that immigrants have in entering the country that they want to live in and the interests that national communities have in maintaining control over their own composition and character. There is not, I have argued, a general right to migration. Nevertheless, those who benefit from living in rich territorial states have responsibilities to the world's poor, and discharging these responsibilities may sometimes involve taking needy migrants in, alongside other practical measures to be considered in Chapter 9.

Responsibilities to the World's Poor

I

In this chapter, I want to turn directly to the questions ‘what responsibilities do we have towards the global poor? What must we do for them as a matter of justice?’. I have already made and defended a number of claims that can help us to tackle them, by eliminating possible alternative answers. I have argued, for example, against the cosmopolitan view that our responsibilities to the world's poor are in principle exactly the same as our responsibilities to our fellow-citizens. We do not, then, owe them everything that we owe our compatriots as a matter of social justice. In particular, whatever global justice means, it does not mean global equality — of resources, opportunity, welfare, etc. — so we are not required to change the global order in such a way that inequalities between societies are levelled completely. On the other hand, I have defended the idea of a global minimum that is due to every human being as a matter of justice, a minimum best understood as a set of basic human rights. Since many societies are presently unable to guarantee these rights to their own members, it appears that the responsibility to protect them may fall on outsiders. But what kind of responsibility is this? I have spent some time distinguishing between different conceptions of responsibility, especially between outcome responsibility — the responsibility we have for gains and losses resulting from our actions — and remedial responsibility — the responsibility we have to relieve harm and suffering when we are able to do so. In the case of global poverty, one large question that we have to address is how far remedial responsibilities to the world's poor should track outcome responsibility for their current plight. Finally, I have defended at
some length the idea of collective national responsibility: the idea that, given appropriate circumstances, it is reasonable to hold members of a national community responsible for the gains and losses that they create, both for themselves and for others. And I have argued that national responsibilities can be inherited across the generations.

With these conceptual and normative tools in hand, we can begin our investigation of our responsibilities to the world’s poor. The basic facts of global poverty are not in dispute. As I suggested in the Introduction, we confront them on a daily basis merely by switching on our television screens. More objective surveys such as the UN’s *Human Development Reports* confirm the subjective impressions that most of us have: global poverty may not be getting worse, in relation to world population as a whole, but it is stubbornly failing to get much better. Significant improvements in some places, for instance East Asia, are offset by worsenings in others, especially sub-Saharan Africa. In the year 2000, more than 1,000 million people were below the $1 a day line for income poverty, itself often thought to be unrealistically low; comparable numbers were judged to be below minimum levels on measures such as adequate nourishment, and access to clean drinking water.

This is poverty in its most primordial form. Whereas we can reasonably argue about the significance of poverty as it is measured in most developed countries—as having an income lower than a certain fraction (60%, for example) of the median—no one can doubt that undernourishment, low life expectancy, lack of access to elementary education or health care, and the other components of extreme poverty add up to a life that is less than minimally decent. So our moral response to these facts should also be clear: it is morally intolerable that we live in a world where somewhere between 15 and 20 percent of people live in dire poverty as defined by these indicators.

There is, however, a large normative gap between identifying a state of affairs as intolerable and identifying agents, individual or collective, who have a responsibility to remedy it. Bridging that gap requires first of all a great deal of empirical investigation. We need to understand the causes of wealth and poverty—why some societies have been able to extricate themselves from widespread poverty over a generation or two, while others appear unable to progress at all, or even seem destined to sink deeper into the abyss. We also need to understand what rich countries can do for poor countries if they so decide—what are the likely effects of changes in the global investment and trade regimes, of the way development aid is provided, and so forth. This investigation is difficult, not least because economic historians and development economists continue to give sharply conflicting answers to the questions just posed. But even if we were able to resolve the empirical questions to our satisfaction, there would still remain an independent normative problem about how to assign responsibility for global poverty to particular agents. It is one thing to show that pulling this lever will avert a disaster: another to show that it is your job rather than somebody else’s to pull the lever. So although in the course of this chapter I shall look briefly at the empirical debate about poverty and development, my main focus will be on the normative question. I want to begin by examining two influential, but contrasting, attempts to answer this question by showing that responsibility for global poverty falls straightforwardly on the citizens of rich, developed societies. The first of these comes from Peter Singer, and the second from Thomas Pogge. In both cases, my aim is to draw out the underlying theory of responsibility that is invoked in order to reach this conclusion and to show why it is unacceptable.

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Singer’s argument begins with an analogy. He asks us to consider someone walking past a shallow pond in which a child is drowning. He observes that the passer-by has a duty to rescue the child even at some cost to himself, for example getting his clothes wet, and extracts from this the general principle 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.”¹ He then points out that this principle applies directly to the position of those in rich countries who could contribute money to save the lives of those in the developing world threatened by starvation or disease, and concludes that we have a moral obligation

to give, up to the point at which further giving would take us or our dependents below the welfare level of the world’s poor.

Let us accept Singer’s assumption that the passer-by has a remedial responsibility to rescue the drowning child—this seems relatively uncontroversial.² I want to focus instead on why it provides a very bad analogy for thinking about responsibility for global poverty.³ I think it leads us astray in three ways at least:

First, in the drowning child example, there is just one child struggling in the pond, and just one passer-by who is able to pull the child out. So there is absolutely no question about what ought to be done in that situation and about who ought to do it. But suppose we were to complicate the example a bit, by having several children in the pond, some easier to rescue than others, some apparently more likely than others to make it to the edge by themselves. And suppose we introduce not just one passer-by but several people, some physically stronger than others, some wearing smart suits and others wearing old jeans, and so forth, then a number of questions not relevant to the original example make their appearance. Which child should be rescued first? Should we try to grab as many children as we can, or should we concentrate on those who seem most in danger of imminent death? And whose responsibility is it to carry out the rescues? How are the obligations to be assigned?⁴ Now it is precisely questions like these that we need to ask if the pond case is to be of any help in thinking about global poverty, because even if we believe that solving global poverty is a matter of redistribution between the world’s rich and the world’s poor—I will return to this question later—it is obviously a matter of collective not individual redistribution; there are millions of people who might be expected to be net contributors, either through their governments or through charitable agencies such as Oxfam; and there are still more millions of people, in varying circumstances, who might expect to be recipients. So questions about priorities, and about the assignment of responsibility, both absent from Singer’s original example, always loom large.

Second, although these are not made explicit by Singer, there are some background assumptions we would naturally make when thinking about the child in the pond. First, it is a rare, one-off event. How many of us have actually ever had to rescue a strange child from drowning? Perhaps, then, our moral response to the child’s predicament depends on this fact, especially the implication that acknowledging an obligation to act in such cases will not severely impede our normal life plans.⁵ Second, once the child is pulled out of the water, she will be returned to her parents and, let us suppose, live happily ever after. For the price of cleaning or drying my clothes, I win a whole human life. But poverty in the developing world is not at all like that. It is chronic; it has long-term structural causes; a life saved today may be lost for a different reason next year. There is a real question what the effects of sending financial aid, say via Oxfam, really are—some aid may help its intended beneficiaries, other forms of aid may make things worse, but it is hard for people who are not experts in this area to know which forms of aid are worth supporting.⁶ This may of course just serve as an excuse for doing nothing, but it does indicate a relevant difference between the person who saves a drowning child and the person who contributes financially to an anti-poverty

² What may be more controversial is whether the passer-by is obliged to rescue the child as a matter of justice. This would be denied by libertarians for whom justice imposes only negative obligations not to violate the rights of others by one’s own actions. Even libertarians, however, are likely to accept that the passer-by has a humanitarian responsibility to go to the aid of the child. I shall return to the question of when responsibilities give rise to claims of justice later in this chapter.

³ For somewhat similar doubts about the relevance of Singer’s example to discussions of global poverty, see K. A. Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (London: Allen Lane, 2006), ch. 10.

⁴ I do not mean that questions such as these are unanswerable, but the answers we give will depend on moral principles that go well beyond what is necessary to support our intuitions about the simple case. Some will answer them in a way that closely aligns global poverty with the predicament of the child in the pond—see, for example, P. Unger, Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), ch. 2. Others will answer them differently. So there can be convergence, from different starting points, on the view that we are morally obliged to rescue the drowning child in the simple case, but considerable divergence about what obligations, if any, we have in the more complex case of the global poor.

⁵ I do not have the space to address this complex issue here. For a full discussion, see G. Callu, The Moral Demands of Affluence (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

⁶ There is an immense literature on this subject, pointing to wildly divergent conclusions. The issues are helpfully surveyed for the lay reader in Callu, The Moral Demands of Affluence, ch. 3. For a recent overview by an insider somewhat sceptical about the effects of most forms of aid, see W. Easterly, The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
charity: one can say with certainty what the consequences of their action will be, while the other cannot. The underlying point is that improving the lot of the world's poor is a macro-level problem; it involves changing the general conditions under which they live—their domestic economic and political regimes, for instance, as well as the international context within which those domestic institutions operate.

Finally, it is perhaps no accident that the person in Singer's pond is a child, an innocent victim who we may assume slipped into the water quite unaware of the danger she was running. And she cannot get out without help. She is the quintessential patient and in no real sense an agent. And this encourages us to think of people living in poor countries in quite the wrong way, simply as victims in need of our help. It might be said in reply here that since many of those most seriously affected by global poverty are children, Singer's perspective does indeed capture the moral reality correctly. But without in any way wishing to discount the moral significance of child poverty in developing countries, we cannot simply consider these children in isolation from the adults who are responsible for bringing them into existence and giving them primary care. Most of what we might do to improve their lot will affect the adults too: if we send aid that can be used to supply food, clean water, or resources for production, adults and children will benefit alike. Put differently, most aid that aims to relieve poverty directly will be targeted at families, not at individual children, and its final distribution will depend on the decisions taken by adults with familial responsibilities. So questions about the causes of child poverty cannot be avoided here, in contrast to the simple child-in-the-pond example. Occasionally, of course, the adults too may find themselves in a helpless predicament: the 2004 tsunami was one occasion on which hundreds of thousands of people were placed more or less in the position of the child in the pond. But more often the (adult) global poor are also responsible agents capable of making choices for themselves—good choices from which they may benefit or bad choices from which they may lose. If they are starving because of crop failure, should they have planted different crops? If they are dying from AIDS, should they have changed their sexual behaviour? Raising these questions is not meant to settle the issue of remedial responsibility; it may be that in each case they have a right to help regardless of how their predicament came about. But it reminds us of the need always to respond to our fellow human beings from a dual perspective, as I suggested in the Introduction: both as agents capable of taking responsibility for the outcomes of their actions and as vulnerable and needy creatures who may not be able to lead decent lives without the help of others. Singer's child-in-the-pond analogy encourages us to take up the second perspective but to ignore the first.

I can summarize my concerns about Singer's argument by putting the distinction between outcome and remedial responsibility to work. First, Singer asks no questions about outcome responsibility for global poverty: he does not ask why so many are poor, whether responsibility lies with rich nations, with the governments of poor nations, etc.—he treats poverty as if it were a natural phenomenon like an earthquake. Second, Singer has an implicit theory of remedial responsibility, namely that we are each remedially responsible for all the suffering we can prevent without sacrificing anything of comparable importance. The mere capacity to prevent suffering is by itself sufficient to assign responsibility. The presence of other people with a similar capacity matters to Singer only in so far as it were to turn out that others had already done enough to eradicate poverty, then obviously my contribution would be unnecessary. For the reasons I have given, I think that on both counts Singer's view of responsibility for global poverty is implausible. I do not mean that Singer really believes this; I mean that the logic of the drowning child example involves seeing poverty as an accident akin to falling into the water. In his more recent book One World: The Ethics of Globalization (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), he looks briefly at different explanations of world poverty without reaching any clear-cut conclusions. He evidently continues to think that the causes of poverty are irrelevant to our moral obligations to the world's poor.

Notice that none of three challenges I have raised to Singer's argument involves the distance that separates the victim from the agent who is able to help her. It is sometimes argued that what distinguishes the child in the pond from the relief of...
to solve global poverty, it is surely not only empirically but also morally relevant to ask how that poverty came about. There must be some presumption at least that where we can find agents who are outcome responsible for the poverty, they should also be held remedially responsible for tackling it. And in cases where there are many agents all of whom are capable of remediating some harm, there must surely also be a presumption that remedial responsibility should be shared between them, pending further information about the particular capacities of each, and so forth. In the first instance at least, each agent has an obligation to discharge their share of the responsibility, not to take up the whole burden single-handed.

III

I turn now to Thomas Pogge’s very different approach to global poverty. Pogge’s argument does take outcome responsibility seriously; he argues in fact that citizens of rich states are remedially responsible for the plight of the world’s poor because they are implicated in responsibility for creating that predicament. He remains officially neutral on the question whether there could be a positive duty to alleviate poverty regardless of how it arose, or in my terms whether there could be remedial responsibility in the absence of outcome responsibility. He thinks it sufficiently clear that poverty is the creation of a global system for which we in the developed world are collectively responsible. As he puts it:

...the underfulfillment of human rights in the developing countries is not a homegrown problem, but one we greatly contribute through the policies we pursue and the international order we impose. We have then not merely a positive responsibility with regard to global poverty, like Rawls’s ‘duty of assistance’, but a negative responsibility to stop imposing the existing global order and to prevent and mitigate the harms it continually causes for the world’s poorest populations.

Pogge speaks here only of a negative responsibility, but I think it is more perspicuous to say that he also wants to attribute two forward-looking responsibilities to the citizens of rich states and their governments: the responsibility to redesign the international order so that it no longer has the harmful effects of the present one, and the responsibility to compensate the world’s poor for the deprivation they have experienced up to now. These are positive responsibilities—they require citizens and states to take positive actions—but they stem from a previous failure to fulfill the negative responsibility not to impose an order that harms the world’s poor.

Pogge does not deny that the proximate sources of global poverty are very often the domestic political and economic regimes under which the poor live. But he argues that these domestic sources of poverty are themselves to be explained primarily in terms of the international context in which poor societies are placed. As he puts it, ‘it is quite possible that, within a different global order, national factors that tend to undermine the fulfillment of human rights would occur much less often, or not at all.’ The present order, he argues, encourages ‘the emergence and endurance of brutal and corrupt elites’ in developing societies. Moreover ‘the primary responsibility for this institutional context, for the prevailing global order, lies with the governments and citizens of the wealthy countries because we maintain this order, with at least latent coercion, and because we, and only we, could relatively easily reform it...’ Pogge’s argument, in short, is that we, citizens of rich countries, bear primary outcome responsibility for global poverty, and since we have the means at our disposal to end it, we are remedially responsible too. It is a powerful argument, and many have found it persuasive, but it needs to be examined with some care.

Pogge, as I have said, does not deny that the immediate cause of poverty in a particular society may be a defective set of economic and political institutions, or that the reason why some societies have institutions that are inimical to growth, while others have managed to develop institutions that allow them to escape from serious poverty over a generation or two, may lie deep in the history and culture of the societies in question. But he continues to attribute responsibility for poverty to rich societies by claiming, as already noted, that if the global environment were different, these national factors would produce different results. But how relevant is this observation when we are allocating outcome responsibility for global poverty? Consider the following analogy. Two cars collide on a roundabout, and we are able to identify one of them, the driver of car A, as outcome responsible for the resulting damage, by virtue of his reckless driving. Now it may well be true that if the roundabout had been replaced by traffic lights, this collision would not have occurred (driver A speeds at roundabouts but does not jump the lights); more generally it may be true that if traffic lights had been installed, fewer accidents, or perhaps no accidents at all, would have occurred at this intersection. Should we then conclude that responsibility for the accident rests not with driver A but with the road engineers who decided to install a roundabout there? This seems implausible yet it also seems exactly analogous to Pogge's claim about the international order and the national factors associated with poverty.

Why is it wrong to attribute outcome responsibility for the car crash to the road engineers? They have designed a roundabout, let us suppose, that drivers of normal competence, paying due care and attention, can navigate safely. They might have chosen traffic lights, and reduced the accident level still further, but this would have caused significantly more congestion and frustration among drivers. In the light of these facts, their decision was a reasonable one. The careless driver of car A cannot shift responsibility off his shoulders by observing that in a different traffic environment the accident would not have occurred.

The question we should be asking about the global order, then, is whether it provides reasonable opportunities for societies to lift themselves out of poverty, or whether it places obstacles in their path that are quite difficult to overcome, requiring an extraordinary economic performance on the part of a developing society. Pogge does indeed notice that some historically poor societies have performed very well under the existing order, but he treats them as exceptional. Faced with examples, he compares them to 'Horatio Alger stories often appealed to in celebration of the unbridled American capitalism before the New Deal', where poor farm boys by dint of effort and enterprise become millionaires. Now he is surely correct to say, as far as the farm boys are concerned, that the few can only rise at the expense of the majority staying close to where they started; simple logic tells us that not everyone can end up in the top echelon of the income distribution. But why does this logic apply to countries lifting their people above the global poverty threshold? Ghana and Malaysia were equally poor countries when they gained their independence from Britain in 1957: now average incomes in Malaysia, over $3,000 per head, are ten times greater than those in Ghana. Why should we think that the institutions and policies that explain Malaysia's success have at the same time contributed to keeping the Ghanaians poor? Why not think instead that if Ghana had followed Malaysia's example, or perhaps a somewhat different economic model appropriate to its circumstances (since there is no reason to think that there is just one blueprint for economic growth), its people would now be comfortably above the poverty threshold, as Malaysia's are?

16 For some remarks about the sheer diversity of economic regimes that have proved conducive to economic growth, see D. Rodrik, 'Rethinking Growth Strategies', in UNU-WIDER, Water Perspectives on Global Development (Rasingtoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
17 In making this illustrative comparison, I do not mean to imply that the external circumstances confronting Ghana and Malaysia were the same in all respects. However, in so far as there is a 'global order' in Pogge's sense, they were both subject to it. Alternatively, if it is argued that these circumstances were very different in the two cases, this puts in question the very idea of a single 'global order' that rich countries impose uniformly on the world's poor.
Pogge also errs by implying that the countries that have succeeded in raising most of their citizens above the poverty line via economic growth within the existing international order are few and far between. In fact, although very rapid growth of the kind seen in South Korea and Taiwan, for example, is indeed exceptional, a much larger group of countries, including most notably China and India, have achieved, and continue to achieve, steady advances in recent decades. The question we should be asking, therefore, is not so much what explains the success of this second group as what has held back the remaining group, primarily concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, whose economies have largely stagnated. Here we enter the debatable territory of explanations of economic development. Without attempting to provide a resolution, let me briefly sketch the current state of the debate. The possible explanatory factors can roughly be divided into three groups: physical factors, such as the availability of resources like coal and oil, the prevailing climate, and the society's geographical location (is it landlocked, for instance?); domestic factors, for instance the prevailing religious or political culture, and the practices and institutions which both reflect and shape it; and external factors, such as the pattern of global trade and investment, the impact of foreign states through colonialism or neocolonialism, etc.\(^{18}\) A priori, it seems likely that any adequate explanation of differential rates of economic development will invoke factors of all three kinds. Our interest here is in the second group of factors: unless domestic factors can be shown to play a significant role in explaining why some societies become rich while others stagnate, then claims about national responsibility for wealth and poverty immediately fall to the ground. The work most frequently cited in support of the primacy of domestic factors is David Landes' book *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, but Landes' wide-ranging and somewhat unanalytical historical study does not suggest any mono-causal theory; indeed, this book starts with a chapter about the importance of climate in explaining the relative success of Europe vis-à-vis countries closer to the Equator. Landes does clearly think that culture matters in explaining economic success, but supports this claim largely anecdotally.\(^{19}\)

Other economic historians, however, have produced more solid evidence to support the significance of domestic factors in explaining differential rates of development. Geography matters to some extent—nearly all developed economies are to be found in temperate rather than tropical zones—but examples such as Singapore and Mauritius show that geographical disadvantage can be overcome by societies with the appropriate cultures and institutions. Natural resources can be either a blessing or a curse depending on the cultural and institutional context in which they are appropriated—coal was a major factor propelling the industrial revolution in Britain, whereas the discovery of oil in the Middle East is widely judged to have distorted economic development in those societies and propped up authoritarian regimes. Conversely, both culture and institutions can be shown to correlate significantly with economic success, the main problem being to disentangle their effects, since there is obviously strong interaction between them. The independent effect of culture can be seen most easily by studying the varying success rates of different ethnic groups in a single society—for instance by comparing the performance of Asian immigrants to the USA with that of blacks and Hispanics.\(^{20}\) Institutional effects have been studied by looking at ex-colonial societies starting out with contrasting legal systems, sets of property rights, and so forth and comparing their economic performance over time.\(^{21}\)

Plainly, we should expect debate to continue over the relative weight to be attributed to factors of the three kinds I have distinguished. But we have already discovered enough to cast doubt on

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\(^{18}\) This division follows the one suggested by Rodrik in D. Rodrik (ed.), *In Search of Prosperity: Analytical Narratives of Economic Growth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), ch. 1, although I have used different labels. See also M. Risse, 'What We Owe to the Global Poor', *Journal of Ethics*, 9 (2005), 81-117.


\(^{20}\) See the papers collected in L. E. Harrison and S. P. Huntington (eds), *Culture Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

Pogge's claim that the international order is responsible for violations of human rights in the form of severe poverty. That order is far from perfect, and indeed it is not difficult to identify reforms that would make it easier for societies starting from a position of economic disadvantage to improve their prospects through inward investment and trade. But even with the imperfect order that we have, many societies have already achieved significant advances, and that at the very least suggests that (outcome) responsibility for the condition of those that remain cannot simply be attributed to that order and the rich societies that uphold it. To revert to our analogy, the roundabout may be badly designed, but the fact that it can be navigated safely by careful drivers shows that some considerable share of responsibility for the accidents that do happen must rest on the shoulders of the drivers involved.

I shall return shortly to the question of what normative conclusions about the remedial responsibilities of rich countries we should draw from this. But before leaving Pogge, there is one further aspect of his theory of responsibility that is worth highlighting. He is very critical of what he calls 'explanatory nationalism', in the context of debates about global poverty. Explanatory nationalism is the view that the relative wealth and poverty of different societies can be fully explained by institutions and policies that are internal to each. As indicated earlier, Pogge believes that this overlooks the way in which the global order determines the effects of different national factors; had that order been different, institutions and policies that now lead to poverty might have had quite different results. He concludes, on that basis, that 'global factors are all-important for explaining present human misery'. And a further implication is that people living in the societies in which poverty is endemic cannot be held collectively responsible for that misery. He nonetheless holds a quite strong doctrine of national responsibility when it comes to explaining why ordinary citizens in rich societies can properly be taxed to provide compensation to the world's poor whose rights have been infringed by the policies pursued by Western governments—according to Pogge you share in responsibility for the actions of any government you are 'involved in upholding' where this might

include just working in the economy and/or paying taxes. That is, he does not allow people who are going about their daily business and are uninvolved in politics to distance themselves from the policies their governments may pursue; he assumes that everyone in these societies is included in national responsibility for the harm they have inflicted on poor people in other countries, and can therefore be required to contribute to transfers to compensate for that harm. But why should the idea of collective responsibility apply in this case but not to people living in poor countries for the harms caused by their own institutions and practices?

To defend a view like Pogge's, it would be necessary to point to some relevant differences between their position and ours which explain why we can be held collectively responsible but they cannot. Could this be done? In Chapter 5, I argued that assignments of national responsibility could most easily be made in the case of societies that were democratically governed and whose members could form their beliefs and values in conditions of freedom. Now broadly speaking rich countries are democratic while poor ones are not. So might this be sufficient reason to absolve those living in poor countries from responsibility for their plight while continuing to attribute collective remedial responsibility to the citizens of rich countries? In the case of dictatorial regimes that operate primarily through fear and repression—North Korea, Burma, or Saddam's Iraq, for example—that conclusion seems correct; it would be absurd to include ordinary subjects in collective responsibility for the regime and its consequences—they are victims, not perpetrators. But between genuine democracies and dictatorships, there are regimes where our judgments must be more nuanced. There are, for example, societies that come close to John Rawls's concept of a 'decent hierarchical society'—a society that is neither liberal nor fully democratic, but in which there exists what he calls 'a decent consultation hierarchy' that connects the government to various corporate groups within the society, and that allows for dissent from


existing government policy. Under these circumstances we can say that what government does broadly reflects the beliefs and the cultural values of the people as a whole, and in this respect the position as far as collective responsibility is concerned is not so different from that of liberal democracies. (One of my earlier examples, Malaysia, seems to fit this model.) Then there are regimes in which elites rule with popular acquiescence but without effective popular control. I have in mind here what are sometimes called 'neo-patrimonial' regimes of the kind found in many African countries, where political authority rests on patron-client relations between politicians and their supporting groups. Here representation takes a different form: political leaders are representative in so far as they meet their obligations to their clients, as understood within the culture of the country in question. In receiving the benefits—jobs, money, public works, etc.—client groups give their tacit consent to the regime.

Such regimes generally do a poor job as far as economic development and lifting ordinary people out of poverty are concerned. Yet if we are allocating responsibility for that failure, a good part must rest with the general population whose inherited cultural values lead them to acquiesce in these damaging practices and institutions.

Another reason that might be given for denying that ideas of national responsibility apply to people in poor countries is that they have no options to choose between: they cannot choose their institutions or the policies that their governments will follow. It is true that the range of possibilities that people in countries like Bolivia or Tanzania face is very different from those faced by the citizens of Denmark or Italy. But it is wrong to say that the former have no chance to exercise collective responsibility. If we look at the societies that have developed successfully over the last several decades, then although there are some basic features that they have in common—no breakdown of social order, a reasonably effective legal system, and so forth—what is more remarkable is the different routes that they have followed. It is also true that on occasion international institutions such as the IMF have attempted to impose economic constraints on societies that leave very little room for manoeuvre—but these misguided attempts do not add up to a general absence of political choice. So although attributions of national responsibility need to be made cautiously and with full reference to the circumstances of each society, there is no reason to exclude people living in poor societies from collective responsibility in an across-the-board way.

IV

So where does this leave us on the general question of responsibility for global poverty? Against Peter Singer, I have argued that it makes no sense to assign remedial responsibility for poverty to citizens of rich states without first considering the question of outcome responsibility—how and why poverty has arisen. Against Thomas Pogge, I have argued that his attempt to assign outcome responsibility for poverty to the international order, and through that to citizens of rich states and their governments, is implausible. At the very least the responsibility should be shared between the road engineers and the careless drivers, so to speak—between governments and international organizations who set the rules governing trade, investment flows, resource rights and other features of the global economy, and people in poor countries who support or acquiesce in regimes that reproduce poverty by siphoning off a large portion of GDP into military expenditure, presidential palaces, and Swiss bank accounts.

But if this is the right story to tell about outcome responsibility, how do things stand when we turn to consider remedial responsibility? After all ordinary people in poor countries cannot be held remedially responsible for abolishing their own poverty—that would be absurd. So doesn’t responsibility in the remedial sense inevitably fall on the shoulders of those who have the resources and the capacity to do something about world hunger and other forms of deprivation?

26 See, for example, the analysis in P. Chabal, The Quest for Good Governance and Development in Africa: Is NEPAD the Answer?, International Affairs, 78 (2002), 447–62.
27 Admittedly, this argument is unlikely to apply to the people living at the bottom of the societies in question, who are not involved in the patron-client networks. These people may also have little or no ability to change the regime even if they should want to. Thus they should not be included in collective responsibility for their own poverty, which nevertheless may continue to rest primarily with political leaders and their client groups inside the society.

28 See Rodrik, 'Rethinking Growth Strategies'.
The broad answer to this question is ‘Yes’, but to give a more
precise one, we need to distinguish between different grounds on
which remedial responsibilities may arise at global level. This will
turn out to matter when we ask the further question ‘what are the
world’s poor owed as a matter of justice?’—the thought here being
that some responsibilities may give rise to duties that are not duties
of justice. These other duties we might describe as humanitarian;
they are duties that we have good reason to perform, without being
required to perform them as we are required to perform duties of
justice. Why does this distinction matter? Humanitarian duties are
in general less weighty than duties of justice. This is important when
we have to consider what costs it is reasonable to expect an agent to
bear to perform duties of either kind—in the present context, how
far citizens of rich states can be expected to sacrifice various domestic
projects in order to discharge remedial responsibilities to foreigners.
The distinction is also important when we consider the position of
third parties. Duties of justice are enforceable, in the sense that third
parties may be justified in applying sanctions to those who default on
them; not so with humanitarian duties. So we need to decide when
remedial responsibilities give rise to duties of justice and when they
do not in order to understand the practical implications of allocating
them.

It might seem that we have already answered this question by
treating poverty as a violation of human rights. If people have a
right to the items and conditions that they need to lead decent lives,
then if they are denied those items and conditions, how can it not be
a matter of justice to provide them? However, as we saw in
Chapter 7, Section V, we cannot always move directly from human
duties to justice—under conditions of scarcity, for example, where
we cannot supply the resources that would fully satisfy everyone’s
human rights, there cannot be a duty of justice to fulfil any one
person’s rights in particular. The problem we are now addressing is
different: whether justice always requires us to fulfil human
duties regardless of prior assignments of responsibility. Consider a
very simple case. B lacks some vital resource and A is uniquely in
a position to supply it. Prima facie, then, A has a responsibility to
supply the resource, and given that B’s need is a basic one, a duty
of justice to do so. But suppose now that B, having been given the
resource that he needs, chooses to destroy it or sell it to someone
else. 29 B is now responsible for not having the resource. Does A
still have a duty to give B what he needs? Perhaps so, but is it
clear that this is a duty of justice? Why is A required, as a matter
of justice, to provide B with the necessary resource a second time?
If he does not have access to the resource, B’s human rights are
being infringed. Yet he himself is responsible for the infringement,
by virtue of the choice he made. In these circumstances, it seems
that although we may continue to hold A remedially responsible for
B’s plight, we cannot justifiably place him under a duty of justice to
help B. If he has a duty at all, it must be a duty of lesser weight—a
humanitarian duty, that is to say.

Whether this argument might apply to some cases of global
poverty remains to be seen. But it underlines the importance of
investigating how remedial responsibilities may arise, and of distin-
guishing different cases. So let me now proceed to this task. I shall
distinguish three circumstances in which citizens of rich countries
might have such responsibilities towards the world’s poor. First,
they might arise as a result of past injustice that has left its victims
in continuing poverty. Second, they might arise through a failure to
implement fair terms of international cooperation. Third, they
might arise from the bare fact of poverty itself, independently of
any prior interaction between rich and poor countries. I suggest that
the implications for global justice will be somewhat different in each
case.

First, then, there might be backward-looking responsibilities to
remedy the effects of past injustice. I have argued, at some length,
in Chapter 6 that there can be inherited national responsibilities
of this kind. I also there drew a distinction between obligations to
redress past injustice, and remedial responsibilities that arise simply
from the fact of past interaction. That is, (rich) society A might
have responsibilities towards (poor) society P either because the past
actions and policies of A have contributed to the present deprivation
of P, and A therefore owes P material redress for the effects of
those actions and policies, or merely because A is connected to P
by virtue of their history of causal interactions, thereby giving A a
special reason to respond to P’s present plight. Responsibilities of the

29 Assume here that B does not sell the resource in order to purchase something
else that is even more necessary to him, or destroy the resource because of some
(understandable) mistake about the nature of what he has been given.
first kind are not remedial in origin, so to speak—they would arise even if society P were not poverty-stricken. Nevertheless, they can serve as the basis for policies whose effects are remedial—they would improve the material position of society P—and their practical force will be stronger in cases where society P is also impoverished. These responsibilities clearly give rise to obligations of justice on the part of society A. If redress is owed for historic injustice, it is owed as a matter of justice. The collective responsibility of the people of P matters here only when it comes to determining the amount of redress that is owed. That is, in determining which effects of historically unjust acts and policies demand redress and which do not, we should consider how the members of P have responded to those acts and policies. Redress is not owed for effects that the PPs could reasonably have taken steps to avoid. Thus if I drive my truck through the wall of your house, I owe you compensation for putting right the damage I have caused, but you can reasonably be expected to call in builders quickly to shore up the roof. If you do nothing and as a result of this inaction the rest of the house collapses, I do not owe you redress in the form of a completely new house. So where the past impact of society A on society P has been unfair, A owes duties of justice to P regardless of what members of P may do, but the extent of the redress that is owed is determined by what it is reasonable to expect the PPs to have done, rather than what they actually did historically.

Where the past interactions between A and P have not been unjust, however, it is an open question whether the remedial responsibilities that A may owe to P by virtue of P’s present poverty constitute obligations of justice. For here A is not outcome responsible for P’s poverty, and the question arises whether the members of P are themselves responsible for their position. I shall return to this question shortly. For now, the important point is to distinguish between two ways in which historical relationships may generate responsibilities to people in poor countries, of which only the first unequivocally makes the relief of poverty a matter of justice.

Can this backward-looking approach to responsibilities for world poverty be made to work in practice? It is often confidently asserted that it can. Pogge, for example, writes:

... there are at least three morally significant connections between us and the global poor. First, their social starting positions and ours have emerged from a single historical process that was pervaded by massive grievous wrongs. The same historical injustices, including genocide, colonialism, and slavery, play a role in explaining both their poverty and our affluence. However, although it is undoubtedly true that historically the relationship between societies that are now affluent and societies that are now poor has been darkened by the moral evils that Pogge describes, it is far less clear that these evils explain present-day affluence and poverty. Genocide and slavery are moral tragedies, but their effects are felt by the people who are their victims, and by their descendants, and I can see no reason to assume that their longer-term results include impoverishment of the societies in which they occurred. If redress for American slavery is owed, for example, it is owed to African Americans, who are not among the global poor even if they are relatively poor by US standards; it is not owed to the societies from which the slaves were taken unless it can be shown that those societies continue to experience deprivation that can be traced back to the taking. As for colonialism, one would need to show not just that it wronged the people who were colonized in various ways, but that its overall impact on the development of the societies in which it occurred was negative. Given that many previously colonized societies are among the economic success stories—think of the Malaysia/Ghana contrast referred earlier—this would be a hard task to accomplish. It seems that linking historical injustice to present-day poverty would require taking specific cases and showing the causal mechanisms at work, rather than relying on broad brush assertions such as Pogge’s cited above.

I turn therefore to a second responsibility owed to poor societies in the present. This is the responsibility to offer these societies fair terms of cooperation. Given that, through economic globalization

30 Pogge, ‘Priorities of Global Justice’, 14. I should make it clear that Pogge lays less emphasis on this assertion as a basis for our responsibilities to the global poor than he does on the claim about the present global order that I discussed in Section III. Nevertheless, he clearly believes it, as do many others.

31 For a fuller discussion of this point, critical of Pogge, see M. Risse, ‘Do We Owe the Global Poor Assistance or Rectification?’, Ethics and International Affairs, 19 (2005), 9–18.
and in other ways, societies unavoidably have significant impacts on each others' prospects, the rules governing these interactions must be fair to both sides. 12 This is demonstrably not the case at present. Many societies are vulnerable to exploitation and other forms of injustice by powerful states, corporations, and other agencies. Consider, for example, a small economically undeveloped society that is heavily dependent on external actors for its trade and investment relationships. If most of society A's exports are bought by society B, and society B is suddenly plunged into economic crisis, or for political reasons decides to sever its relations with A, then this is likely to have disastrous consequences for A's economy. 13 Or society C might rely almost entirely for its export earnings on one or two commodities, in which case sharp price fluctuations or changes in the import tariffs imposed by other countries may prove severely disruptive to C. It might be said that in such cases people in those societies are themselves responsible for placing themselves in such vulnerable positions. In the very long term this might be true, but in the short-to-medium term the implicit expectation is unrealistic. It may take considerable time to develop new export markets.

12 How could we decide whether the terms of international interaction are fair? Ideally we would appeal to a principle, or set of principles, of fairness that would settle the question. But such principles are hard to come by. For example, we might propose that an exchange between two parties—a trade in commodities—is fair when both parties benefit from the exchange to the same extent. But how should this principle be applied? We need first of all to establish an appropriate baseline—how each party would be positioned in the absence of the exchange. Then we need to find a neutral way of measuring benefit: what 'currency' should we use? Should benefit be measured in absolute terms, or in proportion to existing resource holdings (in trade negotiations, should the benefit to a particular country of some decision be recorded as a percentage of existing GDP, for example)? These problems and others suggest that there can be reasonable disagreement about the fairness of any particular rule or practice; nevertheless we can say that some interactions, such as those described in the text, are so one-sided in their impact as to be unfair by any reasonable standard. For discussion of this question, see C. Albin, Justice and Fairness in International Negotiation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. chs. 2 and 4; J. Stiglitz and A. Charlton, Fair Trade for All (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. ch. 5.

13 Consider, for example, the impact on Cuba's economy of the US trade embargo, given that before Castro's revolution more than two-thirds of Cuba's foreign trade was with that country, followed after 1959 by the withdrawal of very substantial trade subsidies from the Soviet Union. These external events undoubtedly contributed significantly to poverty in Cuba in the years after 1990. For discussion, see S. E. Eckstein, Back to the Future: Cuba under Castro (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

and if your economy is largely geared to the production of one commodity—bananas, say—then it is simply not feasible to switch overnight into growing mangoes in response to a fall in the world price of bananas, or a change in the EU's banana import regime. Rich societies are not typically exposed to such risks: because they are industrialized, their economies are far more diversified, and their networks of trade and investment much wider.

What poor countries can legitimately demand, therefore, is an international order in which they are sufficiently protected from such vulnerabilities. This does not mean being isolated from global trade and investment. On the contrary, all the evidence suggests that integration into the global economy is one important precondition for economic growth. 34 It does, however, mean regulating the order so that it is fair to poor countries, in the sense of giving them reasonable opportunities to develop, and allowing them to choose between different policies for achieving this. That means, first of all, not allowing outside agencies such as the IMF to impose rigid economic guidelines on particular countries as a condition of their receiving development loans. It means preventing the governments of rich countries from erecting tariff barriers as a way of protecting their own industries against competition from developing countries, while at the same allowing poor countries, if they choose, to shelter their own new industries for a period. It means taking steps to stabilize the prices of commodities that are the staple exports of particular societies. In other words, a fair international order cannot simply mean a free market in which nations and corporations pursue their interests without regard to the consequences for vulnerable poor people. The responsibility of citizens of rich countries is to ensure fairness in this sense—an international order whose rules allow poor societies adequate opportunities to develop.

One might hope that if the first two responsibilities were discharged—the responsibility to remedy the effects of past injustice, and the responsibility to offer poor societies fair terms of cooperation—there would be no further remedial responsibilities to

34 See, for instance, the evidence presented in M. Wolf, Why Globalization Works (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2004), ch. 9. For the argument that integration through trade is beneficial only when an appropriate regulatory framework is in place, see Stiglitz and Charlton, Fair Trade for All, esp. ch. 2.
the world's poor, since each society would shortly be in a position
to tackle poverty within its own borders (there might be transitional
problems requiring resource transfers to poor societies, but noth-
ing beyond this). But given the evidence surveyed above about the
usual role of domestic culture and institutions in lifting societies
out of poverty through economic growth, and given the continued
existence of cultures and/or institutions that cannot perform such
a role, this hope seems a forlorn one. There would remain some
instances of global poverty for which rich societies could not be
held outcome responsible, for either of the reasons just canvassed.
Would remedial responsibilities still exist in such cases, and if so
how should they be characterized? Here we need to investigate the
extent of responsibility carried by people inside the society for their own
continuing deprivation. There are three broad possibilities: none are
responsible, some are responsible, and all are responsible. I shall
consider these in turn.

The first possibility occurs when a society is impacted by outside
events for which nobody bears (outcome) responsibility. The most
obvious example would be a natural disaster such as a severe drought
or a volcanic eruption that devastates local agricultural produc-
tion. However we should also include under this heading economic
shocks caused by rapid changes in consumers' tastes or technolog-
ical advances - think for example of a society such as Zambia whose
economy became heavily reliant on the export of an expensive min-
eral (copper in Zambia's case) whose world price collapsed suddenly
as cheaper alternatives (such as optical fibre) became available. It
might be said that there is always responsibility in such cases - the
responsibility to protect yourself from becoming vulnerable to such
unanticipated events. But, as I suggested above, it is often unreason-
able to extend the notion of responsibility so far. People can be held
responsible for outcomes that they should have anticipated, given
existing evidence, but not for every outcome that might conceivably
occur unless ones against it.

In these circumstances, remedial responsibilities cut in, and they
give rise to duties of justice. That is, if people are unable to lead
decent lives as a result of events outside of their society for which
they cannot be held responsible, this imposes a general respons-
bility to assist which is distributed to particular agents - states,
voluntary organizations, etc. - according to the criteria identified in

Chapter 4, Section IV. We find the capable agent or agents most
strongly connected to the people whose human rights are being
infringed, and hold them responsible for bringing relief. Of course,
it might be possible to formalize this relationship by, for example,
creating an international fund for disaster relief that could be drawn
upon in emergencies of this kind, and this would clearly be desirable,
given that it is often difficult to determine which agents in particular
bear the primary remedial responsibility. But in the absence of such a
scheme, there is no alternative but to rely on judgements of the kind
discussed in that chapter.

Once remedial responsibilities are identified, they must be dis-
charged as a matter of justice, assuming that the relevant agent or
agents are able to do so without infringing other, weightier, duties
of justice. Why is this so? On the one side we have people whose
lives fall below some absolute standard of decency, who are not
responsible for being in that condition, and who cannot now pull
themselves out if it unaided. On the other side we have, let us say,
the citizens of a rich nation who are able to provide the necessary
relief, and who have been singled out as having the responsibility to
do so. They have not, by hypothesis, actively violated the rights
of the people now in need; yet if they fail to act now, I suggest, they
will infringe those rights. So discharging the remedial responsibility
is a requirement of justice.

Not everyone will agree with this conclusion. Others have argued
that the duty in such cases must be described differently, for example
as a duty of humanity or a 'duty of assistance'. Such descriptions
may be appropriate, I suggest, in the cases I shall discuss below, but
not in the one we are presently considering. It is perhaps hard to
demonstrate to someone who does not share this moral intuition that
infringing human rights by failing to fulfil them is unjust, but let me
briefly consider two reasons that might be given for resisting this
claim.

The first is that justice only comes into the picture when an
agent takes some positive action that affects a second party. Mere
inaction, standing by and doing nothing, may be reprehensible, but
does not constitute injustice. So violating human rights by some

This is Rawls's phrase to describe the more general duty that people in de-
veloped societies owe to those living in what he calls 'burdened societies'. See Rawls,
The Law of Peoples, section 15.
positive action would be unjust, but failing to protect them—say by not delivering food one might have delivered in a famine situation—would not be. But notice that this is not how we think about social justice. Social justice does require that the state should make various forms of positive provision for its citizens; it is an injustice if citizens are left without adequate health care, or housing, or support in old age, by virtue of state inaction. So it cannot be a conceptual truth about justice that it comes into play only in cases where an agent has acted in a way that impacts on another.

A second reason has been suggested by Thomas Nagel. He asserts that we have a strong moral obligation to provide material aid to those who fall below a minimal poverty line, but he characterizes this as a duty of humanity rather than justice. To support this he argues that humanitarian duties hold in virtue of the absolute rather than the relative level of need of the people we are in a position to help. Justice, by contrast, is concerned with the relations between the conditions of different classes of people, and the causes of inequality between them. In other words, justice is by definition a comparative notion: it is about how different groups of people fare relative to one another. But this seems merely stipulative; it disposes out of hand the idea that principles of sufficiency, for example, might qualify as principles of justice. It seems better to say that justice can take both comparative and non-comparative forms: sometimes it concerns how people are treated relative to one another, sometimes about how they are treated in absolute terms. Indeed, Nagel is willing to concede that breaches of human rights may in certain instances count as acts of injustice—he refers to war crimes and crimes against humanity—but these are surely absolute rather than relative wrongs. So why suppose that a failure to supply human beings with the means to meet their essential needs when it is possible to do so does not also count as injustice?

All of this, however, applies in the first instance only to deprivation that arises in such a way that nobody can be held outcome responsible. There are two other possibilities to consider. The next occurs when responsibility lies with a subgroup within the society in question (together perhaps with foreign companies or governments who support them) rather than with the people as a whole. This subgroup, which might, for example, consist of a dictator and his henchmen, or an ethnic minority who monopolize the means of coercion, may pursue disastrous policies that cripple the society's economy, or may simply divert a large share of GDP into their own hands, leaving most of their fellow-countrymen below the poverty threshold. This can happen even in the case of societies like Zimbabwe that start from a relatively high level of economic development. In such cases, do people in rich societies have remedial responsibilities towards the exploited majority?

It should be clear that remedial responsibility falls in the first place on the subgroup within the society that is outcome responsible for the deprivation. But it may equally be clear that there is no prospect of this group discharging its responsibility. Given that those who are suffering the effects of the regime are not themselves responsible for its existence, it seems that outsiders do have responsibilities towards them. How to discharge these responsibilities in practice presents intractable problems. Applying economic sanctions to the regime in an attempt to change its policies may just worsen the position of the exploited group still further, as essential imports are blocked. Poverty relief efforts in the form of conventional aid may have the perverse effect of strengthening the regime, whose members can bolster their power by supervising the distribution of aid, meanwhile siphoning off some proportion of it into their own pockets. Military intervention to replace the regime is not only likely to be very costly but may have untoward side effects. But in principle, where agent A who is primarily responsible fails to relieve patient P, responsibility passes to B who is next in line.

Does B have a duty of justice to relieve P in these circumstances? It is evident that B has a strong reason to act, where P's deprivation is severe, and B has some feasible way of relieving it. But it may be better to say that the duty here is a humanitarian duty rather than a
duty of justice. One reason for saying that is that we may think that B cannot be required to act, given that the primary responsibility rests with A. That is, we ought not to apply sanctions to B of the kind that we would be justified in applying if he were primarily responsible for relieving P but were refusing to do so. I suggested earlier that one mark of a duty of justice is that it is always potentially enforceable in this sense.

If this is the correct way to understand responsibilities in the second scenario, a fortiori it must also be in the third—collective responsibility for poverty rests with all, or nearly all, of the adult members of the society in question. It might seem that this is an empty box: why would a nation make political choices or follow practices that resulted in its members’ own impoverishment? Undoubtedly some examples that appear to belong here would on closer inspection turn out not to, because the conditions for collective responsibility were not met. Thus if we take a case like North Korea, at first glance there has been virtually unanimous support for a regime whose economic policies have resulted in famine conditions (causing an estimated two million deaths in the 1990s). But since the regime allows no freedom of thought or expression—the media are all state-controlled and merely churn out a daily diet of official propaganda, and harsh penalties are applied to anyone found tuning in to foreign media—this support is almost entirely manipulated support, and, as I argued in Chapter 5, the idea of national responsibility does not apply under these circumstances. Nonetheless, even if cases of collective responsibility for poverty are likely to be few and far between, they are not impossible and it is worth considering briefly what remedial responsibilities fall on outsiders if they occur.

Suppose, then, we encounter a society most of whose members are chronically malnourished, and the reason for this is that they insist, for religious or other cultural reasons, on adhering to traditional forms of agriculture that cannot produce an adequate supply of food. Should we leave them as they are, out of respect for their culture and the practices that express it, or should we intervene on the grounds that all human beings have basic rights that must be fulfilled as conditions of a decent life? This is an acute dilemma, but my own intuition is that the second reason is the more compelling, and that we have a responsibility to intervene—to send in aid, but also to engage in a process of persuasion, whose outcome, in the best case,

would be a cultural shift that allows people in the society to adopt new methods of production without completely abandoning their previous collective identity.40 It would also be reasonable to impose a cut-off point beyond which further aid would not be supplied unless changes of this kind took place. This reflects the fact that remedial responsibility in such cases does not amount to a duty of justice, but is instead humanitarian in nature.

V

I have argued that remedial responsibilities to the world’s poor are not straightforward, but must take into account a variety of factors, primarily having to do with attributions of outcome responsibility for the poverty we witness. Some readers might be impatient of the distinctions I have drawn. Here we stand, citizens of affluent societies, with resources at our disposal far in excess of anything that we need, even where ‘need’ is understood as societal need, need relative to standards of decency in particular rich societies. There, facing us, are desperate people, millions living on less than a dollar a day, with life expectancies of 40 years or less. It would cost us little to relieve their far more urgent needs. So why raise so many contestable questions, about the historical sources of poverty, about fairness in international trade, and so forth, in order to make discriminating judgements about who is owed relief as a matter of justice and who is not, and so forth, when the moral imperative to send aid is so pressing? Why should we adopt the more complex approach to global poverty advocated here in preference to the simpler approaches favoured by Singer and Pogge?

There are two main reasons. First, I believe that these approaches, and especially Singer’s, would lead us to take bad policy decisions.

40 It is also relevant here that the society will include children who must be exempted from responsibility for the practices that lead to poverty. It is sometimes argued that, because children are always among those who suffer most when societies are poor, relieving poverty must be seen as a duty of justice regardless of how it is caused. I suggested earlier, however, that because adults bear the primary responsibility for the welfare of their children, and because poverty relief, when successful, benefits adults and children alike, this argument cannot be accepted. Our remedial responsibility to children suffering from poverty is better understood as humanitarian where outcome responsibility for the poverty rests with adult members of their own society.
If we think about poverty only in terms of the needs of those who suffer from it on one side, and the capacity of those on the other side to make resource transfers to the poor, this focuses our attention away from the institutional changes that might eventually serve to end or at least radically diminish world poverty. The economics of aid is a complex subject, but one message clearly conveyed by even a cursory reading of the literature is that the positive or negative effect of aid in relieving poverty is heavily dependent on local institutions in the place where the aid is being sent.\(^{41}\) Sending in aid can not only seriously disrupt local economies, but in the worst cases can have the effect of propping up local despots and warlords, who are able to control the flow of aid from the agencies to people on the ground, while diverting some of it for their own private enrichment. Pogge, of course, does direct our attention to institutions rather than to resource transfers between individuals. But the approach that he takes encourages us to think that if we were able to mend the defects in the current international order—for example, get rid of the international resource and borrowing privileges that he argues help to sustain corrupt and exploitative regimes in power\(^{42}\)—then the local sources of poverty would disappear. I believe that we will make better policy by asking first where responsibility for world poverty really lies, without making the convenient assumption that outcome responsibility must always lie with those agents—the rich nations—who are able to discharge remedial responsibility.

Second, we need a discriminating response to world poverty because we need to set priorities: we need to ask which cases make the greatest claim on our resources, and we need to weigh the demands of global justice against the demands of social justice in domestic societies. The ethical foundations for this response were laid in Chapter 2, where I argued that, even in cases involving human rights, different duties had different weights, depending on what role the duty-bearer had played in causing the victims’ rights to be infringed. To see the implications of this, consider the following hypotheticals. Suppose, at one extreme, that world poverty was entirely the (outcome) responsibility of rich societies and their governments. Then the citizens of those societies would have remedial obligations of justice that might well trump their internal obligations of social justice (such as their obligation to create and support an extensive welfare state). Moreover these obligations would be enforceable, in the sense that third parties (other states or international organizations) could justifiably take reasonable steps to ensure that they were complied with, for instance by applying economic sanctions to countries that refused to pay their share of the cost. At the other extreme, suppose that rich societies were in no way responsible for global poverty; it was entirely endogenous to the poor societies. In that case, remedial responsibilities would be humanitarian only, and would therefore take second place to domestic duties of justice. They would also not be enforceable by third parties. Neither of these extremes describes the world as it actually exists. But to know what we owe to the world’s poor, we have first to come up with a more accurate, and therefore more discriminating, account of the underlying causes of their poverty.
