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A pluralistic approach to global poverty

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Abstract. A large proportion of humankind today lives in avoidable poverty. This article examines whether affluent individuals and governments have moral duties to change this situation. It is maintained that an alternative to the familiar accounts of transdomestic distributive justice and personal ethics put forward by writers such as Peter Singer, John Rawls, and Thomas Pogge is required, since each of these accounts fails to reflect the full range of relevant considerations. A better account would give some weight to overall utility, the condition of the worst off, and individual responsibility. This approach provides robust support to global poverty alleviation.

Introduction

Some two and a half billion people – two-fifths of the world’s population – live on less than \$2 per day. Over a billion people do not have access to clean drinking water and 800 million suffer from hunger and malnutrition.¹ These facts, and many others illustrating the extent, severity and effects of world poverty, are well known by the governments of affluent countries. Thanks, in part, to recent high profile campaigns, the general public are also aware of their broad shape. Yet these facts alone do not offer us a guide to action.

In the first place, there is the question of what, if anything, can be done to reduce world poverty, and related phenomena such as food and clean water shortages. If nothing could be done about global poverty, the facts before us would remain dismaying – horrifying, even – but lose any moral hold they might have on us, since ought implies can. But in fact many things can be done to reduce poverty, as every developed country accepts. And while the developed countries are doing some of these things, through both direct aid and international development organisations, they could clearly do much more. There is huge wealth in advanced industrial societies, and means by which larger portions of this wealth could be converted into more effective assistance for the global poor.

These issues of *feasibility* are vitally important, but they are not the main focus of this article. Rather, I will be concerned with *moral* considerations – that is, with what affluent individuals and governments *ought* to do, given that global poverty is a fact, and that doing more than we presently do about it is feasible. And I will be

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¹ United Nations Development Programme, *2006 Annual Report*, p. 8.

particularly concerned with the insights shed on the problem by contemporary anglophone accounts of distributive justice. In my view, the most plausible position will combine the central considerations of two such accounts with those of a much older view of right and wrong. Yet one need not subscribe to any view this specific to reach the conclusion that present day global poverty is a most grave moral wrong. Those who subscribe to any one of these accounts (at least, in their most plausible construals), or any combination of them, should reach this conclusion. World poverty is perhaps exceptional in being opposed from so many otherwise conflicting perspectives. In the rush to stake their distinctive positions on transdomestic distributive justice,² philosophers have made surprisingly little of this remarkable fact.

The discussion begins with the aforementioned older view of right and wrong – that of utilitarianism. Two subsequent sections each consider a prominent recent approach to distributive justice: first, the Rawlsian approach, which focuses in particular on improving the standing of the worst off; and second, a post-Rawlsian approach which, though formulated in different ways by Thomas Pogge and luck egalitarians, is characterised by a focus on responsibility considerations. In each case, the central concern is with how these approaches have been applied to transdomestic distributive justice, the extent to which this application is plausible, whether a superior alternative application is available, and what these various applications have to say about the issue of world poverty.

An additional concern is with *personal ethics*, or more specifically, with what each affluent individual ought to do according to each of these approaches, and their various transdomestic applications. This is appropriate in the case of utilitarianism and, as I will construe it, luck egalitarianism, since these positions are ‘monistic’ in the sense of denying ‘the specific claim that the two practical problems of institutional design and personal conduct require, at the fundamental level, two different kinds of practical principle’.³ It is also appropriate when considering Pogge’s work since, though he denies monism, he defends a particular ‘dualist’ position (that is one which accepts the above ‘specific claim’) that sets out demanding requirements for individual conduct regarding world poverty.⁴ Although John Rawls was less forthcoming on such questions, there may be grounds for devising a Rawlsian personal ethics.⁵

Utilitarianism

The principle of utility was famously formulated by Jeremy Bentham in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* as ‘that principle which

² I adopt the unusual language of ‘transdomestic justice’ since this seems neutral in a way that more common terms such as ‘international justice’ and ‘global justice’ are not. For useful discussion see Onora O’Neill, *Bounds of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 115; Simon Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2. I prefer my term to O’Neill’s ‘transnational justice’ since it seems to carry even less unnecessary baggage.

³ Liam Murphy, ‘Institutions and the Demands of Justice’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 27 (1999), pp. 251–91, at p. 254.

⁴ See Thomas Pogge, ‘On the Site of Distributive Justice: Reflections on Cohen and Murphy’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 29 (2000), pp. 137–69 and *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).

⁵ See note 53 below and the attached text.

approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question'.⁶ It is curious that, in this initial formulation, Bentham leaves open the question of who the party in question actually is.

For our purposes, there seem to be two key questions regarding application of the principle of utility. Which party's happiness is to be maximised? And what implications does this maximisation have for the affluent world's response to global poverty? In the *Introduction*, Bentham focuses on the domestic case, and holds that the appropriate party to consider is the community as a whole, the community's happiness being just the sum of its members' happiness. But his posthumously published *Principles of International Law* treats the relevant party in the trans-domestic case as the nations concerned, the end being the 'common and equal utility of all nations'.⁷ Modern day utilitarians have increasingly taken the global population as the relevant party. Peter Singer, in particular, has focused on the question of world poverty, and the discussion in his influential 1972 article 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality' is enlightening for our purposes.⁸

Singer starts with an assumption that he feels will be acceptable to most: 'that suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad'. Next, he suggests two versions of what I will call the *prevention principle*: the first, stronger version is that, 'if it is in our power to prevent something *bad* from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of *comparable moral importance*, we ought, morally, to do it'; the second, weaker version is that, 'if it is in our power to prevent something *very bad* from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything *morally significant*, we ought, morally, to do it'.⁹ To illustrate the application of the principle, he imagines walking past a shallow pond, and seeing a child drowning in it. In this case, it is uncontroversial that the child should be rescued, since the death of the child would be very bad, while the muddying of clothes involved in the rescue is insignificant.

While in many contexts such as this individuals routinely act on the prevention principle, Singer urges that in many others they contradict it. Consistent endorsement of the principle in either form would, he supposes, fundamentally alter our world. For the principle is unconcerned with matters of proximity or distance – whether the child is ten yards away or thousands of miles away – or whether I alone or millions could act to prevent the bad thing from occurring. Of course, this indifference has obvious implications where the topic is that of world poverty. There may be psychological reasons why a Westerner may be less inclined to address urgent needs in Africa than those right on their doorstep – we may feel less guilty about refusing assistance where we will not see the effects of this in person, or where others habitually make similar refusals. But these reasons do not have a moral basis.¹⁰ In

⁶ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (London: Athlone, 1970), ch. I, sec. 2, p. 12.

⁷ Jeremy Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. John Bowring (Edinburgh: Tait, 1843), vol. II, p. 537; see also David Lyons, *In the Interest of the Governed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 102–5.

⁸ Peter Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1 (1972), pp. 229–43; see also Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), ch. 8.

⁹ Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality', p. 231, my emphasis.

¹⁰ See Richard J. Arneson, 'Do Patriotic Ties Limit Global Justice Duties?', *Journal of Ethics*, 9 (2005), pp. 127–50.

consequence, Singer suggests that '[t]he traditional distinction between duty and charity cannot be drawn, or at least, not in the place we usually draw it'.¹¹ Non-governmental organisations providing the means for relatively rich individuals to help the global poor are referred to as 'charities'; while it may be thought good when an individual contributes, it is not thought bad when she does not. But new clothes, say, are not morally significant, whereas saving a life is. Hence, spending the money on the latter rather than the former is required by morality; the contrary action is morally wrong.

The argument is framed in terms that Singer hopes will appeal to utilitarians and non-utilitarians alike. The appeal to non-utilitarians is based on the weak version of the prevention principle, on which 'it may not follow that we ought to reduce ourselves to the level of marginal utility, for one might hold that to reduce oneself and one's family to this level is to cause something significantly bad to happen'. Even the weaker version has radical implications, he believes: 'it should be clear that we would have to give away enough to ensure that the consumer society, dependent as it is on people spending on trivia rather than giving to famine relief, would slow down and perhaps disappear entirely'.¹² I am sceptical about this. There is no *prima facie* reason for holding the 'trivia' of consumer society to be morally insignificant. That a Western child is happy for even a few days seems to me to be morally significant; since that happiness may be based on being the recipient of a particular favoured toy, the provision of that toy may itself be morally significant. Many adults have their own consumerist sources of happiness (however short-lived), and these sources also take on moral significance. And once this is accepted, one who endorses the weak version of the prevention principle can simply observe that aiding the global poor will almost always have some morally significant opportunity cost.

Of course, the moral significance in such cases pales in comparison to, say, the moral significance of a child being well-fed rather than starving. To introduce this comparison of moral significance, and favour that course of action which realises the more significant moral goods, is to endorse the stronger version of the prevention principle. This need not be accompanied by full-blown utilitarianism – one might, for instance, hold that rights of various utility-trumping kinds exist. But since such rights might be filled out in such a way that, say, one is permitted to spend one's money exactly as one wishes, the utilitarian route to the kind of conclusion Singer wants to reach appears to be surer than most. There is an important reason for this. Diminishing marginal returns – the fact that, in general, £1 creates more utility in the hands of a poor person than it does in the hands of a rich person – provides a utilitarian reason for distributing money in egalitarian fashion.¹³ This is even stronger as a reason for transdomestic redistribution than it is as a reason for domestic redistribution. A pound or a dollar can buy much more in a developing country than it can in a developed one. This is likely to more than offset the effect of lower expectations among the poor in generally poor countries, although that is also an important empirical factor to be taken into account.

Utilitarianism is a comprehensive moral theory – it prescribes action for both individuals and governments. In recent formulations it is *cosmopolitan*, in that the

¹¹ Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality', p. 235.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹³ Peter Singer, 'The Right to be Rich or Poor', in Jeffrey Paul (ed.), *Reading Nozick* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), p. 50.

basic unit of moral concern is the individual. Despite utilitarianism's bad reputation, I think it is clear what it has to say on the topic of world poverty: affluent individuals must alleviate it as a matter of morality; affluent governments must alleviate it as a matter of social justice.¹⁴ Nevertheless, I do not think it is an ideal basis on which to apply the strong prevention principle, since I believe that at least two things other than total or average utility matter, morally speaking. One of these is central to the most prominent account of distributive justice to have emerged in the twentieth century. It is to this account that I now turn.

Rawlsian justice

In 1971 Rawls published *A Theory of Justice*,¹⁵ and political philosophy would never be the same again. Rawls argued for a modernised version of the social contract theory of Locke, Rousseau and Kant, dispensing with a quasi-historical state of nature, and putting in its stead an explicitly ahistorical 'original position', from which a group of persons are to decide on the principles by which the main institutions of their society are to be organised. The original position incorporates a 'veil of ignorance', to the effect that those choosing the principles do not know their own place in the resulting distribution. Rawls further argues that, facing such a profound, one-off choice, the choosers would settle on principles that, firstly secure basic liberties (political liberty, property rights, freedom from physical and psychological assault, and freedoms of speech, assembly, conscience, thought); secondly ensure 'fair equality of opportunity' (that each has the same chance to acquire each position, except where an opportunity inequality improves the opportunities of those with lesser opportunities); and thirdly, guarantee the greatest benefit for the least advantaged (the worst-off are to hold as much income and wealth as possible, consistent with basic liberties, fair equality of opportunity and obligations to future generations). The overall account, which Rawls calls 'justice as fairness', describes a distribution of rights, liberties, self-respect, opportunities, income, and wealth – collectively, 'social primary goods' – that is to the advantage of the worst off.

The principles Rawls endorses seem on the face of it to provide much support for world poverty alleviation. Most obviously, the 'difference principle', which ensures that the income and wealth of the worst off are maximised, might seem to provide the basis for a very direct argument for improving the economic standing of the global poor. The basic liberties and fair equality of opportunity are 'lexically prior' to – roughly, trumping of – the difference principle, but these too seem to support substantial assistance to the globally worst off. Clearly, many people in the

¹⁴ Singer himself would maybe be uncomfortable with describing this as a concern of justice, and Brian Barry has suggested that his utilitarianism is really concerned with the contrasting notion of 'humanity'. See Singer, *Practical Ethics*, pp. 14–15; Barry, 'Humanity and Justice in Global Perspective', in J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (eds), *Nomos XXIV: Ethics, Economics, and the Law* (New York: New York University Press, 1982). But others make it clear that utilitarianism gives a central role to distributive justice. See, for instance J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* in his *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), ch. V; R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), ch. 9; P. J. Kelly, *Utilitarianism and Distributive Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); references to revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

developing world do not have the right to vote or the freedom to publicly criticise their rulers, and it is manifest both that these persons are denied access to many kinds of jobs found in prosperous countries, and that this denial does not improve the opportunities of the denied. Overthrowing these prevailing political and occupational circumstances is in practice very much tied up with improving the material condition of the poor. Even if this is not strictly speaking a precondition of equal access to the democratic process and the job market, it is clearly no impediment to it, and hence appears to be mandated by one and consistent with the other two of the demands of Rawlsian justice.

But Rawls' masterpiece also presents some obvious obstacles to global poverty alleviation. *A Theory of Justice* explicitly states that the theory is only to be applied within a society. Furthermore, in those few places where the book offers some tangential discussion of transdomestic justice, it is characterised as a question of 'the justice of the law of nations and of relations between states'.¹⁶ Hence, in a discussion occasioned by his analysis of conscription and conscientious refusal, Rawls suggests that 'one may extend the interpretation of the original position and think of the parties as representatives of different nations who must choose together the fundamental principles to adjudicate conflicting claims among states'.¹⁷ He comments that this procedure is 'fair among nations', and that there would be 'no surprises' in the outcome, 'since the principles chosen would . . . be familiar ones' ensuring treaty compliance, describing the conditions for just wars, and granting rights of self-defence and self-determination – the latter being 'a right of a people to settle its own affairs without the intervention of foreign powers'.¹⁸ This is, then, a thoroughly *nationalist* conception of justice: social justice applies only within a state or nation. Rawls's radical principles of distributive justice, such as the difference principle, would only hold transdomestically where, improbably, states had signed treaties to this effect. Given that such wide ranging internationally redistributive treaties have never been signed, *A Theory of Justice* provided a rationale for the Western general public's impression that their duties to the global poor are, at most, those of charity.

Rawls' full expression of his views in this area came nearly three decades later in *The Law of Peoples*.¹⁹ Here Rawls again uses the notion of a transdomestic original position, arguing that it is an appropriate instrument for selecting laws to govern relations between both liberal societies and 'decent non-liberal societies', especially those which are 'decent hierarchical societies', being non-aggressive, recognising their citizens' human rights, assigning widely acknowledged additional rights and duties, and being backed by genuine and not unreasonable beliefs among judges and other officials that the law embodies a 'common good idea of justice'.²⁰ This Society of Peoples would agree to be guided by eight principles constituting 'the basic charter of the Law of Peoples'.²¹

Rawls is quite clear that the Society of Peoples would not even be allowed to consider general distributive principles such as those he advocated at the domestic

¹⁶ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

¹⁹ Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

level in *A Theory of Justice*: the only question is how the parties choose to interpret the eight principles. Rawls offers little overt argument for this conclusion, but it is worth briefly considering two differences he says hold between the domestic and transdomestic cases which may seem to yield some such arguments. First, Rawls notes this difference between the two uses of the original position:

A people of a constitutional democracy has, as a *liberal* people, no *comprehensive* doctrine of the good . . . , whereas individuals within a liberal democratic society do have such conceptions, and to deal with their needs as citizens, the idea of primary goods is used.²²

By a comprehensive doctrine of the good, Rawls means a thoroughgoing religious or philosophical account of value and virtue in human life.²³ Primary goods provide the means by which each individual can pursue whichever conception of the good life they endorse. Since a liberal people is characterised by ‘reasonable pluralism’, it does not itself endorse any comprehensive doctrine, and hence, Rawls implies, primary goods considerations are less weighty. But I do not think this at all follows. While a liberal people does indeed have no interest in promoting any particular comprehensive doctrine, it surely has an interest in securing primary goods, which are the means by which any reasonable comprehensive doctrine can be pursued. It is therefore unclear why a liberal people’s representative in the transdomestic original position would not apply precisely the same reasoning as in the domestic original position, and secure a package of primary goods that is favourable to the worst off nations, just in case, once the veil of ignorance is lifted, it turns out she represents one of those nations.

Rawls notes a second difference in examining the eight principles:

Much as in examining the distributive principles in justice as fairness, we begin with the baseline of equality – in the case of justice as fairness the equality of social and economic primary goods, in this case the equality of and the equal rights of all peoples. In the first case we asked whether any departure from the baseline of equality would be agreed to provided that it is to the benefit of all citizens of society and, in particular, the least advantaged. . . . With the Law of Peoples, however, persons are under not one but many governments, and the representatives of peoples will want to preserve the equality and independence of their own society.²⁴

This draws on what Rawls calls the ‘fundamental interests of peoples’, which extend to the protection of their territory, security, political independence, culture of freedom, self-respect, as well as their citizens’ well-being.²⁵ But the starkness of the contrast Rawls’ draws between the domestic and transdomestic case relies on omitting the last of these fundamental interests – that of citizens’ well-being. If such interests are omitted, justice as fairness-style distributive principles no longer have much traction, since the primary goods they distribute take much of their significance from the extent to which they promote various aspects of individual well-being. But how might this omission be justified?

In the first place, it might be supposed that some other interests – roughly, those concerned with one or other form of a people’s *self-determination* – take precedence. But even if we accept this, it would still not follow that well-being should drop out of the picture altogether. Once self-determination has been secured, different

²² Ibid., p. 40, original emphasis.

²³ See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

²⁴ Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 41.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

interactions between peoples will have different impacts on well-being. So it does not follow that we should disregard well-being on account of the importance of self-determination, since both kinds of fundamental interest may be simultaneously promoted.

Rawls hints at another ground for downplaying the importance of well-being. He says that '[i]t is part of a people's being reasonable and rational that they are ready to offer to other peoples fair terms of political and social cooperation', and that '[t]hese fair terms are those that a people sincerely believes other equal peoples might accept also'.²⁶ It is not clear what Rawls thinks the relevant kind of acceptance here actually is. It might be the acceptance of the other peoples' representatives in the transdomestic original position. But there is no reason for thinking that such representatives would be unconcerned with well-being – far from it. One way they might express their concern would be to endorse justice as fairness. For the argument from acceptability to support the exclusion of well-being considerations, the intended acceptability must then be real-world. It can well be imagined that, in a real world Society of Peoples, substantial proposals to promote well-being in transdomestic fashion would be unacceptable to many peoples. For example, wealthy peoples would typically lose out under justice as fairness, and they would therefore propose less demanding inter-people redistribution, or no such redistribution at all. But it is hard to see these *realist* considerations shouldering the kind of moral weight Rawls would require. Reasonableness and fairness are not decided by what rich countries are likely to offer to poorer ones.

But let us see where Rawls' sharp distinction between domestic and transdomestic justice lead us. What of the eight principles of the Law of Peoples that Rawls does say are acceptable? Of these, the sixth, which ensures that human rights are honoured, has some distributive potential. Although Rawls construes human rights quite narrowly, focusing on basic liberties and formal equality rather than socioeconomic rights, he does at least accept a right to life, including a right to subsistence.²⁷ Rawls does not mention any rights to standards of living above bare subsistence, and shies away from stating that peoples have a general duty to uphold the right to subsistence. The only relevant duty appears to be that described by the eighth principle, describing a highly circumscribed duty of assistance. Rawls acknowledges that some regimes cannot qualify as 'well-ordered', being neither liberal nor decent. Some of these are expansive outlaw states, but others are non-aggressive *burdened societies*. Well-ordered peoples have the long-term objective of making these regimes well-ordered. In the case of burdened societies, well-ordered peoples are under a duty to assist such states in their efforts at overcoming the political, cultural, economic and technological barriers before them. But Rawls believes that principles of distributive justice are not necessarily required here, since '[m]ost such principles do not have a defined goal, aim, or cut-off point, beyond which aid may cease'.²⁸ Instead, he advocates a 'duty of assistance', which appears to be quite distinct from duties of social justice. Furthermore, once a well-ordered society has been brought about, Rawls insists that any assistance be cut off, however poor that society may remain. In short, from what Rawls says, it does not appear that the global poor have any

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

claim of justice on the citizens and governments of affluent countries. Those below the subsistence level may have a claim for assistance, but it is not clear where the corresponding duty lies. Those just above the subsistence level have no claim whatsoever where their society is liberal or decent. Rawls' systematic treatment of transdomestic justice give much the same impression as the scattered comments in *A Theory of Justice*: justice does not oblige the global rich to alleviate world poverty.

However, we saw earlier that Rawls fails to explain why the transdomestic original position would decide on principles so radically different from those of the domestic original position. No good reason has been given for why the representatives in the first instance, unlike those in the second, would refuse to agree on principles whose justification and principal effect is the channelling of primary goods to the disadvantaged. It follows that one might develop a Rawlsian account of justice that endorses full-blown principles of distributive justice at both the domestic and transdomestic levels. An *international difference principle*, for example, would be able to appeal to much the same considerations as the original, domestic one. If it seems morally arbitrary that some individuals are advantaged, and some disadvantaged, by their endowments of natural, social and economic resources, as Rawls argues, it may also be thought the case that a similar moral arbitrariness applies where one people is advantaged over another through similar chance circumstances. This moral arbitrariness makes international inequalities in income and wealth appropriate only where they benefit the least advantaged, as the difference principle allows. We would redistribute from rich countries to poor countries in the name of justice, and the redistribution takes place even where the receiving country is well-ordered.

This is not the only way that Rawlsian justice can be extended beyond the domestic. Charles Beitz argues that, since there is in fact a global system of cooperation, it is appropriate to apply principles of distributive justice at this level.²⁹ Rather than being concerned with the principles which representatives of different peoples would agree on in the original position, we should be concerned with the principles that each individual in the world would agree on. On this basis, he suggests that Rawls should in fact endorse a *cosmopolitan difference principle*.³⁰ This account of justice demands even greater redistribution, this time from rich individuals to poor individuals. It seems to have support beyond that available to the international difference principle, in being an obvious application of Rawls' methodological individualism.³¹ I will not here offer further grounds for choosing between the international and cosmopolitan approaches to Rawlsian distributive justice. It suffices to observe that either offers a far more consistent extension of Rawlsian justice in a transdomestic direction. Neither places artificial nationalist or realist restrictions on the kinds of principles that representative persons in the original position can choose. Both demand that whatever can be done to help the global poor is done.

²⁹ Rawls' (implicit) view that there is no such international co-operation is supported in Barry, 'Humanity and Justice in Global Perspective', pp. 232–3.

³⁰ Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

³¹ See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 233–4; Thomas Pogge, *Realizing Rawls* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 247. For the more general claim that the usual justifications of distributive justice principles imply cosmopolitan versions of such principles, see Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders*, ch. 4.

Responsibility

Rawls in fact objects to extending the difference principle in the ways I have suggested by means of two counterexamples. In the first, one liberal or decent country industrialises and a second deliberately does not, preferring the pastoral, leisurely status quo. The former country thereby becomes much the wealthier of the two. In the second counterexample, one liberal or decent country brings its high population growth under control, while a second chooses not to. In both cases, the differential outcomes can be explained by freely held social values. Rawls notes that a difference principle would have the effect of taxing the first of each pair of countries, in order to improve the position of the second. But he asserts that this does not seem right, and that his duty of assistance, which would not apply in cases such as this where all the countries involved are liberal or decent, therefore seems preferable.³²

I am not quite sure why Rawls' thinks this application of the difference principle seems wrong since he offers little by way of explanation. But I am inclined to agree with him, and I think many others are as well. There are various possible grounds for this, but they all concern *responsibility*.³³ These are not considerations of a sort that can be drawn from Rawls' theory of domestic justice, since responsibility in fact plays little role in it. I believe that this is a deficiency of Rawls' domestic theory, and hence of any account of transdomestic justice that is drawn from it – be it the 'official' Law of Peoples, or the alternative accounts I recommended as truer to Rawls' overall position.

The point can be illustrated by looking at how the duty of assistance would operate in a slight variation of the first of the scenarios just depicted. Here one burdened society industrialises and a second deliberately does not, and the former thereby becomes much the wealthier of the two. With the culmination of industrialisation, this first country also becomes liberal or decent. At this point, if we apply the duty of assistance, the first, newly industrial society is obligated to provide assistance to the second, wilfully pastoral society as before. But this time the justification is in terms of facilitating the development of the second into a well-ordered society.

One objection to this new counterexample should be addressed immediately. It might be supposed that it makes all the difference that in the original counterexample both societies were well-ordered at the point when the important decisions were being made, whereas in this scenario neither society is well-ordered. I do not see how this undermines the force of the counterexample. That one country is well-ordered and another is not may mean nothing more than that one is non-aggressive, recognises its citizens' human rights, assigns widely acknowledged additional rights and duties, and is backed by genuine and not unreasonable beliefs among judges and other officials that the law embodies a common good idea of justice, and that the other exhibits all

³² Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 117–18. Rawls seems to assume that Beitz is concerned with distributions between nations or peoples, when in fact, being a cosmopolitan, he is concerned only with individuals. This makes little difference to the force of the counterexamples, since the members of each group are treated as acting as one, and hence unfairly advantaging or disadvantaging one group coincides with unfairly advantaging or disadvantaging all of its members.

³³ David Miller, who criticises Beitz on similar grounds, is more explicit here: 'To respect the autonomy of other nations also involves treating them as responsible for decisions they make about resource use, economic growth, environmental protection, and so forth' (*On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)), p. 108.

of these attributes *but one*. The citizens of burdened societies may play as great – or an even greater – role as citizens in decent societies in making decisions about industrialisation. The decision may be one they share in the appropriate sense, and it may fully reflect their freely held social values relating to the issue in hand. The fact that they may simultaneously be denied input into some decisions does not diminish their responsibility for the decisions that they *are* involved in.

While Rawls is right that a transdomestically applied difference principle is inappropriate, the same is true of his alternative. But how might transdomestic theory better capture the relevant distinctions, and particularly, those concerning responsibility? One answer here is provided by Thomas Pogge, who has recently forcefully argued that *negative duties* would play a central role in a plausible account of global justice. Pogge ‘propose[s] to call *negative* any duty to ensure that others are not unduly harmed (or wronged) through one’s own conduct and to call *positive* the remainder: any duty to benefit persons or to shield them from other harms’.³⁴ He believes, firstly, that so defined, negative duties are weightier than positive duties, and secondly, that world poverty alleviation is, for the affluent, a matter of negative duty. Let us take these claims in turn.

The strength of the focus on negative duties is apparently demonstrated where we apply it to the scenario presented as a counterexample to Rawlsian transdomestic justice. In this case it can be assumed that the industrialised country has not imposed harms, far less undue harms, on the non-industrialised country. There is therefore no negative duty in play. By contrast, where the industrialisation occurred at the expense of the non-industrialised country – perhaps it was exploited in trade negotiations by the industrialising country, or is subject to its pollution – there appears to be a negative duty. In this way, Pogge’s account appears to be sensitive to the considerations of responsibility that Rawlsian accounts are not. Roughly, it states that those who are *responsible for another’s unfair disadvantage* are strictly obligated to combat that disadvantage. Any duties in the absence of such responsibility are of the weaker positive variety.

How, then, does Pogge think the distinction, in combination with the facts of the world, yields the result that the developed world must help the developing world? He first attempts to find an ethical baseline, such that those forced below the baseline are unduly harmed, and settles on a particular construal of the Lockean state of nature.³⁵ The baseline is to be measured by ‘the best lives that can be lived in a state of nature’, which while lacking modern conveniences, include access to clean water, regular food, and climate-appropriate clothes and shelter.³⁶ The argument then deploys what Pogge calls a ‘*second-order* Lockean proviso’, which states that ‘human beings may create and enforce economic institutions that permit disproportionate unilateral appropriation – provided everyone *rationally* consents to (that is gains from) their introduction’.³⁷ Since for the global poor there is no gain from the move from the Lockean state of nature, but only loss, substantial undue harm is being inflicted on them on a daily basis.

³⁴ Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, p. 130.

³⁵ See John Locke, *Second Treatise* in his *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

³⁶ Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, p. 138.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137 original emphasis.

I am somewhat sceptical about the Lockean turn of Pogge's position. I am unconvinced that significant moral weight should be assigned to comparisons with a hypothetical Lockean state of nature. Furthermore, I find the kind of comparison that Pogge uses, and his argument in support of it, particularly problematic.³⁸ Why should one compare the status of the modern day worst-off with the best-off in the state of nature? Pogge seems to offer only one argument for this unusual comparison:³⁹

if we tell slaves or English day labourers or the present global poor that *they* could have rationally agreed *ex ante* (in ignorance of their social position at birth) to institutions under which some may be worse off than persons in a state of nature, they can plausibly reply that this hypothetical consent cannot have been *theirs*, since they never had a real chance to occupy the better positions.⁴⁰

To be sure, the hypothetical consent never was literally that of these disadvantaged groups – it is *hypothetical* consent, after all. While the reply is in fact more than plausible, it also misses the point. The relevant question, according to the second-order Lockean proviso that Pogge endorses, is whether the hypothetical consent could be rational. It seems to me not only that it could be, but that it must be. It seems absurd to suggest that, given the choice between a global state of nature where, in absolute terms, a small minority are averagely off and the overwhelming majority are badly off, and a global society of sorts where half are well off, and half are badly off, a person deprived of information about their position would choose the former option. Such a radical position goes beyond even Rawls' highly controversial conception of rationality in similar circumstances as involving 'maximizing', or maximising the minimum (worst) outcome.⁴¹ For in the present case, the state of nature does not offer any improvement in the position of the worst off. Choosing it would simply increase the likelihood that the chooser was in a worse off position, and decrease the benefit to be had from being in a better off position. The alternative choice is rational from the perspective of any major decision rule.

This all matters because the circumstances of the state of nature's best off are, by definition, not representative. When we compare the present day global poor's standing with that of the averagely well off in the state of nature, it is far from obvious that the former are being harmed by the existing global order, since there is no guarantee whatsoever that the average person in the state of nature would have his basic needs met. If the comparison is with the *worst off* in the state of nature, which it arguably should be, it is even harder to identify real world harm. In short, a

³⁸ This problematic aspect of Pogge's position is not found in other modern 'left-libertarian' writers, although they share the more general insistence on the moral weightiness of comparisons with the state of nature; see Hillel Steiner, *An Essay on Rights* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) and Michael Otsuka, *Libertarianism without Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³⁹ That is, aside from his equally unusual interpretation of Locke's comment that 'a King of a large fruitful territory (in the Americas) feeds, lodges, and is clad far worse than a day Laborer in England' (*Second Treatise*, sec. 41, p. 297) as supporting the worst-off-to-best-off comparison. In fact, Locke's point here is intended purely factually: he is merely illustrating the point of his previous paragraph that 'if we will rightly estimate things as they come to our use, and cast up the several Expences about them, what in them is purely owing to *Nature*, and what to *labour*, we shall find, that in most of them 99/100 are wholly to be put on the account of *labour*'.

⁴⁰ Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, p. 138, original emphasis.

⁴¹ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 132–5; see John C. Harsanyi, 'Can the Maximin Principle Serve as a Basis for Morality?', *American Political Science Review*, 64 (1975), pp. 594–606.

Lockean baseline can only be a sure way of identifying undue harm where its mechanism is rigged in most counterintuitive fashion.

There is an additional problem here. If, in spite of its obvious problems, we accept Pogge's Lockean baseline, or alternatively accept some other way of distinguishing undue harm,⁴² it seems obvious that some groups, such as rich and powerful governments, multinational corporations, and international organisations, have unduly harmed the global poor, and therefore have negative duties to alleviate world poverty. But the duties of individuals remain far from clear. Pogge claims that '[b]y continuing to support the current global order and the national policies that shape and sustain it without taking compensating actions toward institutional reform or shielding its victims, we share a negative responsibility for the undue harms they foreseeably produce'.⁴³ But this relies on a highly controversial conception of responsibility. A typical Western individual can exert little or no influence on her country's policy decisions, far less on the global order.⁴⁴ Very often she will not even be contributing to her country's prosperity: it may be that, were she to resign from her post, another currently unemployed or underemployed person would be sufficiently productive that there would be a net societal gain from this resignation. An individual who has no control over an outcome, whether it be the political decisions of a country or its economic power, can plausibly deny responsibility for it. A focus on negative duties may in fact appear to absolve many averagely powerful Western individuals from any responsibility to combat world poverty.

Even accepting Pogge's unusual account of responsibility does not easily lead us to negative duties for affluent individuals. Since the vehicle for undue harming is society, construed in a broad way, one can avoid the acquisition of negative duties simply by cutting oneself off from society. On this account it may then follow, as Pogge suggests, that 'I might honor my negative duties . . . through becoming a hermit or an emigrant'.⁴⁵ This is surely absurd. Faced with the fact that hundreds of millions of our fellow human beings are in the direst of circumstances, Pogge offers complete withdrawal from the world as a way of meeting the most pressing moral obligations we are under – as, in principle, just as good a way of meeting these obligations as actually doing something about the miserable conditions many face. This shows, as clearly as anything, that placing such weight on negative duties over-emphasises the significance of agent guilt at the expense of what really matters – making the world a better place.

⁴² Independently of his Lockean baseline argument, Pogge suggests these definitions: 'we are *harming* the global poor if and insofar as we collaborate in imposing an *unjust global* institutional order on them. And this institutional order is definitely unjust if and insofar as it foreseeably perpetuates large-scale human rights deficits that would be reasonably avoidable through feasible institutional modifications' (Thomas Pogge, 'World Poverty and Human Rights', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 19 (2005), pp. 1–7, p. 5, original emphasis). Given the context, Pogge is most likely defining *undue* harm. But note that for this definition and that of the unjust global order to be at all determinate some prior definition of human rights is needed. Other ways of identifying undue harm may then be just as circuitous (and possibly contentious) as the Lockean baseline route.

⁴³ Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, p. 144; see also Thomas Pogge, 'On the Site of Distributive Justice', pp. 166–7.

⁴⁴ See Deborah Satz, 'What Do We Owe the Global Poor?', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 19 (2005), pp. 47–54.

⁴⁵ Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, p. 66; see also Pogge, 'On the Site of Distributive Justice', p. 168.

Pogge is not in fact committed to the view that negative duties are all that matter.⁴⁶ He can acknowledge that positive duties remain in play, even when negative duties fail to materialise, or are met through a deliberate policy of personal isolationism. But Pogge certainly downplays the importance of such positive duties.⁴⁷ Consider, for example, this comparison:

There are two ways of conceiving [global] poverty as a moral challenge to us: we may be failing our *positive* duty to help persons in acute distress; and we may be failing to fulfil our more stringent *negative* duty not to uphold injustice, not to contribute to or profit from the unjust impoverishment of others.⁴⁸

Taken together with a more nuanced account of individual responsibility than that Pogge entertains, this is an argument for only the weakest of duties regarding world poverty for many affluent individuals. Pogge never fully explains the relationship between the two kinds of duty, or defines relative weights. But what he does say would be quite consistent with placing absolute or lexical priority on negative duties. It may well be better on Pogge's account to isolate oneself from the world than to do one's utmost to address needless suffering in the developing world, since the former may fully satisfy negative duties in a way the latter does not.

I believe there is a much better way of incorporating responsibility considerations into our account of global distributive justice. Rather than focus on the positive/negative duty distinction, we concern ourselves with the distinction between those advantages and disadvantages which individuals are responsible for, and those advantages and disadvantages which individuals are not responsible for. This latter distinction has been central to many post-Rawlsian debates about egalitarian justice, and has yielded many insights.⁴⁹ Particular weight is given to the distinction by *luck egalitarianism*, according to which variations in advantage levels are justifiable insofar as they reflect differential exercises of responsibility. I now want to show how luck egalitarianism might be applied to the topic of world poverty.

First, I consider application to the case which initially drew our attention to responsibility considerations, and which seemed to support the significance of negative duties. Here, it will be recalled, there is inequality of holdings as a result of one society industrialising and another freely declining this option. An important thing to notice about the kind of luck egalitarianism that I am putting forward here is that it does not look at the societies as a whole in nationalistic fashion, but rather takes a cosmopolitan perspective, looking at the responsible acts of each individual. On the face of it, it seems likely that the inter-societal inequality roughly corresponds to the actions of the individuals who make up each society involved: after all, it is specified that the choices of the two societies reflect their social values. If these values, and the corresponding actions, are universally held and performed within each society, there seems to be no evident injustice in the first society holding on to its

⁴⁶ Thomas Pogge, 'Severe Poverty as a Violation of Negative Duty', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 19 (2005), pp. 55–83, pp. 65–9.

⁴⁷ See Rowan Cruft, 'Human Rights and Positive Duties', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 19 (2005), pp. 29–37.

⁴⁸ Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, p. 197, original emphasis.

⁴⁹ Richard J. Arneson, 'Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare', *Philosophical Studies*, 56 (1989), pp. 77–93; G. A. Cohen, 'On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice', *Ethics*, 99 (1989), pp. 906–44; Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), ch. 2.

material advantage over the second.⁵⁰ If they are less than universally held and performed, it seems appropriate for some redistribution from less responsible to more responsible individuals to take place, regardless of which society they belong to. I submit that this response to the case is at least as intuitively plausible as that Pogge suggests.

How, then, does one apply luck egalitarianism to the world as it actually is? The luck egalitarian does not ask, 'are the global poor doing better than they would do in a Lockean state of nature?', or any other such hypothetical question. Rather, it asks whether the differential advantages so manifest in our world reflect differential exercises of responsibility. It is conceptually possible for a highly advantaged group to act so much more responsibly than a highly disadvantaged group that the inequality between them is justified. But this is not at all what the world is like. The global rich and poor did not start with equal resources, which one group deployed diligently, and the other wasted on gambles and consumption. Rather, the present day rich started with much more than the present day poor. Many of the poor are children, for whom judgments of responsibility are usually thought inappropriate. In such cases, where there is no responsibility, there should be no disadvantage. The adult poor have not, typically, acted unusually irresponsibly. Often living some sort of life for as long as they have required substantial efforts and prudent decision-making. At any rate, there are no grounds at all for thinking that their puny distributive shares, and the relatively huge holdings of even an averagely positioned Westerner, are at all proportional to differential exercises of responsibility. In short, the existing distribution is grossly unjust. Luck egalitarianism demands that affluent governments redistribute assets to the global poor on a massive scale.

What, though, of the duties of individuals? Like Rawlsian justice, of which it is a development, luck egalitarianism was conceived as an account of distributive justice, typically to be applied to the 'basic structure' of societies. I believe, however, that there is no special problem in applying it to individual action. Of course, individuals can generally do much less than governments to reduce global poverty, but they can still do something, in terms of both directly contributing and, where viable, taking political action to exert pressure on government policy. Furthermore, 'ethical luck egalitarianism', as we might name the version that speaks to personal morality, can generate individual duties without requiring that those individuals are actually responsible for the undue harms of which the global poor are victims. Luck egalitarianism assigns the duties to right the great moral wrong of world poverty to, first, those who are responsible for this wrong, and second, where no one is responsible for the wrong, or where the wrongdoers will not right it, to those who are not responsible for the wrong, but whose holdings are not as small, relative to their responsibility, as those of the victims of the wrong. Hence, if it turns out, as it appears

⁵⁰ Two complications should be noted here. First, in my view, and that of luck egalitarians such as Richard Arneson, the appropriate measure of advantage is welfare, and hence we can only really judge the fairness of distributions of holdings (and of other goods, such as leisure time, which the second society may have an advantage in) once their welfare effects are known. In the text I simplify by assuming that something like holdings is a decent proxy. Second, I say *evident* injustice, since there may be an injustice where individuals are not responsible for their actions, in spite of (or because of) the fact they are based on universally held social values. Again, for illustrative purposes, I simplify by assuming that such acts are responsible ones. Luck egalitarianism actually makes no such assumption. See Carl Knight, 'The Metaphysical Case For Luck Egalitarianism', *Social Theory and Practice*, 32 (2006), pp. 173–89.

to, that very many affluent individuals are not responsible for how their governments enforce world poverty, luck egalitarianism can still insist that they do something about it if responsibility for the wrong lies with nature, with the dead, with those unable to right their wrongs, or with those who refuse to act according to their duties.

Since it does not rely on negative duties, ethical luck egalitarianism does not let rich individuals disregard poverty for which they are not responsible. It also does not allow such individuals to limit their duties by detaching themselves from society, since duties are generated from the wrongness of unjustified poverty itself, rather than from affluent countries' roles in creating such poverty. Taken together with a sensible account of individual responsibility for the undue harm of poverty, luck egalitarianism suggests that the most obvious major moral wrong of the world today is *global poverty combined with the victims' non-responsibility for such poverty*. Responsibility for bringing such undue harm about is relevant, but strict duties to undo it go far beyond those arising from such responsibility. Luck egalitarianism also suggests that global poverty alleviation on grounds of responsibility is reliant upon neither holding members of pluralistic democracies responsible for decisions they had no hand in, nor personification of humankind as the agent of such poverty.⁵¹

A pluralistic approach

In this section I set out an alternative approach to transdomestic distributive justice and personal ethics, for which I claim two related but distinct advantages. First, it seems to capture the relevant moral considerations, and no irrelevant considerations. Second, its pluralistic character ensures that even its partial acceptance results in the endorsement of world poverty alleviation. This second advantage is, admittedly, much the less fundamental of the two, but it is still an advantage, especially since some writers on global poverty have been at pains to inject broad appeal into their accounts.

In my view, none of the three accounts of distributive justice examined above adequately captures all that it needs to at either the domestic or transdomestic levels. Utilitarianism fails to account for the significance of responsibility or of improving the position of the worst off; Rawlsian justice, while correcting the second flaw, leaves the first in place, and also fails to account for the value of improving aggregate welfare or resource (hereafter: advantage) levels; and luck egalitarianism, while accounting for responsibility, does not acknowledge the importance of either aggregate advantage or showing special concern for the worst off. An obvious solution presents itself: combine all three approaches in a pluralistic approach to distributive justice that gives some weight to all three types of considerations. This view of justice, which we might simply call *the pluralistic account*, seems about right to me.⁵² It also very obviously endorses the conclusion that we need to stop thinking

⁵¹ These further two positions are suggested by Alexander Cappelen, 'Responsibility and International Distributive Justice', and Ser-Min Shei, 'World Poverty and Moral Responsibility', both in Follesdal and Pogge (eds), *Real World Justice* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005).

⁵² The pluralistic account does not fully reflect Rawlsian justice since it does not give priority to basic liberties or fair opportunity, and is welfarist. Note also that the most natural extension of the pluralistic account to transdomestic cases would also depart from Rawls' position in being cosmopolitan. In these and other regards it is very similar to Richard Arneson's

about world poverty as an issue of charity, and start thinking about it as a truly monumental injustice that affluent countries are obligated to right.

Those who wish to reject this approach can take one of two strategies. They might argue against the inclusion of one or more of the component considerations, or they might insist that the construct as a whole is somehow less than the sum of its parts. I will not say very much against the first of these strategies, since the three considerations have been central to the preceding discussion. It suffices here to note that each consideration has attracted considerable attention and support in the literature in its own right, and that each of the following views seem, by the standards of contemporary political philosophy, relatively uncontroversial: that overall happiness (welfare) levels or the size of the 'social (resource) pie' matter; that diminishing the disadvantages of the worst off matters; and that those who act more responsibly (make better choices, make greater efforts, demonstrate greater prudence, and so on) getting more is, *ceteris paribus*, better than those who act less responsibly getting more. I will say a little more about the second strategy, which can take two forms, both of which focus on the alleged *incoherence* of the pluralistic strategy.

The first form suggests that the approach is *conceptually* incoherent, since it is pulled in such different directions. For instance, it might be suggested that there is an obvious tension between its utilitarian and luck egalitarian strands, since the first is future-regarding, and the latter is past-regarding. The contrast with the conceptual unity of utilitarianism, say, is stark. But I see no reason why we should expect an account of justice to be tension free. We are often drawn in more than one direction when considering a problem of justice or of morality more generally, and many have taken this as a sign that there are several relevant factors in play. Indeed, this has often been taken as grounds on which to object to utilitarianism as an oversimplification of the moral realm. Our best guess seems to be that both past action (be it diligent or reckless) and future effects (whether favourable or unfavourable) are relevant in deciding how to treat individuals, so the onus is, if anything, on those who object to pluralism to show why we should not try to accommodate these disparate considerations.

The second form is manifested in the suggestion that such a pluralistic approach is *practically* incoherent. Here the claim is that, even if there is no deep structural problem with the approach, when it comes to application it suffers from internal conflict or outright indeterminacy. The utilitarian might advocate one course of action, the Rawlsian another, and the luck egalitarian something else altogether. By appealing to three considerations, but refusing to assign a lexical order or other scheme of priority to them, I have, it may be contended, provided a recipe for disorder.

In reply, it should first be acknowledged that there is indeed some conflict among the three operative principles. Moreover, there is a certain degree of indeterminacy in the position as stated above. But this is merely on account of the fact that I have declined to state specific weightings for the three considerations. Once weightings are assigned, the only problems of application are the familiar empirical ones. For

'responsibility-catering prioritarianism'. While Arneson's account does not focus on advantaging the *worst* off, its focus on the *worse* off is closely related. See Richard J. Arneson, 'Equality of Opportunity for Welfare Defended and Recanted', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 7 (1999), pp. 488–97 and 'Luck Egalitarianism and Prioritarianism', *Ethics*, 110 (2000), pp. 339–49.

example, we might decide that each unit of advantage (welfare or resources, typically) has a base value of one unit of moral value, that each unit of advantage for the worst off is worth an extra unit of moral value, that each unit of advantage for the responsible is worth an additional half a unit of moral value, and that each unit of advantage for the irresponsible is worth minus half a unit of moral value. In assessing public policies, the only question is then which policy realises the greater moral value. If a first policy brings about ten units of advantage, of which two are in the hands of the worst off (who are also responsible and/or irresponsible), six in the hands of the responsible, and four in the hands of the irresponsible, and a second brings about twelve units of advantage, of which one is in the hands of the worst off (who are also responsible and/or irresponsible), five in the hands of the responsible, and seven in the hands of the irresponsible, the pluralist approach will choose the first policy, since it realises thirteen units of moral value, compared to the second policy's twelve. As this illustration shows, once a weighting is selected, the component principles do indeed pull in different directions – in this case, Rawlsianism and luck egalitarianism favoured the first policy, and utilitarianism the second – but there is no problem of indeterminacy whatsoever. Of course, it is no easy task selecting a specific weighting, but that does not at all show that the approach is mistaken. In general we do not take the fact that deciding on the best trade off is difficult as evidence that some or all of the things being traded off are worthless – quite the contrary. Consideration of a sufficiently large range of cases may offer further guidance as to the optimum relative weights of the various considerations. It suffices here to note that each consideration is significant and as such should carry significant weight.

We saw earlier that utilitarianism and ethical luck egalitarianism also suggest that even quite modestly wealthy individuals are under strict duties of personal ethics to address the plight of the global poor. Rawlsian justice could, perhaps, be further extended in this way. G. A. Cohen in fact suggests that, at the domestic level, it is incoherent to apply Rawlsian justice to the basic structure, but not to individual choices.⁵³ There may, then, be no great difficulty in applying the pluralistic account to personal ethics. The rationale for this is much the same as that for the corresponding approach to social justice. In terms of the strong version of Singer's prevention principle, we might say that such poverty is a bad which can be prevented without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, where the comparison gives weight to the condition of the worst off and considerations of individual responsibility in addition to overall utility levels. An individual who favours assigning weight to just one or two of these factors will nevertheless find global poverty a bad that needs to be tackled.

Full acceptance of the pluralistic account is not the only way to the conclusion that world poverty is a very substantial moral wrong, and that rich and powerful governments must address this as a matter of justice. I have argued that three of the most prominent accounts of social justice each, when extended to transdomestic justice in the most appropriate way, yield this conclusion. One who insists that two of these three positions is utterly irrelevant to justice, but who endorses the third, will be lead to the above conclusion, as will one who assigns weight to two of the three positions' concerns. While it is obvious that the present state of the world is viewed

⁵³ G. A. Cohen, 'Where the Action Is: On the Site of Distributive Justice', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 26 (1997), pp. 3–30.

as unjust by those who endorse a human right to subsistence,⁵⁴ it may have been less obvious that several more comprehensive accounts of transdomestic distributive justice also raise such objections. A public policy of removing world poverty would, perhaps, be unique in being able to draw support from such disparate accounts of justice. Usually policy decisions take the form suggested by the earlier numerical example. One policy (a tax decrease, say) is thought to be preferable to another (an improvement in public services, say) from some important perspectives and inferior to it from others. No such trade-offs are required in the present case. Even partial acceptance of the pluralistic account will lead to the objective of global poverty alleviation.

Several theorists have shown a concern with making this an appealing objective to those who endorse a wide range of positions. Pogge emphasises that he is 'trying to build an argument that is widely acceptable by leaving open whether human rights entail any positive duties'.⁵⁵ As indicated earlier, Singer's argument is intended to appeal to an even broader range of views. But such theorists have not drawn attention to the plurality of plausible positions from which world poverty is criticisable. In consequence, where there appears to be some shortfall in the general acceptability of the position (as with Singer), or where its implications may be quite other than those posited (as with Pogge), the entire case unravels. This article has advanced an approach to transdomestic justice and personal ethics that is pluralistic, and hence does not stand or fall with any one strand of argument.

In his recent book *Justice Beyond Borders*, Simon Caney makes a similar claim for the 'ecumenical appeal' of his position. It is appropriate, then, to reflect on the contrast between the two pluralistic views. This will, I believe, bring out both the advantages that I claimed for my approach at the start of this section.

Caney tentatively suggests (1) a right of subsistence, (2) global equal opportunity, (3) equal pay for equal work, and (4) priority to the worse off.⁵⁶ I have no criticism of (4). (1) is, admittedly, fairly uncontroversial, but it also seems somewhat superfluous, assuming that priority to the worse or (especially) worst off is given any substantial weight at all (as I would insist). Furthermore, I do not see (2) or (3) as having *fundamental* (non-derivative) moral weight. They are evidently intended in a very restricted sense, such that exploiting one's superior native talents is legitimate grounds for higher remuneration. There are, then, reasons of responsibility to object to them. It seems, *ceteris paribus*, unfair to give one person more than another, simply because they have greater native talent (and hence can use opportunities better, and get a better job). There is a morally relevant difference between this case, and that where the talent has arisen through conscientious, fully responsible efforts, which luck egalitarianism recognises and Caney does not. I can also conceive of circumstances in which it would be just to deny equal pay for equal work (as I take the term to be meant) on grounds of utility or advantage. If we find that it is harder to attract certain kinds of specialised, wealth-creating workers to some areas rather than others, perhaps on grounds of individual preferences for certain climates or social environments, I see no grounds for objecting to introducing unequal pay for equal jobs. Sometimes the most socially favourable incentive structure will be unequal in

⁵⁴ This right is defended in Henry Shue, *Basic Rights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980) and Charles Jones, *Global Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵⁵ Pogge, 'Severe Poverty as a Violation of Negative Duty', p. 65.

⁵⁶ Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders*, pp. 123–4.

this way. Where equal pay for work leads to localised skill shortfalls, economic stagnation and, in turn, to a major overall advantage shortfall, its appeal vanishes. Despite their importance, Caney gives responsibility and utility considerations no weight at all.

It might be objected that, even if Caney overlooks some things that matter, I seem to make the same mistake, since I refuse to give equal opportunity and equal pay for equal work any weight. My reply is that I give these the only kind of weight that is appropriate to them: derivative or instrumental weight. As it so happens, I believe that global equal opportunity and equal pay for equal work would make the real world a more just place, but this is just because these measures would, on balance, promote utility, improve the circumstances of the worst off, and reward the more responsible. The suggested oversight only arises if equal opportunity and/or equal work for equal pay are sometimes worth pursuing when they do not advance any of these other goals, which I take to be fundamental. But where they do not advance those goals they typically reward and penalise on the basis of natural contingency (as where talents vary but responsibility does not) or procrustean levelling down (as where equality is secured, but even the worst off do not gain). The particular pluralistic approach I have put forward is insensitive to these morally irrelevant factors.

Although I reject the specifics of Caney's position, I am sympathetic to his overall strategy. The pluralistic account alone appears to hold the first advantage of taking only relevant moral considerations into account, but both this and other plausible pluralistic approaches hold the second advantage. The fact that Caney's position would still endorse the moral and political objective of global poverty alleviation were it stripped of its two more controversial principles illustrates the robustness of pluralistic approaches to this topic.

Before I conclude, some remarks on implementation are probably in order. According to the OECD, in 2005 the United Kingdom was the only large country with a developed economy to contribute more than 0.5 per cent of its gross domestic income in official development assistance; Italy, Japan, and the United States failed to contribute even 0.3 per cent.⁵⁷ The pluralistic account is not, as matter of principle, committed to the view that rich countries should increase their levels of overseas development aid. But it seems unlikely that such low levels are presently the best way of achieving the pluralistic account's goals. Were the rich countries to spend one per cent of their gross domestic income on aid it seems improbable that their domestic welfare levels would suffer a drop sufficient to fully offset the welfare gains to be anticipated in poor countries, and Rawlsian and luck egalitarian ends would clearly be served. There is reason, then, both for governments to take these measures and for individuals to support political parties and other organisations that endorse them. Individuals should also, as Singer suggests (but not only for the reasons he mentions), make donations to charities focused on global poverty alleviation.

Of course, this is all assuming that the aid money is not only spent but spent at least reasonably well. Writers such as Jeffrey Sachs suggest that poor countries could be lifted onto the ladder of development if only official development assistance increased: 'If the foreign assistance is substantial enough, and lasts long enough, the capital stock rises sufficiently to lift households above subsistence. At that point, the

⁵⁷ (<http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/idsonline>).

poverty trap is broken'.⁵⁸ Even critics of major interventions of this sort do not usually deny that some forms of aid are effective. If, as William Easterly suggests, 'the Planners' global social engineering has failed to help the poor, and it will always so fail', we should as individuals indeed become 'Searchers', focusing our efforts on making sure that money reaches the poor by being motivated, accepting responsibility, providing whatever is locally demanded, and so on.⁵⁹ Governments could, for instance, shift money away from conditional IMF loans and towards World Bank grants; they could increase scrutiny of the performance of aid agencies and 'give more power and funds to the many Searchers who are already working in development'.⁶⁰ More money means more can get done here as elsewhere. In sum, then, the pluralistic approach recommends that both states and individuals in the West do their best to reduce poverty elsewhere, whatever that may mean. It seems sensible to suggest that this will involve both increased funding for global poverty alleviation and better use of those funds.

Of course, some will still reject such measures since they continue to reject the moral objective of global poverty alleviation, perhaps for nationalist, realist or (right) libertarian reasons. Such reasons may be disputed on their own terms,⁶¹ but there is undoubtedly some underlying difference of opinion. I hope to have given some indication of the breadth and depth of the moral reasoning available on one side of this divide.

⁵⁸ Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 246.

⁵⁹ William Easterly, *The White Man's Burden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 334; see also pp. 5, 335.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶¹ It is not, for example, clear that those who adhere to Nozickian libertarianism should be indifferent to current world poverty, since that poverty may have arisen through historical processes which they recognise as unjust. This would seem to be an implication of a wider point made by Alasdair MacIntyre: 'The property-owners of the modern world are not the legitimate heirs of Lockean individuals who performed quasi-Lockean ('quasi' to allow for Nozick's emendations of Locke) acts of original acquisition; they are the inheritors of those who, for example, stole, and used violence to steal the common lands of England from the common people, vast tracts of North America from the American Indian, much of Ireland from the Irish, and Prussia from the original non-German Prussians' (*After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981)), p. 234; cf. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).

