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Unreasonable Limitarianism

Luchino Hagemeyer
(Universität Hamburg)

Abstract

In this paper, I will argue that limitarianism — the view that nobody should be too rich — is an unreasonable view of distributive justice. I will develop this charge by responding to a recently popular move within the limitarian literature: As Ingrid Robeyns (2022) and Dick Timmer (2021) have suggested, limitarianism can be grounded in incompletely theorized agreements among proponents of different views of justice. As a first step, I will argue this move fails: It is neither clear if limitarianism will be the outcome of some incompletely theorized agreements. Nor is it clear that those agreements, of which it might be the outcome, can provide any justificatory value. As a second step, I will suggest that grounding limitarianism in reasonable agreement within a public reason framework is *prima facie* more plausible. However, despite its initial promise, I will argue that not every reasonable person necessarily has reason to accept limitarianism. More worrisome, I will show that some people may reasonably reject limitarianism. Hence, I will conclude that limitarianism is unreasonable and as such lacks the legitimacy required for any political principle. What has been suggested as a defense of limitarianism, once put under scrutiny, henceforth turns into a significant challenge that must be overcome if limitarianism is to inform public policy.