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HAVING TOO MUCH

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I. Introduction

Whatever else contemporary theories of distributive justice take a stance on, they always specify a metric of justice and a distributive rule.[1] The metric is concerned with the good *X* whose distribution matters insofar as justice is concerned. Among the most influential metrics are welfare, resources, primary goods, and capabilities. The distributive rule specifies how *X* should be distributed; prime examples are the principles of priority, sufficiency, equality of outcomes, equality of opportunity, and Rawls's difference principle.

This chapter articulates and defends a view of distributive justice that I call *limitarianism*. In a nutshell, limitarianism advocates that it is not morally permissible to have more resources than are needed to fully flourish in life. Limitarianism views having riches or wealth to be the state in which one has more resources than are needed and claims that, in such a case, one has too much, morally speaking.[2]

Limitarianism is only a partial account of distributive justice, since it can be specified in a way in which it is agnostic regarding what distributive justice requires for those who are not maximally flourishing. It could, for example, be combined with one of the many versions of equality of opportunity below the limitarian threshold. The version of limitarianism that I defend here is not agnostic as to what happens below the line of riches; but, as I will point out in section II, there are several different versions of limitarianism, and different versions may have different views on what morality requires below the line of riches.

In this chapter I defend limitarianism as a non-ideal doctrine. I postpone the question of whether limitarianism could be defended as an ideal theory for future work. Analyzing limitarianism as a non-ideal doctrine requires that we start from the distribution of the possession of income and wealth as it is, rather than asking what a just distribution would be in a world with strong idealized properties, such as for example the absence of inherited wealth and privileges, a world in which everyone's basic needs are met or where we are in a state of initial property acquisition.[3]

Social scientists and scholars in the humanities have a long tradition of theorizing and conducting research on the position of the worst-off in society. In theories of justice, this is especially visible in the wide support for sufficientarianism.[4] In its dominant understanding, sufficientarianism is the view that distributive justice should be concerned with ensuring that no one falls below a certain minimal threshold, which can be either a poverty threshold or a threshold for living a minimally decent life.[5] It shouldn't be surprising that the study of poverty and disadvantage is so vast, since most people hold the view that these conditions are intrinsically bad.

Given the sizeable philosophical literature on poverty and the position of the worst-off, it *is* surprising that so little (if any) contemporary theorizing on justice has focused on the upper tail of income and wealth distribution. Obviously, there is a great deal of literature about theories of justice in relation to inequality in general; it may well be that political philosophers assume that it is not necessary to single out the upper tail of the distribution in particular. Still, I think it would be helpful for political philosophers to conduct a normative analysis of the upper tail of the distribution. For one thing, this would make it possible for philosophers to have greater impact on existing debates in society. For a long time normative claims related to the rights, privileges, and duties of rich people have been advanced in public debate. Most countries have some political party that claims that the rich should pay for economic crises, rather than the poor or the middle classes. In recent years several European political parties have proposed introducing an increase in the highest marginal tax rate of the highest income group; similarly, the Occupy movement in the United States has claimed that the "one percent" should be taxed much more heavily. Some citizens have also complained that austerity measures affect the poor and the middle classes disproportionally, rather than affecting the rich in equal measure. What all these normative claims have in common is a focus on the upper tail of the distribution—thereby making a distinction between the middle class and the rich.[6]

Interestingly, in recent years several economists have developed analyses of the top of the income and wealth distributions. Most famous was Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, along with his earlier collaborative research with other economists, which generated part of the data forming the empirical basis of the later book.[7] These studies show that in the decades following the Second World War inequality decreased, yet wealth inequality has again been expanding since the 1980s. Piketty offers a theory for why the postwar period should be regarded as an historical exception, rather than the beginning of a period in which inequality would decrease or stagnate. Piketty argues that this increase in inequality is undesirable, but certainly not all economists share this view. The Harvard economist Greg Mankiw has defended the moral desirability of letting the rich be rich, on the grounds that they deserve their wealth.[8] However, as Mankiw himself admits, he is merely engaging in "amateur political philosophy."[9] In fact, few normative claims made by economists about inequality and the rise of top earners are well defended. But this should not necessarily be seen as a criticism, since in the intellectual division of labor, this task falls on other shoulders.

In this chapter I want to articulate one particular version of limitarianism and offer a justification. But before doing so, I first want to highlight that there are a variety of limitarian views, and a variety of grounds on which they can be defended. In this sense it is no different from the other distributive doctrines, such as sufficientarianism, prioritarianism, or egalitarianism. In the next section, I spell out a variety of potential strategies for defending the limitarian view. Some offer reasons why being rich is *intrinsically* bad. In contrast, the reasons that I offer regard limitarianism as derivatively justified. Limitarianism as a distributive view is justified in the world as it is (the non-ideal world), because it is instrumentally necessary for the protection of two intrinsic values: political equality (section III), and the meeting of unmet urgent needs (section IV). After offering these two arguments for limitarianism, I address the question of which notion of wealth or riches the two arguments require (section V), and discuss whether limitarianism should be considered a moral or a political doctrine (section VI). I will also respond to two objections: the objection from unequal opportunities and the incentive objection (section VII). The final section sketches an agenda for future research on limitarianism.

II. Intrinsic versus Non-Intrinsic Limitarianism

In its most general formulation, limitarianism is a claim relating to distributive morality, which entails that it is not morally permissible to be situated above a certain threshold in the distribution of a desirable good. Limitarianism could be defended in various dimensions or domains, and with different theoretical modifications. For example, the case of a personal emissions quota that has been studied in the climate ethics literature is an example of a limitarian institution, whereby the good that is limited is the right to emit greenhouse gases. Breena Holland has argued for the introduction of "capability ceilings" in environmental regulation, which are "limitations on the choice to pursue certain individual actions that are justifiable when those actions can have or significantly contribute to the effect of undermining another person's minimum threshold of capability provision and protection."[10] For example, if having access to high-quality water and not living in an environment with severely polluted water are capability thresholds, then extracting gas by means of hydro-fracking may not be permitted in case fracking could contaminate the local hydro-ecosystems. Normative arguments for limits could also be provided in other areas of life. For example, one could discuss limitarianism in the context of global population size, and argue that due to environmental concerns, there should be a moral limit of one child per adult.[11]

In this chapter, the focus is on limitarianism of financial resources. Limitarianism is then the view that it is not morally permissible to be rich. Given that our "metric" is a monetary metric, we can reformulate the limitarian claim. Call *surplus money* the difference between a rich individual's financial means and the threshold that distinguishes rich from non-rich people. By definition, only rich people have surplus money. Limitarianism can then be restated as claiming that it is morally bad to have surplus money.

How can limitarianism be justified? That would depend on whether we aim to defend limitarianism as having intrinsic value or instrumental value—a distinction that also applies to egalitarianism.[12] *Intrinsic limitarianism* is the view that being rich is intrinsically bad, whereas according to *non-intrinsic limitarianism*, riches are morally non-permissible for a reason that refers to some other value.

In this chapter I am concerned only with non-intrinsic limitarianism, and remain agnostic on the question of whether intrinsic limitarianism is a plausible view. To examine the plausibility of intrinsic limitarianism, one could develop an argument based on paternalism, whereby wealth is objectively a burden on rich people and their children, leading them to suffer in the nonmaterial dimensions of a flourishing life. There may be some evidence for this, but in this chapter I will not investigate this argumentative strategy any further.[13] Other argumentative strategies for intrinsic limitarianism can be sought in virtue ethics. Several arguments against wealth accumulation, based on virtue ethics and perfectionist theories, can be found in the history of ethics, and have been very important in, for example, the teachings of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.

In this chapter, I merely want to note the possibility of defending intrinsic limitarianism, and will remain agnostic on the plausibility of that view and on the soundness of any of its justifications. Instead, I limit myself to developing two reasons for non-intrinsic limitarianism. The first, which I will discuss in the next section, is the democratic argument for limitarianism, which focuses on the claim that wealth undermines the ideal of political equality. Section IV will then present and analyze another argument for limitarianism: the argument from unmet urgent needs.

The distinction between intrinsic and non-intrinsic limitarianism is important, since the two views offer different answers to the question: "What—if anything—is wrong with some people being rich in an ideal world?" Non-intrinsic limitarianism will most likely respond that in such an ideal situation, where all important intrinsic values are secured, riches are not morally objectionable. Non-intrinsic limitarianism will limit its claim that riches are morally objectionable to a world where certain intrinsically important values are not secured, and where limitarianism is instrumentally valuable to securing those ultimate ends. In contrast, intrinsic limitarianism will answer the question affirmatively. Nevertheless, as I mentioned earlier, in this chapter I am agonistic on whether intrinsic limitarianism is a plausible view. My aims here are instead limited to an analysis and defense of non-intrinsic limitarianism.

III. The Democratic Argument for Limitarianism

The first justification for the limitarian doctrine can be found in political philosophy and political science, where there exists a long history of arguments that great inequalities in income and wealth undermine the value of democracy and the ideal of political equality in particular.[14] Rich people are able to translate their financial power into political power through a variety of mechanisms. In his article "Money in Politics," Thomas Christiano discusses four types of mechanisms by which the expenditure of money can influence various aspects of political systems.[15] Christiano shows how the wealthy are not only more able but also more likely to spend money on these various mechanisms that translate money into political power. This is due to the decreasing marginal utility of money. Poor people need every single dime or penny to spend on food or basic utilities, and hence, for them, spending 100 dollars or 100 pounds on acquiring political influence would come at a serious loss of utility. In contrast, when the upper-middle class and the rich spend the same amount, they see a much lower drop in utility, that is, the utility cost they pay for the same expenditure is much smaller.

The democratic argument for limitarianism can easily be derived from the mechanisms that Christiano outlines: Because rich people have surplus money, they are both very able and seemingly very likely to use that money to acquire political influence and power. On the account of "the rich" that I will develop in section V, the rich have virtually nothing to lose if they spend their excess money, which is the money that goes beyond what one needs to fully flourish in life. The welfare effect—understood in terms of a certain set of valuable functionings—is more or less zero. There may be some psychological welfare loss, such as a loss in status if one spends a fortune on politics rather than on the latest Lamborgini, or there may be a purely subjective loss if one does not like to witness a decline in one's financial fortune, but there will be no loss on the account of well-being presented below. In other words, the arguments Christiano develops for those who have some money to spend will apply *a fortiori* to the rich, as defined in section V.

The four mechanisms that turn money into political power are buying votes, gatekeeping, influencing opinion, and the workings of money as an independent political power.

First, rich people can fund political parties and individuals. In many systems of private campaign financing, those who donate a lot will get special treatment or greater support for their causes. Donations generally come with the expectation that if the funder one day needs some help from the politician he or she will get it. This commonsense wisdom is reflected in the saying "He who pays the piper calls the tune." Receiving money makes people, including politicians, indebted to the donor and likely to try to please them, do them a favor, spread their views, or at the very least, self-censor their own views to avoid upsetting the donor. In the political arena, this undermines political equality. But, as Christiano points out, there are also other democratic values at stake. When money can be used to buy votes, those who funded the elected politician will see their interests protected in the policies that are implemented—but a large part of the costs of those policies will be borne by society as a whole. Vote-buyers are, in a certain sense, free-riding on the spending of society as a whole, which bears a (large) chunk of the costs, for legislation that favors the interests of said private donors.

The second mechanism for turning money into political influence or power is in using money to set the agenda for collective decision making. If, as with the US presidential elections, the ability to raise funds is a crucial determinant in who will be the next candidate, and if upper-middle-class and wealthy people are more likely to be donors, then political candidates who represent those upper-middle and upper-class interests are much more likely to be on the ballot in the first place. Since the affluent are much more likely to contribute to campaign financing, and since donors choose to give money to people who have the same values and beliefs, those who cannot donate will not have their interests and views represented in the election debates or on the ballot.

Christiano argues that if part of the value of democracy is that it publicly treats citizens as equals by giving them an equal say in the process of collective decision making, then financial expenditures on politics cause a great inequality of opportunity when it comes to influencing the political agenda.[16]

A third mechanism is that money can be used to influence opinions. Rich people can buy media outlets, which they can use to control both the spread of information and the arguments that are exchanged in public debate. Media outlets have become a very important power factor in contemporary democracies, yet if access to the media is a commodity that can be bought and sold to the highest bidder, this provides another mechanism for rich people to translate financial power into political power. Lobbyists are another increasingly important instrument for influencing opinions. Again, their services are costly, so the interests of those who can afford to hire lobbyists will be much better represented in the decision making of policy makers and politicians.

While the corporate media and lobbyists are most often discussed when analyzing how money can influence opinions, there are also more subtle ways for rich people to influence views—not necessarily on direct questions of legislation and policy making, but also more diffusely on the construction of what is perceived as sound evidence and knowledge. Rich people can also put financial power into changing the ideological climate and what is perceived as "sound evidence," e.g., via research and think tanks, which provide arguments supporting the views of their funders on various social, economic, and political issues. For example, historical research by Daniel Stedman Jones has shown how private financial support played a crucial role in the spread of neoliberal thinking within universities and subsequently within politics.[17]

Finally, to the extent that rich people have their wealth concentrated in firms, they can undermine democratically chosen aims by using their economic power. This turns the power of capitalists into a feasibility constraint for democratic policy making. For example, if citizens have democratically decided that they want fewer greenhouse-gas emissions in their country, then major firms can threaten to shift polluting production to other countries if the democratically elected government were to impose stricter ecological emission regulation.[18]

These are all mechanisms through which wealth undermines the political equality of citizens. Yet the political equality of citizens is the cornerstone of free societies—and it is the most basic principle of our democratic constitutions. The constitution should guarantee political equality, but it does not protect our right to be rich. Thus, we have an initial argument for why we shouldn't be rich—namely, that it undermines political equality.

One could object to the democratic argument for limitarianism as follows. The moral concern is not so much that there are inequalities within one sphere of life (e.g., economic welfare) but rather that one's position in one sphere of life can be used to acquire a better position in another sphere of life (e.g., politics, education). The real moral concern is therefore not inequality per se, but rather the spillover of inequality from one sphere of life into another sphere of life.[19] Surely there should be solutions to preventing financial power from turning into political power other than simply forcing rich people to get rid of their surplus money. For example, one could try to reform the legislation on campaign funding, or the state could guarantee public radio and television in order to restore the balance of views and arguments in public debate. Dean Machin has argued that we should present the superrich with the choice between incurring a 100% tax on their wealth above the level that makes them superrich, or forfeiting some political rights.[20] The idea is that this would prevent the rich from buying political influence and power. Similarly, one could argue that if we implement proper campaign legislation and anti-corruption legislation, the money invested by the rich could no longer significantly affect politics, and there would be no democratic reason to make surplus money an undesirable thing.

While some of these institutional measures are surely necessary for a healthy democracy, none of the solutions will restore political equality between rich and non-rich citizens. The reason for this is that much of the political influence of rich people escapes the workings of formal institutions, such as legislation and regulation. Rich people could give up their right to vote, but if they are still able to set up and fund think tanks that produce ideologically driven research, or if they still have direct private access to government officials, then they will still have disproportionate levels of political power. Given the overall class stratification in society, rich people tend to know other rich people from the schools and colleges where they received their education, or from socializing in clubs where membership is only affordable to rich people. Money not only translates into economic capital and political power; it also translates into social capital. Class-stratified social capital accumulation can to some extent be limited, for example, by outlawing expensive and selective private education, or by using spatial politics to create mixed neighborhoods. But this can at best *limit* the accumulation of social capital according to lines of affluence and class. Most of the reasons why rich and influential people socialize with other rich and influential people cannot be influenced by policy makers.

Imposing formal institutional mechanisms in order to decrease the impact of money on politics is thus feasible only to a limited extent. Large inequalities in income, and the possession of surplus money in particular, will thus always undermine political equality, even in societies where those four mechanisms have been weakened as much as possible through institutional measures. Therefore, if we hold that the value of democracy, and political equality in particular, are cornerstones of just societies, then we have an initial reason to endorse limitarianism.

IV. The Argument from Unmet Urgent Needs

The second justification for the limitarian doctrine can be called *the argument from unmet urgent needs.* This argument is essentially consequentialist in nature, and makes the justification of limitarianism dependent upon three empirical conditions. These conditions, which we can call the circumstances of limitarianism, are the following:

(a) *the condition of extreme global poverty*: a world in which there are many people living in extreme poverty, and whose lives could be significantly improved by government-led actions that require financial resources;

(b) *the condition of local or global disadvantages*: a world in which many people are not flourishing and are significantly deprived in some dimensions and whose lives could be significantly improved by government-led actions that require financial resources;

(c) *the condition of urgent collective-action problems*: a world that is faced with urgent (global) collective-action problems that could (in part) be addressed by government-led actions that require financial resources.

The *argument from unmet urgent needs* is dependent upon these conditions: if none of these conditions are met, the argument no longer holds. At least one of these three conditions has to hold for this argument to be valid. Yet, in the world as we know it, all three are met.[21] First, the condition of extreme global poverty is clearly met. Billions of people worldwide are living in (extreme) poverty, and while not all solutions that entail financial costs or financial redistribution are effective in eradicating poverty, many if not all of the effective poverty-reducing interventions do require financial resources.[22] Even institutional changes, such as creating a publicly accountable bureaucracy or establishing the rule of law, require financial resources.

The second condition is also met. Even people who are not extremely poor in material terms can be deprived or disadvantaged in many other ways. All post-industrialized countries have citizens who are homeless or who are socially excluded to the extent that they cannot fully take part in society; children with special educational needs do not always get the education that allows them to be adequately challenged and developed; a surprisingly large number of people are functionally illiterate; and a worryingly large number of both adults and children have mental health problems for which they are not receiving adequate help.[23]

The third condition is also met, since there are numerous collective-action problems that require the attention of governments or other actors of change. As twenty years of *Human Development Reports* have documented, several major collective problems facing the world could be effectively addressed if only the government were to devote sufficient attention and resources to these issues. Addressing climate change and the deterioration of the Earth's ecosystem is arguably the most urgent problem, which could partly be mitigated by a massive investment in green technological innovation. Other issues could be addressed by, e.g., providing expanded educational opportunities for girls, reproductive health services in areas where there is a large unmet need for contraceptives, large-scale programs of reforestation, and so forth. All of these require financial resources.[24]

If any of these three circumstances is in place, certain needs will have a higher moral urgency then the desires that could be met by the income and wealth that rich people hold. Recall that the money that rich people hold that exceeds the wealth line is their *surplus money*. The argument from unmet urgent needs claims that since surplus money does not contribute to people's flourishing, it has zero moral weight, and it would be unreasonable to reject the principle that we ought to use that money to meet these urgent unmet needs. The limitarian principle is thus supported by a modified version of Thomas Scanlon's Rescue Principle, which states that "if you are presented with a situation in which you can prevent something very bad from happening, or alleviate someone's dire plight, by making only a slight (or even moderate) sacrifice, then it would be wrong not to do so."[25] Scanlon also points to Peter Singer's famous defense of a version of the Rescue Principle in his influential paper "Famine, Morality and Affluence."[26]

The limitarian principle I defend here bears resemblance to Singer's and Scanlon's principles. Yet there are at least two significant differences. First, limitarianism is less demanding than Singer's and Scanlon's principles since it only makes a claim about moral duties related to surplus money. It does not spell out any duties we have with regard to the money that we would use in order to flourish yet do not need to stay out of poverty—say, money we spend on learning the piano, or on taking a holiday abroad. Under one widespread interpretation of Singer's view, we ought not to spend that money on playing the piano or taking a holiday, but should send it to Oxfam. As many have pointed out, such a radical principle suffers from overdemandingness.[27] Limitarianism, in contrast, need not take a stance on our duties related to the money we possess that is not surplus money, and hence can be part of a comprehensive theory of justice or morality that is able to avoid overdemandingness. For example, while limitarianism claims that 100% of surplus money should be redistributed and re-allocated to satisfy the three sets of urgent unmet needs, this claim could be part of a more comprehensive view on justice whereby incomes between the poverty line and the wealth line would be taxed at percentages well below 100%, and those tax revenues should be redistributed to the urgent unmet needs mentioned above.

The second difference to Singer and Scanlon's principles is that the argument for unmet urgent needs broadens the category of needs that are to be addressed. Scanlon refers to "lives that are immediately threatened" or people "in great pain, or living in conditions of bare subsistence." Singer, too, focuses on the globally worst-off, those whose deaths from famines and destitution could be prevented. While I do not deny that the basic needs of these people should be met, I cannot claim that the life of a homeless person living on the streets of Moscow or Chicago, at great risk of freezing to death, or the lives of psychiatric patients, suffering from anxiety attacks and self-harming behaviors, any less urgently need addressing.

Note that the argument from unmet urgent needs does not deny that it is possible for people to still *want* their surplus money, for example to spend it on luxurious lifestyles, or to simply accumulate it. Yet the account of flourishing is an objective account of well-being: Flourishing should not be confused with a desire–satisfaction account of well-being. Such subjective accounts of well-being may be plausible and defensible for some purposes, but not if we need a *policy-relevant notion* of well-being, as is the case for discussions about distributive justice.

Note also that the argument from urgent unmet needs does not regard wealth as an intrinsically morally bad social state, or rich people as non-virtuous people. Rather, the argument for urgent unmet needs is based on the premise that the value of surplus income is morally insignificant *for the holder* of that income, but not for society at large, at least under certain alternative usages.

A strength of this consequentialist argument for limitarianism is that it is highly suitable for the non-ideal world, in which we often do not have information about the origins of people's surplus income and about their initial opportunity sets. More precisely, we do not need to know whether someone's surplus income comes from clever innovation in a market where there was a huge demand for a particular innovative good, whether it is whitewashed money from semi-criminal activities, if it came from being part of a cartel of high-level managers who give each other excessively high incomes, or if it is the accumulated inheritance from four frugal grandparents. If one has so much money that one has more than is needed to fully flourish in life, one has too much, and that money should be redistributed in order to ameliorate one of the three conditions that make up the circumstances of limitarianism.

V. An Account of Riches

In the two preceding sections, I have offered two arguments in defense of limitarianism. Yet these arguments remain vague and elusive as long as we don't know what the relevant thresholds are. In other words, we need to know who counts as rich, and who doesn't. Such an account of riches is required, since otherwise limitarianism will suffer from the same ambiguity that surrounds sufficientarianism—the view that everyone should have resources or well-being above a certain threshold. As Paula Casal puts it, "sufficientarianism maintains its plausibility by remaining vague about the critical threshold."[28] It is difficult to know whether limitarianism is a plausible view if we don't know what the critical threshold is above which a person will be judged as having too much.

In this section, I will therefore offer a conceptualization of the notion of "riches." This account will allow us to identify rich people. The conceptualization will need to meet three criteria. First, the purpose of the conceptualization is that it will serve a function in normative claims of justice. Second, given the non-ideal character of this project, the conceptualization has to be operable: With access to the relevant data, economists and social scientists should be able to estimate the amount of riches within a certain population and be able to identify rich persons. Third, the conceptualization should not be an all-things-considered account of all that matters when we consider people's quality of life. A person can be rich but unhappy: A proper conceptualization of riches should not lump all these factors together. Being rich is not all that matters in life—in fact, it may be something that doesn't matter much at all. Yet, for questions of distributive justice, we may have good reason to want to capture riches and only riches, while acknowledging that for some other questions this is not what we should be focusing on. After developing a conceptualization of riches, I analyze and respond to two objections to the account of riches.

Is "Riches" an Absolute or a Relative Notion?

Since poverty and riches are opposite tails of the same distribution, the literature on the conceptualization of poverty provides a good starting point for thinking about how to conceptualize riches.[29] If we want to identify the poor, we need to define a party line, which is a certain cutoff point on the metric that we hold relevant (e.g., money): Anyone situated below that cutoff point qualifies as poor. To identify rich people, we need to define a riches line, a cutoff point on the metric that everyone situated *above* qualifies as rich. At first sight, then, the conceptualization of riches is symmetrical to the conceptualization of poverty. Three issues emerge from the poverty literature that are relevant for the conceptualization of riches: first, the issue of relative versus absolute poverty measures; second, the question of the relevant metric of comparison; and third, the question of the scope of comparison. We will address the question of the metric of comparisons below, and turn first to the issue of relative versus absolute measures and the scope of these comparisons.

A *relative* poverty measure defines poverty wholly in terms of the distance to the average of the distribution. For example, in the European Union, poverty is defined as living at or below 60% of the median income of the country in which one lives. An *absolute* poverty line defines poverty in terms of the resources needed for meeting some basic needs, such as adequate food, housing, and so forth.

In the empirical literature, it is generally acknowledged that no single poverty line is clearly superior to all other poverty lines, and that each conceptualization of poverty faces some challenges.[30] Statisticians and policy makers in Europe, North America, and Australia favor relative measures in the space of income. Nevertheless, there are at least two problems with relative measures from a conceptual point of view.[31] The first is that relative measures conflate "poverty" with "the worst-off," independently of how well-off or badly off those worst-off are. A relative measure is thus better understood as a hybrid of a poverty measure and an inequality measure. Second, in the case of relative measures, there will always be poor people and hence a fight against poverty can never be won, even if everyone were living in an affluent utopia. The only exception would be either if inequality was completely eliminated or if income distribution below the poverty line was completely eliminated, e.g., by introducing an unconditional basic income pitched at the level of the poverty line.

The second lesson from the poverty literature relates to the scope of poverty comparisons. Poverty measures are generally applied to geographic areas that are relatively homogenous in terms of economic development, or that form a fiscal unit. This is especially true for relative poverty measures. Some absolute poverty measures, particularly related to poverty in developing countries, are absolute and can be applied internationally, such as the well-known $2/day poverty line. Yet, apart from extreme poverty understood as having the mere prerequisites for physical survival, the consensus on poverty measurement is that poverty needs to be understood in its local context, since being poor in India equates to something different from being poor in England. One could argue that independent of context, there is an abstract idea of poverty shared across contexts, such as not having enough material resources to live a dignified life. But the concrete translation of that abstract idea will then have to be specified in a context-dependent manner.

How have these insights into the relative/absolute nature of poverty measures, and the scope of the comparisons, been used in measures of affluence and riches? The few existing empirical analyses of riches tend to define the rich in relative terms. In one of few empirical studies on the rich, the British social policy scholars Karen Rowlingson and Stephen McKay define three categories of wealthy people: the "rich" are the most affluent 10% on a combined measure of income and assets; the "richer" are the top 1%; while the top 1,000 households are the "richest" group.[32]

From a theoretical point of view, relative riches measures seem arbitrary and suffer from the same problems as relative poverty measures.[33] First, if the income distribution shifts, and everyone becomes materially better or worse off, the number of wealthy people stays the same. Suppose we endorse a relative riches measure that defines the rich as the top 10% of the income and assets distribution. Suppose now that the Swedish government discovers a huge oil field below its territories, and decides to distribute the revenues by giving all Swedish citizens equal entitlement to the profits of oil exploitation. If everyone's annual disposable income goes up by 20,000€, then the number of rich, richer, and richest on a relative riches measure will stay exactly the same, and those belonging to the middle classes, who were just below the cutoff point for being counted as rich (say, those who were in the 89th percentile before the real income increase) will still be considered middle class. They were, by this account, almost rich, and apparently the additional 20,000€ of disposable income doesn't make a difference to whether they should count as rich or not. The idea that a riches measure would be insensitive to changes in one's absolute income level is strikingly implausible. Relative riches measures may be appropriate for tracking the income position of the top tail of the income distribution over time, or for comparing the position of the top *x*% richest people in different countries, but relative riches measures are unsuited to giving a proper answer to the questions: "What entails riches?" or "Who should count as rich?."

Second, we need to distinguish between being the person who has the best position in material terms (a comparative notion) and being rich (an absolute notion). A person can have an excellent or even the very best position in comparative terms, but in absolute terms could be in a dire situation. This is most obvious in the case of a life-and-death situation. Take a dangerous and overcrowded refugee camp in Darfur. In such a context, having access to a useful basic object like a knife or a torch is surely incredibly important and may be an unusual object to have: Such a person holds a valuable asset that most other people in the refugee camp don't have, and hence in comparative terms this person is well-off. But possessing some valuable object that most other people around her don't possess is not enough to make a person rich. It would be deeply counterintuitive to say that an undernourished refugee whose only possession is a knife should be considered rich. Instead, such a person may be said to be slightly less deprived or slightly better equipped in the struggle for survival.

The conceptual problems of relative poverty measures are thus reflected in relative riches measures. Yet from this it doesn't follow that the only options left are absolute measures of poverty and wealth, such as the \$2/day poverty measure, or a riches metric that would state, for example, that if your disposable household income is 100,000€ or more, you count as rich. There are more options for riches measures, but in order to see them we need to make a distinction between two types of relative measures, namely measures that are distribution-relative versus measures that are context-relative.

Distribution-relative measures define riches or poverty as being at a certain distance from the average of the distribution. *Context-relative or contextual measures*, on the other hand, make *some* (generally weaker) reference to the context of the measurement in the definition of the riches or poverty line, without making that reference a function of the distribution itself. Context-relativity is plausible for an account of riches, since it allows us to account for the socially constructive nature of riches, and to allow for differences in our understanding of riches over time and space. For example, in Western Europe owning a new yet not luxurious car doesn't in itself make one rich, but there are areas in the world where car ownership is a prime indicator of affluence.

A plausible conceptualization of riches should avoid distribution-relativity, that is, riches should not be defined as a particular share or percentage of the distribution of welfare, well-being, or material resources, or be defined as those living at a certain distance above the average of that distribution. Rather, we should be able to describe in absolute terms what having riches entails—even if that absolute description is context-specific—and those people who meet the criteria that are entailed by this conceptualization will then count as rich.

The choice of a context-specific absolute conceptualization of riches provides a first step toward a conceptualization of riches. However, it leaves two difficult questions to be answered: First, what is the metric in which we conceptualize riches, and second, where do we draw the riches line—the cutoff point on the metric above which a person will qualify as rich, and thus, according to the limitarian doctrine, as having too much?

The Power of Material Resources

The intuitive and commonsense understanding of riches is the state in which one has more resources than are needed to fully flourish in life. Yet to develop a distributive rule, this needs to be expanded and specified. More specifically, we need an articulation of the relationship between resources and human flourishing. It seems quite obvious that we do not want to develop a metric of subjective well-being for the conceptualization of riches (like happiness or preference satisfaction, or self-perceived judgments of affluence). A subjective measure, such as how satisfied a person is, or how affluent a person considers herself to be, may be interesting for other purposes, but it will not reflect what affluence and riches actually are. A subjective measure would clash with our commonsense notion that affluence does not refer to a mental state of mind, or to happiness or satisfaction, but rather to the material possessions that people hold or the material side of their quality of life. In addition, subjective well-being measures are problematic because of the pervasive issue of adaptation. Problems of adaptation occur not only in the case of disadvantaged or oppressed people adapting to adverse circumstances; rich people also adapt to their current level of welfare, and hence adapt their levels of satisfaction and their aspirations accordingly *in an upward way*. A rich person living among other rich people may not feel rich at all, and a rich person living among the hyper-rich may even strongly believe that she is not rich, since others around her have even more than she does. Particularly in countries with high levels of class segregation, this may lead to significant distortions in people's own assessment of their level of affluence. We should thus stay away from subjective judgments about affluence status, and instead develop an account of affluence and riches that is objective and conceptualizes the relationship between material possessions and flourishing or well-being.[34]

In daily language, the common metric of affluence is the material resources that people have at their disposal—both flows of material resources as well as stocks of material resources. In their empirical estimates, Rowlingson and McKay use a combination of income flows and an estimate of assets as their metric for determining who counts as rich, richer, and richest. Many other popular indicators of riches also focus on the amount of money people have in their possession (e.g., we speak of "billionaires") or of the luxurious material goods people have bought with this money, such as expensive cars, large houses, designer clothes, and so forth. There does seem to be a prima facie case for conceptualizing affluence and riches in terms of a metric that focuses on the material side of quality of life—either on the means that one has at one's disposal (income, durable consumption goods, assets), or on the material lifestyle that one can afford to enjoy.

Yet some of the arguments that have been voiced from a capability perspective on the conceptualization of poverty may also have some force in the conceptualization of affluence. For example, if I have extensive needs due to a physical impairment or pervasive mental health problems, then the amount of money that would make a non-impaired person rich may not make me rich, since I may well have to spend a lot of money on my medical needs before I can contemplate spending it on luxury items. The well-known argument from the capability approach, which favors focusing on what people can do with their resources rather than on the resources itself, applies.[35]

However, accounting for such factors may lead us into a tricky situation when conceptualizing affluence, since we may not want to account for *all* individual differences between people. Some of these differences may be needs, such as in the case of an impaired person, but some of these differences may simply be "expensive taste," for which we may not want to account when deciding who is affluent and who isn't.[36] For example, a semi-paraplegic person who buys an electric wheelchair buys an expensive good that she *needs* in order to secure some basic functioning, namely to acquire the same mobility that non-impaired people have in walking, cycling, or using public transport. Yet an able-bodied person who lives in a city with excellent public transport and cycling facilities, who buys a fancy scooter just for fun or because he is a bit lazy, is buying a luxury item. They are similar commodities and may be similarly priced, but from a normative point of view the second purchase should count as a luxury item, whereas for the impaired person it would be deeply counterintuitive to say that such a purchase counts as a luxury item, since it is simply needed to secure some basic functioning. The challenge of distinguishing "needs" from "expensive tastes" is a general problem for the capability approach, and indicates the theoretical price we have to pay for endorsing the core capabilitarian insight that what matters is not what resources people have, but what those resources can do for people.

Adopting these insights from the debate on the metric of justice, I want to propose a metric of affluence that accounts for these three insights: First, it should account for our commonsense understanding of the terms "rich" and "affluence" as referring to people's material possessions; second, it should incorporate the core insight from the capability approach, namely that when we consider people's standard of living we are not interested in resources themselves but in what those resources enable people to do and be; and third, it should account for the concerns related to the need/want distinction that have been discussed at length in the literature on theories of distributive justice.

Let me call the proposed metric of affluence *the power of material resources (PMR).* PMR is an income metric that makes a number of modifications to our income level in order for the modified income metric to properly reflect the power we have to turn that income into material quality of life. The PMR will be constructed in such a way that it best captures the conceptualization of the material side of quality of life, and can therefore be used as a metric of affluence.

$$PMR = (Y_G + Y_K + A - EXP - T - G) * ES * CF$$

(1) PMR starts from the gross total income of a household (Y_G). That is, we aggregate income from all sources—whether from labor, profits, entitlements (such as child benefits), transfers, or returns on financial capital or investment. In line with all empirical measurements of poverty and inequality, we assume sharing of income and assets within the household.

(2) We add to Y_G a monetary estimate of any income or transfer in kind (Y_K). For example, if an elderly person is living in a nursing home that is paid for by her adult child, then the cost of living in a nursing home will be added to the estimated income of that elderly person (and subtracted as a gift (G) from the PMR of the adult child). Similarly, if a diamond company decides to give its employees diamonds as a bonus or Christmas present, then the market value of those diamonds will be added to those people's income.

(3) We add an estimate of the life annuity (A) of a household's assets. That is, we estimate what the assets of a household would be worth if they were to be sold as a life annuity, that is, if the asset

were turned into an annual payment for the rest of the owner's life. These assets include not only real estate and financial savings, but also shares, stocks, and company ownership.

(4) If a person endures reasonable expenses in order to undertake income-generating activities, these are also deducted from gross income. For example, the net expenditures (EXP) on child care and other forms of family care, but also expenditures for commuting or the improvement of one's human capital, should be included.[37] Obviously, this notion of "reasonable expenses" is vague, and there will inevitably be a grey area where we are unsure of and/or disagree about where to draw the line between reasonable and non-reasonable expenses. But the presence of a grey area should not prevent us from deducing at least those expenses where a large consensus exists that they are unavoidable or otherwise reasonable and needed for income generation.

(5) Next, we deduct the taxes that a person has paid on income and the annuity (T) and also deduct any transfers of money or gifts (G) the household has made. Not all gifts can be deducted from an income to decide on a person's PMR; this applies only to those gifts that represent a net increase in someone else's PMR. Gifts to causes that do not affect someone's PMR, such as political campaign contributions, or financial support of the arts and sciences, should not be taken into consideration, since these gifts give the gift-giver power to decide on which causes more or less money is spent.

(6) At this point we need to consider the capabilitarian argument that what intrinsically matters is not income, but rather what resources enable people to do and to be. Income is at best a proxy for what matters; in other words, it may matter for instrumental or diagnostic reasons. In addition, people are diverse and income metrics cannot sufficiently account for this diversity: People need different amounts of income to meet the same set of basic capabilities. These insights have been developed in detail in the poverty literature—both in theory and in empirical measures.[38] How does this insight transpose itself on the upper tail of the distribution? If a person has personal characteristics that mean she has less of an ability to convert income into valuable functionings (or that allow her to avoid negative functionings[39]), then this conversion factor (CF) needs to be applied to her gross income. If someone is

perfectly able to turn income into a valuable functioning, then CF = 1 and no correction is needed. If a person is severely impaired or has other characteristics for which they cannot be held responsible and which lead to a need for significantly more resources than other people to reach the same level of valuable functionings, then CF<1.[40] The lower the value of CF, the lower the ability of a person to turn income into valuable functionings, or, put differently, the more money that person needs to reach a certain level of valuable functioning.

(7) Finally, we apply household equivalence scales (ES) to take into account the number of persons within a household. In poverty and inequality measurement, income is generally modified to account for pooling and sharing of income within households, and for household size and composition.[41] For this purpose economists have developed "household equivalence scales," which is a factor allowing the rescaling of household income to what that income means for each person living in that household. Rather than dividing a household income by the number of persons living in a household, it is assumed that there is some joint consumption of goods—for example a person living alone needs a fridge, but four people sharing a household together can share one fridge. So the normative relevance of adapting household equivalence scales is that we endorse the view that the material standard of living matters, and in order to reach the same material standard of living, two single persons living on their own need more money than a couple living together.[42]

Applying equivalence scales to define PMR implies that we are assuming that household income and the revenue from assets are shared within the household.[43] The reason we apply household equivalence scales to our income measure is that we want to be able to compare households of different sizes and compositions. Yet using household equivalent scales is a normative decision, since it implies that for the purpose of deciding whether someone counts as rich, we do not conceptualize having children as equivalent to a consumer choice,[44] or as an action that has an externality on others.[45] When deciding whether a certain household income makes the members of that household rich or not, each human being should be taken into account. Suppose a single person earns £120,000 on her own, and doesn't need to provide for anyone else.

Suppose our riches metric and riches line are such that with this income the single person qualifies as rich. How should we compare her with her colleague who also earns £120,000, but who is a parent providing for her family of six in which she is the only earner? It seems plausible to suggest that the single person is affluent, while the members of the six-person household are decently well-off, but not rich, since they need to divide the £120,000 among themselves in order to secure their standard of living. Nevertheless, the way PMR deals with children is a contentious issue, as one of the objections discussed below will show.

The Riches Line

We now have a metric of affluence, namely the "power of material resources.". But how high should one's PMR be in order to count as rich? Where should we situate the cutoff line?

We should determine the riches line by reference to a certain set of capabilities to which people should have access as a matter of fully flourishing in life. In capability theory, there is a common distinction between a set of *basic capabilities* and capabilities *tout-court* (that is, all capabilities—which have no ceiling). Basic capabilities are those that one should have in order not to be deprived.[46] To identify the rich, we need to proceed in a similar fashion. We need to take two steps that are both conceptual and normative: First, we should identify the set of capabilities that are relevant for the standard of living, or the material side of the quality of life, rather than for a more encompassing notion of quality of life that also includes non-material dimensions. Second, we need to decide on the riches line, that is, the cutoff point above which people count as rich.

The first thing that this conceptualization requires is the establishment of a list of functionings that are the relevant dimensions for a standard of living. Luckily, there is by now considerable literature on this question, though it comes in a number of slightly different variants. One can select the relevant capabilities based on a fundamental normative grounding, e.g., those capabilities that protect our human dignity, enable us to be equal citizens, or that protect our autonomy.[47] Alternatively, one can start from a discourse-theoretical or deliberative democratic point of view and endorse a procedural route. This could translate in practice into a mixture of expert consultation, deliberative analysis, and social-choice theoretic procedures.[48]

Assuming that certain minimal conditions about the nature of collective decision making are met, we could let a democratic process decide which capabilities matter for normative questions related to public policy and social justice.[49] Yet if we proceed along the deliberative-democratic route to developing the capability approach to affluence and riches, we need to know the scope of the deliberations. Recall that poverty is generally specified at a local or national level: One assesses the standard of living of a certain group against the standard of living of all people living in the area. Poverty and riches are contextual notions: one is poor or one is rich against the background of the context in which one lives.

The same holds for the rich. If we could project ourselves 300 years back in time, while keeping our current material living standards fixed, we would all count as rich, whereas only few of us would regard ourselves as such here and now. Once upon a time being able to buy spices, and hence enjoying spicy meals, was a sign of affluence, since spices were very scarce and hence expensive. Nowadays a wide range of species is available to all at low prices. To be able to enjoy a meal cooked with spices was once a privilege of the rich, but that is no longer the case. Thus, both the selection of the detailed functionings, as well as the decision of where to draw the poverty- and the riches lines, need to be contextualized: They must take account of the time and place in which one is making evaluative judgments of poverty and affluence.

Yet the list of relevant functionings would need to be limited in one important sense: It would only entail those functionings that are considered part of the standard of living or the material side of quality of life, rather than the broader notions of quality of life or well-being. A comprehensive account of quality of life would also include functionings that do not have a material basis, but that belong more to the political, social, or spiritual dimensions of life. If we need an account of riches for the purposes of developing a distributive rule, it is important that we limit our conceptualization of quality of life to those dimensions that are directly related to one's income level. Obviously, this doesn't mean that the nonmaterial dimensions of quality of life, such as one's opportunities to be active in local politics, or the capabilities of being part of a religious community and engaging in its practices, are any less morally important. Rather, the underlying rationale is that the concept of riches should not capture everything that is worthwhile, and we should try to not confuse different components of quality of life. By keeping the material and nonmaterial dimensions of quality of life distinct, we can allow for the possibility that a very rich person could be lonely and unhappy, but also that a middle-class person could feel incredibly blessed by her friends and family and all the joy and meaning that she derives from her regular walks in the woods. The latter may *feel* rich, or *self-describe* as rich, but a political redistributive doctrine is therefore not warranted to count her as being rich.

The process of deciding which functionings are important for the conceptualization of the riches threshold would require a careful outline of how to make that process as legitimate as possible, and how to prevent biases in that process (e.g., power imbalances among the deliberators). This raises a host of different questions that are addressed in the literature on deliberate democracy and participatory techniques.[50] Yet in order to get an initial, very rough idea of what one could expect to emerge from such a process, we could look at the existing literature on the selection of functioning for the standard of living in a Western European country.[51] This literature suggests that something like the following list of capabilities could emerge from such a participatory process: physical health, mental health, personal security, accommodation, quality of the environment, education, training and knowledge, recreation, leisure and hobbies, and mobility. Each of these broad, general functionings should then be specified in more detail, by working out which more detailed and specified functionings would be entailed by each of the more general functionings.

For each of these broad, general functionings, the deliberative decision-making process should then specify the riches line, by answering the following question: Which levels of capabilities do we think it is reasonable for people to claim for a fully flourishing yet not excessive life? The answer to this question will depend on the context—on the relevant time and space. I conjecture that in contemporary Europe or North America, we would answer this question by stating, for example, that one must have access to the goods that enable one to be mobile within a radius of a few hundred miles: Hence, one must either be able to afford a decent car, or have access to public transport that enables the same functioning—but one wouldn't need to have access to a private jet. Being able to fly to the other side of the continent on a regular basis wouldn't fall under the capabilities of the flourishing-but-non-rich life.

Once we have listed the capabilities to which we should have access for a flourishing but non-rich life, we can calculate how much money would be needed for a typical person (with CF = 1) to buy these goods and services. That amount gives us the riches line (RL), which is expressed in a monetary unit. For example, if our estimate is that in order to have access to these functionings related to a fully flourishing but non-rich life we need 200,000€ a year, then the riches line is put at 200,000€.

Anyone whose PMR is greater than the riches line has more resources than she needs for a fully flourishing life and therefore counts as rich. This is what I call the PMR-account of riches.

Before closing this discussion of the PMR-account of riches, I want to offer two remarks. First, note that this account of riches doesn't leave it to each individual person to decide whether she is rich or not. Rather, I believe that such matters should be open to public debate, whereby the role of the philosopher is to put proposals on the table for that debate and provide citizens with arguments in defense of a certain proposal. It is to be expected that compared with the PMR-account of riches, some people who do not consider themselves rich could be identified as rich. This would not be surprising if it is true that people who are rich according to the PMR-account are not always aware of how affluent they are.

Second, note also that making a distinction between an affluent life and the life of the rich doesn't mean that a non-rich person can never have access to a functioning that the deliberation process has decided falls outside the scope of the fully flourishing life. For example, the conceptualization would *not* imply that those who count as non-rich can never fly to join a party on the other side of the continent: It only implies that since that capability falls outside the range of capabilities to which we think one should have access as a matter of a flourishing-but-non-rich life, a person wanting to fly somewhere for the weekend would need to sacrifice some resources that she could, in her flourishing life, have spent on other goods and services that fall within the scope of the non-rich qualify of life.

Two Objections to the PMR-Account of Riches

The *ecological sustainability objection* argues that the PMR-account of riches doesn't allow us to draw a distinction between qualitative features of people's spending patterns: The account doesn't consider *how* people spend their money. Yet for ecological reasons surely it matters a great deal whether people use their PMR to attend yoga classes, buy an SUV, or fly on a regular basis. The PMR-account of riches doesn't tell us anything about people's ecological footprint. Isn't that a relevant moral consideration when we decide who counts as rich and who doesn't? If two people have the same PMR but one spends it in a sustainable way and the other doesn't, surely that must be taken into account somehow?

The ecological sustainability objection makes a valid normative point but ultimately fails as an objection to the conceptualization of riches. The valid point is that from a moral point of view it matters how people spend their money.

Yet that is analytically a separate issue: We may also endorse sustainability-relative normative claims that put additional constraints on our morally acceptable behavior. For example, John Broome has argued that we have a moral duty of justice to reduce our carbon footprint to zero.[52] Yet this is *an additional* constraint on whatever distributive claim we want to defend. The limitarianism defended in this chapter is money-limitarianism; but this doctrine could be supplemented with an additional account of "ecological-resources-limitarianism."[53] A person can be rich or non-rich, and can violate or not violate moral duties related to ecological sustainability concerns. Having or not having too much, and damaging or not damaging the ecosystem too much, are separate issues, although there are probably empirical correlations between the two.

The second objection, the *fertility objection*, is partly similar in structure to the ecological sustainability objection, but it cuts deeper. This objection states that the conceptualization of riches defended in this chapter provides positive fertility incentives, since those who have more children can acquire much more income and assets before they count as rich.[54] One version of the fertility objection sees positive fertility incentives as a bad thing, given worries about overpopulation and the net ecological burden that each additional life represents. Yet this version of the fertility objection can be rebutted in the same way as the ecological sustainability objection: There may well be quantitative moral limits to our procreative behavior, but this is best conceptualized as an additional constraint on any normative claim related to the upper tail of the PMR-distribution. A family with six children may fall just below the riches line and therefore not qualify as rich, yet we may have independent reasons regarding why it is morally objectionable to have six children, or why the government is morally justified in implementing policies that aim at limiting the number of children we have.[55] This is a separate question.

Yet the second version of the fertility objection may cut deeper still. This objection states that in post-industrial societies, one needs to be fairly affluent before one can afford to have children.[56] If children are taken into account when calculating the per capita PMR, we may obtain counterintuitive results. Take two couples, A and B, who each form a family. Both families have the same PMR, and both qualify as being middle class and hence as non-rich families. While family A finds that it doesn't quite reach the level of affluence needed to have children and be able to provide them with a decent life, family B has four children and a net family income level that is much higher than family A's. If the parents in family B had not had children, the parents of family B would have qualified as rich. Yet since in the calculation of family B's PMR a lot of expenditures for childcare are deduced and the household income is regarded as the income of six persons rather than that of two, family B doesn't count as rich either. Isn't it deeply counterintuitive to say that family B is non-rich, whereas the parents in that family clearly have enough material means to support four children?

While the pull of this objection is clear, I think we must nevertheless resist it. The reason is that for purposes of determining our material standard of living, each person counts as a moral equal, including children. The fertility objection regards children as the object of the decisions or choices of their parents, in the same way that parents can decide to buy a dog or a car. Yet such a view violates the moral stance in which children are seen as members of our moral community who count on equal terms when we make per capita assessments, such as in the case of deciding who counts as rich. The most we can say about family B is that this family was rich before it decided to have children, or could have been rich had it decided not to have children, but is no longer rich after it had its four children. Children are not part of the material standard of living that makes up our affluence—rather, they are just additional human beings among which this affluence needs to be divided.

Note also that the second version of the fertility objection would also lead to deeply counterintuitive results if we were to apply it to the case of poor people. Suppose a poor family could have stayed just above the poverty line if it had not had any children. But surely the presence of those children does not prompt us to categorize this family as non-poor. Rather, we may believe that their procreative decisions have plunged this family into poverty, or believe that if the parents in this family had decided not to have children they could have remained non-poor. But these are clearly different claims to the one stating that this poor family must be considered non-poor since the presence of the children makes the difference between poverty and non-poverty.

VI. A Moral or a Political Doctrine?

So far the argument has remained silent on the question of whether limitarianism is merely a moral or *also* a political doctrine. The choice for either makes a significant difference. Limitarianism as a merely moral doctrine means that we have a *moral* duty not to be rich. If we are rich, we are violating a moral norm, but there is no coercive power, such as the state, that can force us to comply with the norm. Limitarianism as not only a moral but also a political doctrine is much more radical, as it means that the state should tax away any surplus money that people have, or reform social and economic institutions in such a way that no one gains any surplus money in the first place.[57] Should we defend limitarianism as a moral or as a political doctrine?

The answer to this question will depend on the justification one gives for limitarianism. If the grounding of limitarianism were a virtue-ethical account of the good life, then it could be argued that limitarianism is merely a moral and not a political doctrine. Yet the justifications I have developed in this chapter are *political* justifications, concerned with the value of democratic equality and with social and distributive justice.

Since on this account limitarianism is a distributive rule of *justice* rather than of beneficence or personal virtues, there is a prima facie case to be made for understanding limitarianism as a political doctrine. After all, following Rawls, justice is generally regarded as the first and most important virtue of society, and if justice includes limitarianism (whatever other distributive rules may additionally apply below the wealth-line), then limitarianism should be a political doctrine.[58] A moral doctrine wouldn't suffice, since as a moral norm limitarianism is non-enforceable, and we would not be able to take coercive measures against those not complying with the limitarian duty.

One could object to this argument for seeing limitarianism as a political doctrine by appealing to concerns of non-compliance. We have to take into account that citizens will not all have a fully developed sense of justice, or will not endorse the view that justice is the first virtue in society, so the objection goes. One could therefore argue that in non-ideal circumstances, limitarianism as a moral doctrine may be the best we can hope for. This is compatible with the view that in ideal theory limitarianism should be a political doctrine, whereby limitarianism as a moral doctrine should be implemented as a step in the direction of limitarianism as a political doctrine. While this all sounds plausible, it doesn't seem enough of a reason to give up on limitarianism as a political doctrine: A doctrine is not a law that a philosopher-dictator can implement, but rather a view for which the philosopher gives the best arguments she can come up with. From that perspective, limitarianism has to be a political doctrine, and it is up to citizens (one of which will be the philosopher) to try to convince their fellow citizens that this is a doctrine for which we have good arguments.[59]

A second objection to seeing limitarianism as a political rather than a moral doctrine relates to the ultimate concern underlying its justification based on the argument from unmet urgent needs.

Given that specific justification, we may ask whether these urgent unmet needs will be better met if limitarianism is considered a political or a moral doctrine. One shouldn't simply assume that governments are more effective, or indeed equally effective, in meeting these urgent needs than non-governmental actors. This is an empirical question. Yet to the extent that NGOs, technology developers, organizations, and communities are more effective than governments in meeting these urgent needs, we have a reason to *modify* our limitarian account rather than to abandon it as a political account. One could develop a limitarian doctrine, whereby the "deductible gifts" in the definition of modified income would include monetary gifts to non-governmental agents who aim at meeting these urgent needs. If we have reasons to believe that non-governmental agents are more effective in meeting those unmet urgent needs than governments, then this modified account of limitarianism leaves the rich with the choice of whether to contribute to meeting urgent needs through non-governmental agents (via tax-deductible gifts) or through the government (via taxation).

Weighing these various arguments, I believe that limitarianism should be defended as a political doctrine. Of course, this doesn't prevent the simultaneous development of a culture of giving among the very affluent who do not qualify as rich. Here too, the government can take measures to create and strengthen the social norms that accompany the moral norm embodied in limitarianism, by supporting and publicly praising gift-giving on the part of the almost-rich, and through various other mechanisms that are at a government's disposal to create and strengthen a social norm.[60] Moreover, on the view that governments are not the only agents of justice,[61] we could also expect those agents of justice that endorse limitarianism, independently of the government, to take initiatives to change social norms and collective practices into limitarianism-supporting directions.

VII. Two Objections against Limitarianism

Unsurprisingly, various objections can be raised against limitarianism. Given space constraints, here I will address the two objections that seem prima facie to be the strongest.[62]

The first objection, the *unequal opportunities objection*, holds that limitarianism deprives persons of equal opportunities, and should therefore be rejected. This objection starts from the widely shared normative premise that in a just society everyone should have equal opportunities.[63] If a person chooses to forgo leisure in order to work more, which generates surplus money that she can use to obtain luxurious items, then she should have the opportunity to do so. Limitarianism creates inequality of opportunity, and should therefore be rejected.

Note that one might think this is a straw man objection, since it is the *rewards* of particular opportunities that are withheld from individuals, rather than the opportunities themselves. The rich can still be CEOs of major international companies, but they can no longer earn millions on a yearly basis. The objection would hold that they still have the same opportunity (to be a CEO), but not the rewards associated with that opportunity. However, I use the term "opportunity" here in its richest sense, that is, as particular states of affairs that are no longer accessible to particular individuals, due to the imposition of the limitarian view. It is not merely reduced earnings that are important, but also what those earnings could be used to obtain (leisure activities, luxury goods, status symbols, etc.). The unequal opportunities objection thus focuses on comprehensive changes in the opportunity sets of individuals that are caused by limitarianism.

The unequal opportunities objection is correct in claiming that those at the top of society will see their opportunities curtailed. But this is the price we pay for something more important, namely the widening of opportunities for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, all those who will benefit from financial investments in ameliorating any of the three empirical conditions that make up the circumstances of limitarianism. The global poor will benefit from poverty-reducing strategies and see a broadening of their opportunities increased toward better lives. The disadvantaged in affluent societies will benefit from disadvantage-reducing policies such as more accessible mental health services, or living arrangements for the homeless. Those living in areas where the harms of global warming will be greatest, such as inhabitants of small islands or the large deltas, as well as people living in the future, will see their opportunities to live without the harmful effects of increased global warming. I thus reject the unequal opportunities objection on the grounds that in the highly unjust and ecologically fragile world in which we live, limitarianism would curtail some opportunities for the best-off, but in order to increase the opportunities for those who have a far more restricted range of initial opportunities. In ideal theory, the unequal opportunities argument may perhaps have some force,[64] but in the non-ideal circumstances in which we live, limitarianism would move us closer to equality of opportunity, rather than moving us away from it.

The second objection, the *incentive objection*, starts by noting that if limitarianism is justified with the argument for unmet urgent needs, then its goal is not to punish the rich, since there is no moral badness in being rich in itself. Rather, the goal is to meet the unmet urgent needs that are captured by the three conditions that form the circumstances of limitarianism. Yet if the ultimate motivation is meeting these urgent unmet needs, why not endorse the Rawlsian difference principle in a slightly modified form? After all, if there is a moral duty to give away all surplus income, then there is a very strong disincentive to add to the social product after one's income has reached the wealth line. Surely the meeting of urgent needs is not helped if the rich face strong disincentives to earn an income above the wealth line in the first place? The difference principle would weaken this disincentive, since it allows the rich to become richer as long as the poor benefit too. In Rawls's theory, the difference principle states that in the design of the basic social and economic institutions in society, inequalities in social primary goods are allowed as long as they benefit the worst-off group in society.[65] A modified difference principle could be applied, not to the design of the basic institutions but to income redistribution, and could replace social primary goods with the modified income metric. Wouldn't this distributive rule better serve the ultimate justification for advocating limitarianism?

That conclusion doesn't quite follow. Limitarianism is agnostic about the distribution below the wealth line, such as legitimate inequalities among the non-rich, but is more radical with respect to what distributive justice requires at the top end of the distribution. Under the difference principle, a person could be rich and have a lot of surplus money, yet from any additional money he would earn, only a small fraction would have to go to the worst-off.

The limitarian principle wouldn't allow this: All surplus money would have to go toward the unmet needs of the worst-off, the disadvantaged, and toward addressing urgent collective-action problems. Limitarianism shares with the difference principle a strong redistributive aim, but the two are distinct.

Yet the opponent of limitarianism may try to attack from a slightly different angle. Perhaps the incentive objection cuts deeper, if it is stated directly without reference to the difference principle. Surely it must be the case that limitarianism entails a very strong disincentive for almost-rich people to contribute more to the creation of the social product by working harder, innovating smarter, and doing more business? The objection here refers to the idea of optimal income taxation, as it is known in public economics. The consensus view among public economists is that the so-called optimal top marginal taxation rate, which is the rate at which total tax revenues are maximized, is about 70%. If one further increases the top marginal taxation rate, then total tax revenues decrease. To the extent that limitarianism is seen as a fiscal policy (and not as an ideal that should guide pre-distribution institutional design or charitable duties), limitarianism equals a top marginal taxation rate of 100%.

This is a serious challenge for the arguments developed in this chapter.[66] The democratic argument is untouched by the fact that the optimal top marginal taxation rate is lower than 100%, since the democratic argument cares about political equality, not about maximal tax revenue that can be used to meet the unmet urgent needs. Hence, if we only care about the value of political equality, we should not lower the top marginal taxation rate below 100% as long as the latter can be shown to lead to more political equality.

In contrast, the argument from unmet urgent needs could be significantly undermined if the optimal top marginal taxation rate is less than 100%. Since the grounding value is the meeting of the unmet urgent needs, the rational thing to do, *as a matter of policy only concerned with the meeting of the unmet urgent needs,* is to weaken limitarianism such that we raise maximal tax revenues among the rich and richest.

The first thing this shows is that there can be a tension between different reasons for limitarianism. The argument from unmet urgent needs would imply that we should opt for the optimal tax rate, whereas the democratic argument would rather forgo some tax revenue if an orthodox implementation of limitarianism better protects political equality. There is thus a certain tension between the two arguments for limitarianism that have been developed in this chapter. Two things follow. First, we need to ask whether there are other reasons for limitarianism, so that we can examine whether there are additional tensions between those arguments and their practical implications. Second, as far as the tension between the argument from unmet urgent needs and the democratic argument is concerned, we have four options. The first is to opt for a revenue-maximizing fiscal policy, together with a set of institutional reforms that breaks down the mechanisms that turn money into political power. Perhaps the residue of unequal opportunity of political influence that remains in that ideal scenario is sufficiently small that we need not worry. This is an empirical question that needs to be investigated. The second option would be to maintain that unequal political influence still matters but that addressing urgent unmet needs trumps the democratic argument, and therefore choose the revenue-maximizing fiscal policy. The third and fourth options are symmetrical to the first and second. In the third option we choose orthodox limitarianism (a 100% top marginal tax rate above the riches line), which fully protects political equality, and try to indirectly meet the urgent unmet needs by means other than fiscal policies, e.g., by calling on non-governmental agents of justice or entrepreneurs to tackle issues of urgent unmet needs. In the fourth option we maintain that meeting the urgent unmet needs still matters but that addressing political equality trumps the meeting of the urgent unmet needs, and hence feel justified in opting for the 100% top marginal tax rate.

If we care more about meeting unmet urgent needs than about the damage done to political equality due to the effects of surplus money, then the fiscal policy that comes closest to the limitarian ideal should be an income and wealth top tax rate that maximizes tax revenue. Yet this should not be regarded as a defeat of the limitarian view. First, limitarianism *as a moral ideal* would be unaffected, and we should encourage a social ethos among those who, after taxation, still have surplus money, to give it away toward the meeting of unmet urgent needs. Second, we should investigate non-monetary incentive systems for avoiding the disincentive effects on the rich of high marginal taxations. In a culture where material gain is not the leading incentive, people may also work hard and harder due to commitments, challenges they have set themselves, or intrinsic joys, esteem, or honor.

I conclude that the unequal opportunities objection does not succeed, but that the incentives objection should prompt us to adapt limitarianism as applied to fiscal policies in line with optimal taxation design, to the extent that we weight the value of meeting the unmet urgent needs higher than the effects of surplus money on the undermining of political equality. Still, in both cases limitarianism as a moral principle stands.

VIII. Limitarianism: A Research Agenda

In this chapter, I have introduced limitarianism as a distributive rule, and analyzed two arguments in support of limitarianism. By way of a conclusion, I want to stress limitarianism's main limitations and draw out some questions that need to be addressed in further research, which require further analysis (in addition to the various issues that have already been mentioned throughout the chapter).

First, recall that I have argued for non-intrinsic limitarianism, while remaining silent on the plausibility of intrinsic limitarianism. Whether convincing reasons for intrinsic limitarianism can be given remains to be seen. For example, how plausible is the view that one would lead a better life, or a happier life, or a more virtuous life, if one were not to become rich? And how exactly would an argument supporting such a claim unfold?

Second, there are various assumptions in the arguments developed in this chapter that I believe are plausible, but for which I may not have argued in sufficient detail. These assumptions need to be analyzed more carefully, together with their implications for the plausibility of the limitarian doctrine.

Third, it would be good to know exactly how the limitarian distributive rule differs from other distributive rules, such as equality of outcome, equality of opportunity, sufficiency, priority, and the Rawlsian difference principle. Many of these rules have been developed in a variety of ways, and a detailed analysis of the differences between limitarianism and these various distributive rules would be needed. It may turn out that certain limitarian views (that is, certain specifications of limitarianism, including its justification) boil down to an already existing distributive view, or are compatible with an existing distributive view. Most existing distributive rules focus specifically on *recipients*, yet the particular version of limitarianism that I have defended in this chapter focused equally on *those who carry obligations*. While the distinction between recipients and contributors is not always easy to make in views of distributive justice, the fact that these two concerns exist makes it possible that some recipient-oriented accounts of distributive justice could be complemented with the limitarian rule. This needs to be analyzed in future work. One particular question that requires attention is how limitarianism relates to the understanding of sufficiency in terms of a shift in the reasons we give for caring about benefits below and above the threshold, rather than the more dominant understanding of simply caring that everyone has enough.[67]

Finally, one can observe that more work has been done in empirical political science on the rich (in discussions on oligarchy and plutocracy),[68] and in welfare economics on the measurement of the top incomes, than in normative political philosophy. In my view, it would be helpful if normative political philosophy connected more strongly with those empirical debates and introduced a stronger focus on the rich in theories of justice and normative political philosophy in general. There are very likely to be other reasons, as well as those discussed in this chapter, why the distinction between the rich and non-rich should play a much more prominent role in normative arguments and theories of justice in particular. The modified income account of wealth developed in this chapter can be used for a wide range of wealth-referring claims, and the principle of limitarianism can be combined with additional recipient-oriented principles of justice or with distributive rules about those parts of the distribution below the wealth line.

Obviously there will be various other accounts of wealth and various other justifications for limitarianism. I have defended one particular account of wealth and have argued for limitarianism as a political doctrine based on the democratic argument and the argument from urgent unmet needs, yet I have conceded that the argument from unmet urgent needs would force us to weaken limitarianism in the fiscal domain into a set of policies that maximizes taxation revenue among the rich. Still, whether this modified income account is the best account of wealth, and whether the democratic argument and the argument for unmet urgent needs are the best arguments for limitarianism, remains to be seen.

Notes

1 Elizabeth Anderson, "Justifying the Capability Approach to Justice," in Harry Brighouse and Ingrid Robeyns (eds.), *Measuring Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81.

2 I will use the terms "wealth" and "riches" synonymously in this chapter.

3 In contrast, starting gate theories, such as Robert Nozick's entitlement theory, outline just procedures against a background of just initial acquisition, and are therefore harder to apply to non-ideal circumstances, since fair initial acquisition is hardly ever possible. See Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

4 For example, Harry Frankfurt, "Equality as a Moral Ideal," *Ethics* 98 (1987): 21–43; Elizabeth Anderson, "What's the Point of Equality?," *Ethics* 109, 2 (1999): 287–337; Jonathan Wolff and Avner De-Shalit, *Disadvantage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

5 Richard Arneson, "Egalitarianism," in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, open access at http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/egalitarianism/ (2013). Liam Shields has offered an alternative understanding of sufficientarianism, which, in a nutshell, entails that there are important reasons to secure enough, and once that threshold is reached, the reasons for securing further benefits change. See Liam Shields, "The Prospects for Sufficientarianism," *Utilitas* 24, 1 (2012): 101–117. Shields's proposal is not a standard view of sufficientarianism, and due to space constraints will therefore not be further discussed in this chapter.

6 In this chapter, the term "affluent" refers to anyone who is not poor. An affluent person can be either rich or non-rich. "Middle class" refers to those who are affluent but not rich.

7 Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). See also Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, "Income Inequality in the United States: 1913–1998," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 68, 1 (2003): 1–39; Anthony B. Atkinson and Thomas Piketty (eds.), *Top Incomes over the 20th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Facundo Alvaredo, Anthony B. Atkinson, Thomas Piketty,

and Emmanuel Saez, "The Top 1 Percent in International and Historical Perspective," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27, (2013): 3–20.

8 N. Gregory Mankiw, "Defending the One Percent," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27, 3 (2013): 21–34.

9 Ibid., 22.

10 Breena Holland, *Allocating the Earth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 142.

11 Christine Overall, *Why Have Children? The Ethical Debate* (Boston: MIT Press 2012).

12 See, e.g., Martin O'Neill, "What Should Egalitarians Believe?," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 36, 2 (2008): 119–156, and Daniel M. Hausman and Matt Sensat Waldren, "Egalitarianism Reconsidered," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 8 (2011): 567–586.

13 For empirical research suggesting that high material wealth is associated with low psychological well-being, see, e.g., Frank S. Pittman III, "Children of the Rich," *Family Process* 24 (1985): 461–472; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "If We Are So Rich, Why Aren't We Happy?," *American Psychologist* 54 (1999): 821–827.

14 On the value of democracy and the notion of "political equality," see, e.g., Charles Beitz, *Political Equality: An Essay in Democratic Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Jack Knight and James Johnson, "What Sort of Political Equality Does Deliberative Democracy Require?" in James Bohman and William Rehg (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy Essays on Reason and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997): 279–319; and Thomas Christiano, *The Constitution of Equality: Democratic Authority and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

15 Thomas Christiano, "Money in Politics," in David Estlund (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 241–257.

16 Ibid., 245.

17 Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe. Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

18 Christiano, "Money in Politics," 250; see also Thomas Christiano, "The Uneasy Relationship between Democracy and Capital," *Social Philosophy & Policy* 27, 1 (2010): 195–217.

19 Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

20 Dean J. Machin, "Political Inequality and the 'Super-Rich': Their Money or (*some of*) Their Political Rights," *Res Publica* 19 (2013): 121–139.

21 One exception may apply, and that is whether governments (at different levels, from local to global government-like organizations such the UN) would be capable of addressing the three types of unmet needs effectively, if only they had the funds. In so-called failed states or in countries

that have very corrupt governments, the conditions may not be met. In these cases, it may be the case that private initiatives by rich individuals may be more effective in meeting the three categories of unmet urgent needs.

22 Examples of resource-dependent development interventions that contribute to poverty reduction are micro-credit schemes or India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The clearest case of a development intervention that is heavily resource-dependent is an unconditional basis income, or unconditional child benefit grants or elderly pensions as they exist, e.g., in South Africa.

23 See, e.g., Wolff and de-Shalit, *Disadvantage*.

24 See, e.g., Stephen Gardiner, Simon Caney, Dale Jamieson, and Henry Shue (eds.), *Climate Ethics. Essential Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); UNDP, *Human Development Report 2011* (New York: Palgrave, 2011); John Broome, *Climate Matters* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

25 Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 224.

26 Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, 3 (1972): 229–243.

27 For recent discussion, see Jørn Sønderholm, "World Poverty, Positive Duties, and the Overdemandingness Objection," *Philosophy, Politics and Economics* 12, 3 (2013): 308–327. See also Garrett Cullety, *The Moral Demands of Affluence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

28 Paula Casal, "Why Sufficiency Is Not Enough," *Ethics* 117, 2 (2007): 316.

29 Amartya Sen, "Poor, Relatively Speaking," *Oxford Economic Papers* 35 (1983): 153–169.

30 Alissa Goodman, Paul Johnson, and Steven Webb, *Inequality in the UK* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 231.

31 Sen, "Poor, Relatively Speaking."

32 Karen Rowlingson and Stephen D. McKay, *Wealth and the Wealthy* (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2011).

33 Of course, it should be acknowledged that empirical research is often confronted with data limitations and has to make simplifications.

34 For arguments about why metrics of justice should be objective, see Anderson, "Justifying the Capability Approach to Justice," 85–87.

35 See Sen, "Poor, Relatively Speaking"; Amartya Sen, *The Standard of Living* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Amartya Sen, *Commodities and Capabilities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). For empirical estimates showing that disabled people need far more resources to reach the same level of affluence, see Wiebke Kuklys, *Amartya Sen's*

Capability Approach: Theoretical Insights and Empirical Applications (Berlin: Springer, 2006).

36 On expensive taste, see Ronald Dworkin, "What Is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10, 3 (1981): 198–246.

37 The share of these expenditures that is already covered by one's employer or the government shouldn't of course be deducted, except if they have first been added to Y_G.

38 Influenced by the capability approach, economists have developed new poverty measures that have functionings as their metric, such as the Multidimensional Poverty Measure, which was developed by Sabina Alkire and James Foster. Sabina Alkire and James Foster, "Counting and Multidimensional Poverty Measurement," *Journal of Public Economics* 95 (2011): 476–487.

39 Negative functionings are functionings with a negative value: One is better off without those functionings. Examples are being in pain, being depressed, and having one's bodily integrity violated.

40 Introducing a notion of responsibility is very important. It rules out claims by a person who chooses for and/or identifies with a religion that would severely constrain her capacity to convert money into functionings. It is also needed to provide a solid response to a criminal billionaire in jail who could claim that he is not able to fully flourish in his life and therefore doesn't count as rich.

41 This is the "modified OECD equivalence scale," which is well-known among welfare economists and scholars working with income statistics.

42 For example, the household equivalence scales used by EUROSTAT (the statistical agency of the European Union) are 1.0 for the first adult in a household, 0,4 for any additional household member 14 years or older, and 0,3 for each child younger than 14. If a household of two adults and two children younger than 14 earns in total 80,000€, than a per capita (average) income in the household would be 80,000 divided by 4 = 20,000€, whereas using the EUROSTAT equivalence scales the equivalized household income would be 80,000 divided by (1.0+0,4+0,3+0,3), which is 80.000 divided by 2.0= 40,000. Equivalence scales can thus make a big difference.

43 This assumption can be criticized, since we know from empirical studies that household income is not equally shared among all members. See for example Frances R. Woolley and Judith Marshall, "Measuring Inequality within the Household," *Review of Income and Wealth* 40, 4 (1984): 415–431. Yet the alternative assumption, to assume no sharing of income within the household, would be even more unrealistic.

44 Gary Becker, *A Treatise on the Family* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

45 Paula Casal and Andrew Williams, “Rights, Equality and Procreation,” *Analyse und Kritik* 17, 1 (1995): 93–116.

46 Ingrid Robeyns, “The Capability Approach,” in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, open access at http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/capability-approach/ (2011).

47 On the selection of capabilities for the purpose of justice, see Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality and Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Elizabeth Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?,” *Ethics* 109 (1999): 287–337; Rutger Claassen and Marcus Düwell, “The Foundations of Capability Theory: Comparing Nussbaum and Gewirth,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16, 3 (2013): 493–510.

48 Sabina Alkire, “Choosing Dimensions: The Capability Approach and Multidimensional Poverty,” in Nanak Kakwani and Jacques Silber (eds.), *The Many Dimensions of Poverty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 89–199; Ingrid Robeyns, “Selecting Capabilities for Quality of Life Measurement,” *Social Indicators Research* 74 (2006): 191–215.

49 Space doesn’t allow me to defend that view here, but for a defense of this way of thinking about justice, see Rainer Forst, *The Right to Justification. Elements of a Constructivist Theory of Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

50 For example, Breena Holland provides an empirically informed theoretical analysis of the substantive conditions that such deliberations should meet in the context of the capabilities that need to be protected by environmental regulation. See Breena Holland, *Allocating the Earth. A Distributional Framework for Protecting Capabilities in Environmental Law and Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

51 Robeyns, “Selecting Capabilities for Quality of Life Measurement”; Ingrid Robeyns, “The Capability Approach in Practice,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 14, 3 (2005): 351–376.

52 John Broome, *Climate Matters. Ethics in a Warming World,* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

53 See, e.g., claims related to the ecological footprint, or Broome, *Climate Matters.*

54 I am grateful to Zofia Stemplowska and Andrew Williams for pressing these objections.

55 See, e.g., Sarah Conly, “The Right to Procreation: Merits and Limits,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 42, 2 (2005): 105–115, or Christine Overall, *Why Have Children? The Ethical Debate* (Boston: MIT Press, 2012).

56 The claim that raising children is costly is supported by empirical evidence. See Nancy Folbre, *Valuing Children. Rethinking the Economics of the Family* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

57 Perhaps if societies were reformed according to the lines of "property-owning democracies," this could be the case. For an introduction to the idea of a property-owning democracy, see Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson (eds.), *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2012).

58 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, Revised Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

59 Michael Walzer, "Philosophy and Democracy," *Political Theory* 9, 3 (1981): 379–399.

60 Cristina Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

61 Justin Weinberg, "Norms and the Agency of Justice," *Analyse & Kritik* 2 (2009): 319–338.

62 Another important objection is that the entire approach developed in this chapter, which looks at the *effects* of wealth and riches (and hence has quite a strong consequentalist flavor), is mistaken. Rather, we should analyze whether the rich should be entitled to their wealth by investigating whether they *deserve* it. This objection will not be addressed here, since it requires a paper of its own.

63 Ronald Dworkin, "Equality of What? Part 2: Equality of Resources," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10 (1981): 283–245.

64 Although even in a world in which everyone complies with the principles of justice, equality of opportunity over the lifetime may be an elusive ideal, and we may have to rethink the rejection of equality of outcome that took place in political theory over the last two decades. See, among others, Anne Phillips, "Defending Equality of Outcome," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12, 1 (2004): 1–19; Clare Chambers, "Each Outcome Is Another Opportunity: Problems with the Moment of Equal Opportunity," *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 8, 4 (2009): 374–400.

65 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* 52–56.

66 I am grateful to John Quiggin for pressing me on this point.

67 On the alternative interpretation of sufficientarianism, see Shields, "The Prospects for Sufficientarianism."

68 See, e.g., Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, "Winner-Take-All Politics: Public Policy, Political Organization, and the Precipitous Rise of Top Incomes in the United States," *Politics & Society* 38, 2 (2010): 152–204; and Jeffrey A. Winters, *Oligarchy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).