss subjective and objective value. However, I understand valuable choices here as being objectively valuable in a loose sense: if most persons think that education is valuable to them (subjectively valuable) then it is objectively valuable in this loose sense. Education may not be strictly objectively valuable, but it would likely be regarded as a valuable option by a majority of members of a society. Objectively, in this loose sense, murder is not a valuable option because it is not valuable to most persons.
bargaining power of the economies of the best-off countries dictates how the global market is shaped. It is also likely that those countries work to manipulate the global market in their favor at the expense of those countries with less bargaining power. As such, autonomy curtailment that is due to being born in a country which is disadvantaged in the global economic arena seems indirectly enforced. It is indirectly so because there is no clear path between the enforcing entity on the one end and those on the other end who have their autonomy forcibly limited; in between there is the vast and complex system that is the global economy. One may, of course, try to make an argument for how the global economic market is justly structured, giving equal opportunity to all participants. Although such may be the ambitions of the free market, the reality is, arguably, significantly different; where those with more bargaining power use it to benefit themselves.

On this view, the limited autonomy of a large portion of the world’s population is enforced (albeit indirectly). But is it just because it is enforced? The answer, I think, is no. The limits on autonomy indirectly enforced cannot be defended as protecting autonomy itself. One would be hard pressed to try and defend the current disparity in autonomy as a means for those who have more autonomy to keep their autonomy, as if it is a necessity that some have less autonomy so that others can enjoy more autonomy. If anti-cosmopolitans cannot justify the enforced autonomy curtailment by appealing to its role as defending autonomy itself, they need to find some other defense. Lacking such a defense, it seems that the autonomy curtailment that exists in our current world is unjust, and ought to be remedied. And such remedy is precisely what cosmopolitans propose.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Valentini’s argument from the rightful enforceability of justice may, at first glance, pose a serious threat to cosmopolitanism broadly construed. If her conclusion that global equality is not a demand of justice was true, it would affect not just one cosmopolitan position, but many different versions of cosmopolitanism, including relational and non-relational cosmopolitanism, and separate versions offering different accounts of just distribution (luck-egalitarian, autonomy-based equality, strict equality, etc.)

I have argued that her conclusion that global equality is not a demand of justice is not plausible if we accept the view that potential rightful enforceability is the correct criterion of justice. If the case for potential rightful enforceability is convincing, cosmopolitan global equality is a demand of justice and ought to be taken seriously as such. I have argued also that
liberals’ commitment to autonomy, and autonomy’s intricate relation to justice especially, gives cosmopolitanism a strong case for being favored over anti-cosmopolitanism. An emphasis on autonomy, and the current (unjust) autonomy curtailment of a great many people in the present world, ought to edge cosmopolitanism forward ahead of its rival.
Works Cited


