Abstract: The Evolution of Wealth: Democracy or Revolution?

This paper considers one way of justifying constraints on wealth that appeals to the importance of doing so to promote social democracy. The argument suggests that a broad distribution of wealth is necessary for political equality and democracy. It asserts that mutual concern requires supporting a truly democratic society (over, e.g., addressing more property global issues). This essay critiques the appeal to mutual concern as a ground for social democracy and argues that further evidence is necessary to make the case that constraining inequality in the distribution of wealth is necessary for political equality and democracy. However, its aim is not to justify inequality. Rather, I believe social democratic principles justified by appeal to mutual concern should not preclude a much more revolutionary redistribution of income across states; we may need to reform our political as well as economic system to better protect individuals' basic interests irrespective of country of origin.

The Evolution of Wealth and Mutual Concern: Democracy or Revolution?

1. Introduction

This paper considers one way of justifying constraints on wealth that appeals to the importance of doing so to promote social democracy. The argument suggests that mutual concern requires supporting a truly democratic society (over, e.g., addressing more property global issues). It asserts that social democracy requires political equality which requires a strong middle class. And, on many accounts, this requires a tax on wealth as well as income (even if wealth does not earn interest), public funding for public education, easier access to credit for many segments of the population, and support for generous health insurance amongst other things. This essay critiques the appeal to mutual concern as a ground for social democracy and suggests that further evidence is necessary to make the case that constraining inequality in the distribution of wealth is necessary for political equality and democracy. However, its aim is not to justify inequality. Rather, I believe social democratic principles justified by appeal to mutual concern should not preclude a much more revolutionary redistribution of income across states; we may need to reform our political as well as economic system to better protect individuals' basic interests irrespective of country of origin.

2. Wealth, Commonwealth, & the Constitution of Opportunity

Consider the Democratic Equality Argument:

1. We should support a truly democratic society and this deserves a great deal of priority (over, e.g., addressing more properly global issues).

2. A truly democratic society requires political equality.

3. Political equality requires a strong middle class.

4. A strong middle class requires limits on inequality in wealth.

SC. A truly democratic society requires limits on inequality in wealth.[i]

C. We should support limits on inequality in wealth within society and this deserves a great deal of priority.

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The inspiration for this argument is in James Fishkin and William E. Forbath's "Wealth, Commonwealth, & the Constitution of Opportunity: A Story of Two Traditions" though I will suggest below that they must offer much more defense of some key premises. However, I think that something along these lines motivates a lot of the concern about inequality in the accumulation of wealth. So the argument merits investigation on its own terms.

What does an adequate defense of the Democratic Equality Argument require? It may be true by definition that democracy is a good thing and that we should support a truly democratic society. It may also be the case that such democracy obviously requires certain kinds of political equality and a strong middle class.[ii] However, the strongest version of the argument would provide reason to embrace the kind of democracy at issue and provide evidence that this kind of democracy requires certain kinds of political equality and a strong middle class. We need to consider the fundamental value of democratic equality because many actual democracies are highly imperfect.[iii] Moreover, many things matter besides democracy – like poverty relief – and democracy may make it more difficult to secure some of these things.[iv] At least there is a large debate in empirical circles about the costs and benefits of democratic governance (Gerring et al., 2005, 323). So some argument is necessary to address critics of democracy, political equality, and the value of having such a strong middle class. Moreover, the idea that democracy, equality or a strong middle class requires limits on inequality in wealth is clearly empirical. So what follows will first consider the claim that we should support a kind of democracy that plausibly requires limits on the accumulation of wealth (and great inequality in it). Then the essay will return to the empirical questions and see whether advocates of the remaining premises have shown that political equality requires a strong middle class and that this, in turn, requires limits on inequality in wealth.

3. The Ethics of Social Democracy

Although Fishkin and Forbath offer some defense of the empirical claims in the Democratic Equality Argument, like many of its advocates, they assume that social democracy has great value. It is important, however, to defend this premise. In "The Ethics of Social Democracy," Richard Miller offers what I take to be one of the most compelling defenses of the claim that we should support, and give a great deal of priority to, establishing and maintaining social democracy in the literature. Miller gives a primarily theoretical argument in favor of social democracy which he believes requires reducing inequality in all kinds of wealth (not only capital), as well as poverty relief (Miller, 2015, 9 and 23). He says social democracy's goal should be ensuring self-reliance for all by helping everyone meet:

> a variety of needs, through measures that reduce the income of the best-off in their societies. For example, along with anti-poverty programs and assurance to the poor of care for severe illness, social democrats want government to provide extensive access to

> educational and cultural resources and assurance to all of adequate care for illness in general (Miller, 2015, 1).

Miller says we should aim at the impartial promotion of everyone's interests and "a system of laws and policies that shapes people's lives throughout a society is relevantly impartial if one would choose it if one sought to advance the wellbeing of someone for whom one is responsible, among those who will be affected, but did not know who this is" (Miller, 2015, 2).[v] Impartiality, Miller argues, requires social democracy: private property, civil and political rights, tax-financed public provision of education and a social safety net.

Impartiality is justified by mutual concern:

> Everyone's underlying concern for others ought to be sufficiently great that greater concern would impose a significant risk of worsening his or her life, if he or she fulfilled all further responsibilities; but apart from special relationships or interactions it does not have to be more demanding than this (Miller, 2015, 15).

To have "underlying concern for others," one must help people meet their needs which requires helping them avoid "a significant risk of worsening" their lives and "to pursue enjoyably and well worthwhile goals with which one intelligently identifies and from which one cannot readily detach" (Miller, 2015, 15).

Miller says the commitment to impartial promotion of welfare is not demeaning or intrusive. Helping people secure self-reliance requires distinguishing between giving people handouts and ensuring that they can pursue their own conception of the good. Though, he lists many other aspects of well-being that we might promote in addition to self-reliance.

Moreover, he argues that his view is not intolerant or condescending. He says it is not intolerant since "self-reliance is advanced by letting people work out their own answer to the difficult question of what is good for them and what they need" (Miller, 2015, 21). Miller says social democracy is not condescending because it is an invitation "to join a social process whose effectiveness in impartially helping people to help themselves is a proper source of pride to all participants" (Miller, 2015, 28).

4. *Is Mutual Concern Necessary or Sufficient for Social Democracy?*

My main concern is with Miller's argument for mutual concern and the conception of welfare it embodies. I have two worries. First, I wonder if the demand to have mutual concern for others requires too much. Again mutual concern basically requires promoting others' welfare insofar as that does not worsen one's life prospects. Miller says this requirement is justified because "If I could be more concerned to help others live better lives without imposing a significant risk of worsening my life, but, nonetheless, I do not care about helping them, I do not treat their lives as just as valuable as mine" (Miller, 2015, 16). Is it impossible, however, to treat others' lives as just as valuable as mine without caring equally for them? Their lives are, after all, not my life (or the lives of my loved ones). Equal respect does not require equal concern. Others (e.g. who are wealthier) may generally bear the duty to care for those in need or promote their interests and I

may just have to respect their interests. A better justification for social democracy might appeal to the great number of interests at stake in living in a society that supports its members to such a great degree. After all, we may all gain if we do not have to care for others so much. Some can produce much more of social value than others. So we may generally do better to allow some to gain property in things that do not improve their own life prospects even if others could benefit more from these goods if these people go on to benefit society with the fruits of their labor or investment.

On the other hand, is Miller's claim that we need only have mutual concern for others (we need not care for them so much that we take on any risk of worsening our life) always justified? He says we need not have more concern because, "If equal respect for all required impartial concern for all, then I might have to make large sacrifices to relieve greater deprivation of others. However, that assumption confuses equal respect with equal concern" (Miller, 2015, 16). Moreover, he says that by giving priority to his own, or his loved ones', minor interests over even the lives of others (e.g. by spending his money on nice clothes or private schools rather than poverty relief), he does not "express the appalling view that their lives were less valuable" (Miller, 2015, 16-17). Even if Miller is right about the symbolic significance of giving priority to one's (or one's loved one's) minor interests over others' major interests or lives, that does not justify the view that we must only show so much concern for others that more would "impose a significant risk of worsening" our lives (though the symbolic significance might also be altered as our moral conception changes) (Miller, 2015, 15). I do not think that, on an adequate account of welfare, Professor Miller's life would be worse if he were less well dressed (even all the time). I think he should get more satisfaction from helping others. But even if he does not, and his life is worse, why is more not required? How can we justifiably let some die so that we can be well dressed or attend private universities or whatever? Why need not we respect and care for all lives more than that?[vi]

Consider the account of welfare that seems to motivate Miller to see whether it is a justifiable basis for his principle of mutual concern that specifies both what we must generally be willing to give to others and what we are allowed to keep: Besides self-reliance, Miller says people need:

> access to a variety of successes in living, for example, the enjoyment, development and expression of personal affection and friendship; inquiry whose complexity, content and demands suits their curiosity, interests, temperament and capacity for learning; meaningful work and reciprocation for others' contributions in cooperation; the fulfillment of responsibilities that grow with growing capacities; the enjoyment of beauty; having fun (Miller, 2015, 3-4).

He says:

> Of course, a need for help in escaping a situation in which self-reliance is apt to lead to a life pervaded by drudgery and fatigue is an especially strong reason [for aid]. But other needs as well provide social democrats with relevant reasons. For example, the preparation needed to appreciate cultural achievements and the need for activities fitting one's temperament, interests and talents are reasons for tax-supported help in receiving an

> advanced education in the humanities which the Ph.D.'s can use to educate others, even though the absence of help is not a ticket to poverty (Miller, 2015, 9).

He continues: "social democrats seek to provide access to culture and natural beauty" (Miller, 2015, 17-18).

> [A]nd a public built environment that is elevating in its major accomplishments, charming in its everyday presence and a basis for widely enjoyed intermingling of people with many different backgrounds. If public funding and regulation, blind to such more than political values, provides no access to Shakespeare for the vast majority of people in an Anglophone country, leaves high culture generally the preserve of a well-off economic elite and the cultural elite who serve them, and leaves vast numbers of people without ready access to vistas and walkways more elevating than shopping malls, it seems philistine gerrymandering to declare that this is not a failure of basic justice (Miller, 2015, 23).

But can pursuit of all of these things really justify not helping others? If I want to see Shakespeare on occasion, can I do so instead of saving someone's life? On the other hand, must I help others go to a museum or complete a PhD rather than going out to lunch even if having another lunch out does nothing to improve the quality of my life?[vii] Again, many might fare better if we allow some to have property that does not improve their life even if it would improve others' lives.[viii]

I think what is necessary for setting the standard of what we must guarantee for others is both a more robust and limited account of welfare on which people need whatever will enable them to live minimally good lives. When important interests are at stake, we must sometimes sacrifice even something that will impinge on our quality of life but when minor interests are in play, we need not normally sacrifice so much (though surely it would be justifiable for us to do so). I have argued at length for a conception of the minimally good life elsewhere but roughly I say this: People need (1) an *adequate range* of the (2) *fundamental conditions* that (3) *are necessary (and perhaps important) for* (4) *securing* (5) *meaningful pursuits, relationships, pleasures, knowledge, appreciation, and worthwhile activities etc.* (5) *a reasonable and caring person would set as a minimal standard of justifiable aspiration.* We can figure out what exactly is necessary by considering what someone about whom we know little – say, a newborn infant - will need for a life at the lowest level of flourishing and what if secured, would leave no serious reasons to doubt that the life could be well-lived. This is what people can (at a minimum) justifiably aspire to attain. When it is impossible for someone to attain this much, they should get as close as possible to doing so (Hassoun, 2013; Hassoun, 2016). We can still "reasonably affirm" that someone lives a minimally good life who does not reach the relevant threshold, but this requires employing a different conception of such a life (Haybron, 2013, Ch. 8).

Many things impact individuals' ability to live minimally good lives in this sense besides the satisfaction of their material needs. People require resources, capacities and institutional structures amongst other things. Everyone needs adequate food and water and most require some amount of education, shelter, social and emotional goods etc. But people must also be able to secure fundamental capacities including liberty and autonomy, the ability to think and connect

with others, appreciate things of value, and develop skills amongst other things. People require social and institutional structures that support the development of their capacities and allow them to secure basic goods. They must have the opportunity to interact with others, to learn, "to evaluate and appreciate things" and to determine their life's direction (Liao, 2015). That is, everyone requires the internal and external conditions for securing the things to which they can justifiably aspire (Liao, 2015). They must have the natural as well as social conditions to live minimally good lives.

People need some kinds of recognition and respect to live minimally good lives. Severe forms of discrimination can, for instance, undermine individuals' ability to live the kind of minimally good lives at issue. There is a sense in which protections of this ability safe-guard individuals' basic moral status or dignity.

To some extent what is necessary for people to live minimally good lives is determined by historical circumstance. As Adam Smith pointed out – a linen shirt may be necessary for people to take part in public life in some societies and not others (Smith, 1776). Food and other resources may have to be culturally appropriate (Sen, 1997). Some people are so tied to particular cultural practices, ways of life, or societies that they can only flourish within them. Others require opportunities or resources that are not available when, or where, they live but that they might secure elsewhere in the foreseeable future.

Still, what is necessary for people to live minimally good lives is a matter of objective fact. While it matters that some important desires are fulfilled, some things can contribute to a person's flourishing even if that person does not desire those things.[ix] There is a difference between matters of pure preference and true urgency.[x]

One might wonder what this alternative would say about support for cultural achievements, higher education, and the arts? Would they have to be funded by voluntary contributions? Would they be private goods? These things are certainly capable of promoting individuals' ability to live minimally good lives but are not normally necessary for people to do so. Perhaps we would have to provide some such options for people (especially as some people will require these things to live minimally good lives), but debates about this issue seem relatively unimportant in our world where the starving and huddled masses demand our attention. What is much clearer is that we should not invest so much in ourselves when others are in such desperate need.

Miller would likely try to justify the claim that we need not help the starving masses at any cost to our quality of life by appeal to national or state boundaries. Perhaps the special relationships with compatriots allow us to do other things first. Miller's principle of mutual concern is cosmopolitian but, he says, within limits. Consider two of the ways he tries to limit his theory's scope. First, he says "the immediate benefits in meeting unmet needs through transfers to developing countries of resources that might help meet lesser needs of compatriots in a developed country must be balanced against a long-term drain on resources for foreign concern" (Miller, 2015, 25). This is true but also within limits – we might always invest more for the future but when people are dying now, the idea that we could save more later, may not provide sufficient justification for waiting to aid those currently in need. Moreover, how many will die in the future likely depends to a great extent on what we do now. If we foster development and do

not just provide humanitarian aid, that may make a great difference to many people's lives for many generations. "Second," Miller says, "the needs for self-reliance and for reciprocity in valued associations have international implications. Mutual reliance among people within poor countries ought to be and is their preferred means of advancing beyond poverty" (Miller, 2015, 26). I do not see why this should be so but Miller does make an exception for cases of desperate need so I will set the point aside here. He also points out, however, that there are "Limits to the effectiveness of foreign aid... Foreign aid typically seems to make no marginal contribution to growth at the highest current levels of aid dependency" (Miller, 2015, 26). However, there is good evidence that aid often helps alleviate poverty and can be scaled up widely. Macro-level measures of aid's effectiveness (when looking at non-military aid etc.) also show strong poverty-reducing impacts and general studies of aid's impact on growth are besides the point as growth can increase even as poverty does (Hassoun, 2010). Although there may be some limits on the ability of countries to absorb foreign aid, we need not always give to countries directly. We can direct aid to non-governmental and other sub-national social institutions.[xi] The democratic equality argument's assertion that distributions among compatriots should have priority when others are in greater need is not plausible.

In short, neither of Miller's points undercuts the application of his general idea to foreigners – we should help them whenever our lives will not be worsened by doing so. If my critique is right, we may have to help them even at some significant cost to ourselves when their major interests are at stake and ours are not. At the same time, we may be entitled to more as a result of our efforts given our talents than Miller supposes. We may not have to give so much to those who are capable of living a minimally good (or even very good) life. It is not clear what support an appropriately qualified version of Miller's argument will provide for social democracy never mind the claim that promoting social democracy should have priority over other things like reducing poverty.

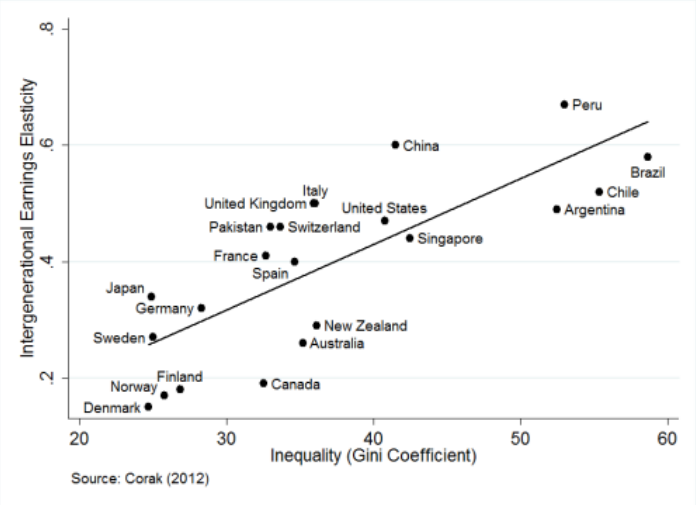
Of course, it is also possible to give other arguments for social democracy and limits on the accumulation of wealth, but many of the above reflections will apply to these arguments as well: one needs an independent account of what kind of equality and democracy matters to understand its value (and why promoting social democracy deserves priority over doing other things like reducing poverty). One also needs an empirical argument showing that this value is threatened by economic inequality. Other things, like ensuring that everyone can live a minimally good life, may require us to give priority to reducing global (as opposed to national) inequality. But, rather than continuing with this inquiry here, let us turn to the empirical evidence that social democracy requires political equality, a strong middle class, and limits on inequality in the distribution of wealth and set aside questions about whether or not it is the kind of thing we should support for now.

5. Does Democracy Require Equality?

In their delightful article, "Wealth, Commonwealth, & the Constitution of Opportunity: A Story of Two Traditions", Fishkin and Forbath point out that there is some evidence in favor of the remaining premises of the Democratic Equality Argument in Miles Corak's "Great Gatsby curve" and Thomas Piketty's popular book *Capital in the 21st Century*. Corak's "Great Gatsby curve" was named by Alan Krueger in a presentation at the Center for American Progress

(Corak, 2006). It shows a correlation between inequality and intergenerational earnings elasticity – a measure of change in earnings between generations in a country. Countries with low inequality have larger changes in earnings between generations on average.

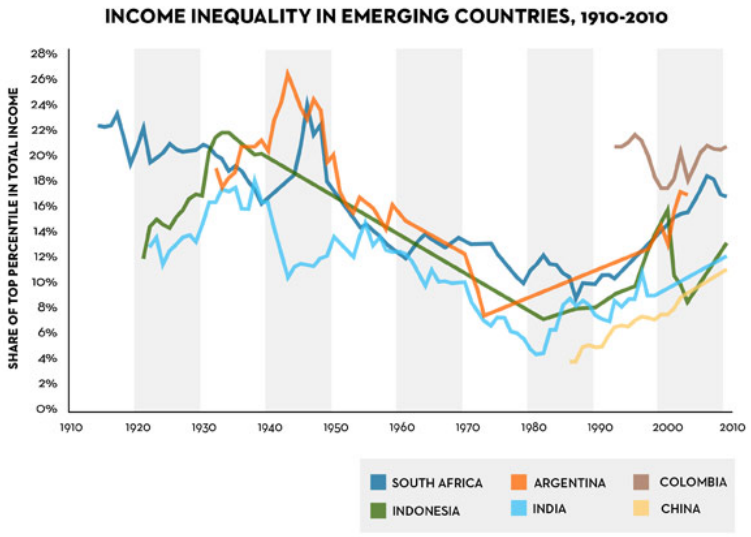
There are several problems with this argument. First, a correlation does not prove causation. There are many differences between countries, like Finland, with relatively compressed income distributions and countries with high inequality, like the US, that might explain the differences in social mobility. Moreover, it is not clear whether social mobility *per se* is a good thing – some changes across generations are for the worse (there may be high elasticity if a high inequality society with a moderate amount of poverty becomes a low inequality society that is uniformly poor). In any case, even if equality is bad for social mobility in an important sense, this does not establish any of the premises in the Democratic Equality Argument – even its fourth premise – that a strong middle class requires limits on inequality in wealth. The middle class may remain the same size precisely because children of middle class parents are likely to remain middle class.



Excerpted From: (Corak, 2012)

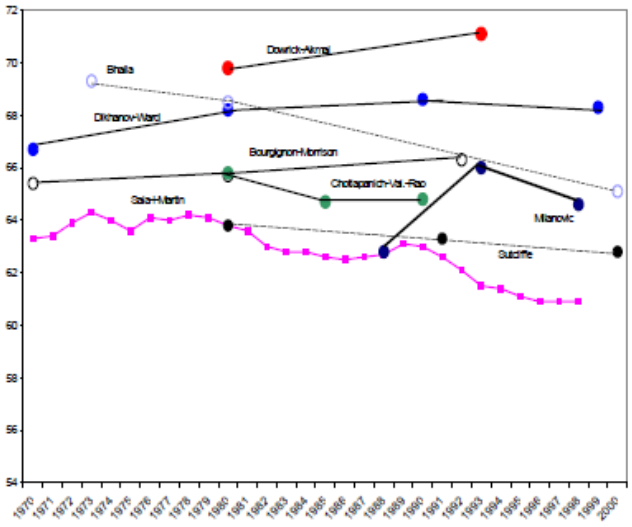
The cover of *Capital in the 21st Century* says that the book argues that when returns on capital exceed the rate of growth, that can generate inequality, create discontent, and undermine democracy, but most of Piketty's empirical work is focused on showing rising income inequality and the concentration of wealth and the book primarily attempts to establish that inequality increases when the rate of growth of capital exceeds that of general economic growth (Piketty 2003; 2010; 2013; Piketty and Saez 2003). So at best it establishes the fourth premise of the Democratic Equality Argument. Much more argument is necessary to support the Democratic Equality Argument. Again, it may be true by definition that a truly democratic society requires a certain kind of political equality, but further evidence is necessary to show that this kind of equality requires a strong middle class and limits on inequality in wealth.[xii] Be that as it may, what follows considers a few critiques of Piketty's argument to throw into question the support it provides for this premise.

First, some have criticized the empirical methods Piketty used to estimate inequality [for some public discussion, see, for instance: Irwin, 2014 and Giles, 2014].



Excerpted From: (Cassidy, 2014)

This is not surprising. There are all kinds of inequality and different methods for measuring different kinds of inequality yield very different results. Consider, for instance, various authors' estimates of world inequality (inequality between all individuals irrespective of country of origin).



Excerpted From: Milanovic, Worlds Apart: International and Global Inequality, 1950-2000.

Researchers do not even find the same trends in inequality; their estimates depend, in part, on whether they use household survey data or GDP per capita along with information about intra-country distribution. There are problems with both procedures and the estimates also rely on problematic assumptions about currency convertibility (Hassoun, 2011).

Second, some question Pickety's claim that it is a law of capitalism that inequality will increase when the rate of growth of capital exceeds the rate of growth in GDP.[xiii] Here are his projections for world growth rates and the rate of return on investment:

Excerpted From: (Cassidy, 2014)

There are many reasons that inequality may not rise whenever the rate of growth of capital exceeds the rate of growth in GDP – he provides a few examples – war and economic depression, but there may be others as well (Cassidy, 2014). Paul Schultz who agrees that "the increase in inequality in the distribution of personal income in many high income countries after 1980… is particularly pronounced in the United Kingdom and the United States" cites a lot of evidence to suggest that:

> this growth in inequality is associated with increased wage differentials by skill, measured by schooling, occupation, and labor market experience, but not necessarily by gender. The growing importance of international trade is ascribed a role in the intercountry diffusion of this change in wage structures, but not all economic studies confirm an important role of international trade compared to the residual skill-biased technical change (Shultz, 1998, 2).

Changes in these factors might greatly alter the evolution of inequality even in the absence of new taxes on wealth.

5. Conclusion: Practical Conclusions and Underlying Values

Even if we grant that the Democratic Equality Argument is plausible, it does not establish that we should implement the policies its advocates prefer. Fishkin and Forbath (amongst others) argue, for instance, that we should tax wealth that does not earn interest. I am not sure that this is always so. There is nothing wrong with saving money and a tax on pure savings may be counter-productive depending on economic circumstances.[xiv] Capital can also be productive, though

production, like consumption, can cause harm (and, do not get me wrong, I think there are plenty of reasons to tax the rich – whether they hold their wealth in capital or just have very large incomes). What matters, I think, is whether capital markets are promoting the kind of production we want and whether or not consumption, or something else, would be better. Perhaps we would do better to pay attention to what uses of capital (what kinds of production and consumption) we want to promote and allow. Some kinds of speculative investments may act as a kind of insurance but can also tie our fortunes together in ways that can be quite destructive. If food prices rise because people move their investments into agriculture as housing markets collapse, that can contribute to a world food crisis (UN, 2011). When people invest in (or consume) non-renewable forms of energy from firms with poor human rights records or methods of resource extraction, that may exacerbate poverty and spur climate change (Pogge, 2008). There are many things governments could do to regulate these kinds of exchanges, though we require more creative thinking about how to address all of the challenges capital poses in our increasingly globalized world.[xv]

In any case, there are many ways to argue for constraining the accumulation of wealth. Further evidence is necessary to show that we must constrain the accumulation of wealth to protect political equality and democracy, that whatever threat inequality poses is sufficient reason to implement the policies those who endorse this conclusion prefer, and even to establish that the value of democracy upon which arguments for limiting the accumulation of wealth often draw is always positive. There seems to me to be something in the observation that:

> Democratic ideals have inspired countless egalitarian movements, but liberal democracy has triumphed across so much of the world because of its success as counterrevolutionary reform: no other political system has done a better job defanging social resentment and fostering acceptance of vast inequalities. The ability to dismiss elected officials when they prove disappointing might seem like a feeble vestige of what democracy promised, especially after tabulating the paltry fraction of the population that bothers to engage in the process, but it has proved remarkably effective at the baser task of protecting the powerful (Shenk, 2014, 9).

We may not so much need new arguments for political economy as concrete, if not revolutionary, new proposals for reforming our political as well as economic system to better protect at least individuals' basic interests irrespective of country of origin.

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i Of course, Fishkin and Forbath basically just assume that the Democratic Equality Argument is defensible but, if I understand their argument correctly, the conclusions they want to establish really hang on this being the case. At least I do not think they would be satisfied with just saying that historically constitutional arguments for substantive equality have been made and we can make such arguments today.

iiii Often the Democratic Equality Argument is supported by appeals to US history. The story is one of slow but steady progress in providing some guarantees of a fair political economy – providing social security, protections of labor, medical care, and education first of all to white men, then slowly to some other segments of the US population. It is possible, however, to tell a much different, more pessimistic, story about US history. On this account, success in achieving substantive equality has, by and large, been small; in the US there is terrible inequality stemming, in part, from deep rooted sexism and racism. The story resembles that given by Howard Zinn in A People's History of the United States of America: 1492-Present). Although this might just amount to emphasizing different parts of the historical picture, this story might leave us very skeptical about the importance of limits on inequality to a strong middle class and social democracy. In any case, much more rigorous cross-country evaluation of inequality in wealth's impact on these things is necessary. But even such correlations would not prove causation. In my opinion, the US has been much less successful than its Nordic peers in eliminating inequality partly for structural reasons and partly because of its religious/cultural background. Many Nordic countries have multi-party democratic systems that represent a much broader range of public interests. They have relatively homogenous populations and broad support for social solidarity. The US lacks these things and is located on a continent that was over-run by violent colonialists, settled by religious zealots, and founded by rich people opposed to taxation. Settlers were hell-bent on genocidal elimination of native populations, and subsequent generations torn apart by a war over slavery.

iii Many democracies are deeply inegalitarian – the articulate, organized, and wealthy are able to secure a lot of power in many democratic societies and different ways of democratizing yield different power structures. The respect implicit in one person- one vote systems may be primarily symbolic and this symbolism can be secured in other ways.

Even if the US political system started to resemble something more like the democracies in some Nordic countries, I would still be dismayed at the injustice democracy permits. Especially with the rise of nationalism, the way that Europeans treat foreigners is not always better than how the US treats them. So, while I believe it would be a great if it were easier for poor people in the US to survive, flourish, and perhaps even get rich, this seems to me to miss what is most important globally about the distribution of wealth and other monetary resources.

iv If we are concerned about the distribution of wealth, I do not think that how the middle class fares (at least in developed countries) is really the most pressing issue -- my friends with student loans may never buy a house but they are fine. Even most poor Americans are pretty well-off in global terms.

v This is different than a Rawlsian veil of ignorance as Miller believes Rawlsian arguments that start from a mere commitment to a political conception of well-being cannot ground social democracy.

vi Miller does allow that there are times when it would be rational for us to change our preferences and says that when we are in the minority that has to sacrifice something that does impact their quality of life, we should not resist doing so. We can turn sacrifice into points of pride if we see ourselves as doing our civic duty. But why should the number of others who must sacrifice the quality of their lives to assure social democracy matter to whether or not we should do so? Here at least, it seems Miller may be invoking a more consequentialist consideration than mutual concern. However, in other work, Miller also allows that there are times when our duties may demand that we sacrifice our quality of life in a clearly non-consequentialist way. In the first chapter of his book Globalizing Justice, Miller modifies Singer's near-by rescue case so that the potential rescuer would have to miss a flight to an interview that gives them their last realistic chance of getting a job in philosophy. He says that the person is required to help in nearby rescue cases nonetheless because doing so is required by the moral code that we should all endorse ex ante (the costs of nearby rescue are typically low). Moreover, he says those who are in need cannot require a more demanding principle while respecting everyone equally because the relatively affluent can reasonably reject such principles. But I cannot see why his principle should be understood in the ex-ante sense. Moreover, if the affluent can reasonably reject giving more to the poor, that may only show that reasonable rejection leads to much too minimal moral principles. Perhaps the number of others' (especially significant) interests at stake is what really justifies social democracy.

viivii My PhD student, John, struggles valiantly to provide for his family while getting a PhD in philosophy but I'm not sure I have to aid him in that struggle (as more than his teacher) given that I have my own husband and child to put through school and spent 10 or more years working and struggling to put myself through a PhD program. Perhaps we need not generally be willing to give everything away to help starving artists or struggling PhD students that is not necessary for maintaining our life quality especially given our justified concern for our family and friends' welfare.

viii This does not require a commitment to a radical version of trickle-down economics, rather the idea is just that sometimes inequality does improve the prospects of the worst- (or at least not best-) off.

ix Although I will not pursue this line of inquiry here, one might also see accounts of welfare (e.g. informed desire or rational care accounts) as attempting to explain these facts and the differences between the accounts may matter only at the margins (Darwell, 2004).

x See (Scanlon, 1975). Though I do not take the later to be determined by consensus in a society.

xi Miller also says "the duty to support political measures to help foreigners in need that is imposed by Mutual Concern is a shared duty of citizenries of all developed countries, with costs properly divided in accordance with domestic capacities and domestic needs. This is the division of costs by which conscientious people would implement their joint commitment to Mutual Concern while expressing their equal valuing of their own lives along with others'" (Miller, 2015, 26). I am not exactly sure what the proposal is here – is it per capita distribution of costs or equal costs between nations treated as solitary units? If it is the former (which seems more justifiable to me) then we can ignore the national units altogether – each rich person is obligated to aid the poor abroad just as each citizen is obligated to aid the poor within their nation. I suppose individual obligations might differ as rich people in poorer developed countries would pay more – but then again one might wonder why that should be.

xii Piketty claims that rising inequality stems from inequality in the returns to capital which does not necessarily come from (nor correlate well with) the productivity of labor and he says this undermines meritocratic democratic values and social justice. Even if this is so, it is not obviously the same as undermining democracy per se.

xiii Some point out, for instance, that this hypothesis is based mostly on data from France and some parts of the EU (Shenk, 2014).

xiv It may also be double-jeopardy given that people who like to save have already paid the tax on their incomes in most cases (or will do so eventually).

xv Or consider Fiskin and Forbath's proposal for a tax on successful graduates of public schools. This, I think, would be a fairly regressive, and prima facie unfair, way to subsidize public education. Private school graduates are likely to make much more on average than those who graduate from public schools. It is not clear why they should be exempt from the tax. In fact, it is not clear why we should even allow private educational institutions if we just want to promote substantive equality. At least a fairer way to pay for public college might be with a more generally applicable progressive tax. A more pressing issue, I believe, is to find a way to fund primary public schools more equitably. Perhaps Fishkin and Forbath are concerned to have a practicable proposal but then why propose taxing wealth – as that is very unlikely to be implementable in a sustainable way given that rich people will just move their money to off-shore tax havens etc.? I am likewise not convinced of the likely success of recent proposals for campaign finance reform.